

**Communicating non-heteronormative masculinities in contemporary
Russian media: discourses on 'non-traditional sexual orientation' in the
context of 'traditional sexuality' legislation**

Olga Sergeevna Andreevskikh

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Abstract

The thesis investigates discursive strategies of communicating masculine non-heteronormativity in contemporary Russian makeover television and online news and entertainment media. The research builds on studies into sexuality, transnational and Russian media, discourse theory and intersectionality.

Through in-depth monitoring of selected media outlets, for the first time in the current scholarship, this study captures the evolution of media discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities and demonstrates that the 2013 'traditional sexuality' legislation did not exclude but rather propelled diverse media portrayals of non-heteronormative men.

The research focuses on verbal and visual strategies of communication of non-heteronormative masculinities, which are presented in a series of media case studies. The processed media data is interpreted through multimodal and Critical Discourse Analysis approaches and is conceptualised within the frameworks of intersectionality and transnational media studies.

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Abbreviations

NHM – non-heteronormative masculinities

LGBTQ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer

RF – the Russian Federation

Thesis introduction

1. Looking back at point zero: the timeline of the research

In 2020, six years after I began working on the research proposal for this thesis, I can vouch that Russian media discourses have seen a radical change in what concerns the mediation of LGBTQ-related themes. The June 2013 'traditional sexuality' legislation, which was a starting point for this research project, served as a watershed in Russian media discourses on sex and sexuality. Through heated debates around homosexuality which were being covered extensively in Russian media before, during and after June 2013, this watershed defined the moment when homosexuality ceased to be seen as solely part of discursive spaces of activism or subculture and when it became a legitimate part of public discourses of all levels and dimensions. The 2013 'traditional sexuality' law introduced into the Russian media sphere an ongoing consistent coverage of events, debates and discussions around LGBTQ rights, 'non-traditional' sexual relations, and non-heteronormative masculinities (NHM). As I will demonstrate in this thesis, the legislation that was aimed at eliminating neutral and positive mediations of non-heteronormative sexuality (or what the law referred to as 'promoting non-traditional sexual relations') prompted a discursive shift around LGBTQ-related issues and served as a point zero for the emergence of diverse, prolific and constantly evolving media discourses on non-heteronormativity.

In my PhD research, I do not aim to answer the question why the 2013 law and the topic of LGBTQ rights served as a watershed: the answer most probably lies in the field of Russian cultural heritage, with its traditional acceptance of homosexual sensitivity when it is located in the realms of art, fashion, and show business (see Baer 2009); or perhaps it is linked to the socio-political events and developments around Russia's leadership and the growing gap between Russian political elites and Russian citizens. Nor do I aspire to provide an account of the evolution of fighting for LGBTQ-rights on the part of LGBTQ activists and their supporters: although there have been fascinating developments in this sphere too, with the 2013 'traditional sexuality' legislation mobilising and solidarising Russian LGBTQ communities (Buyantueva 2018, Buyantueva and Shevtsova 2020), this has only affected Russian media discourses as events on the news agenda or collaborations with a limited number of openly pro-LGBTQ outlets and has not dramatically changed the ways of how Russian outlets operate (which I will dwell upon in more detail in Chapter Two of this thesis).

What I achieve with my research is that I capture and analyse how various Russian media outlets have reflected this overall discursive shift and how they have managed to present a diverse range of portrayals of non-heterosexual men despite the state-imposed attempts at censoring positive and neutral mediation of non-heteronormative people. In other words, for the first time in the scholarship on contemporary Russian media I focus not on the top-down discourses attempting to regulate the media industry or the relations between grassroots movements and the media, but on the mechanisms in which Russian media outlets operate, on the bottom-up discourses of media outlets shaping and influencing public agendas, and on the specific discursive tools applied by Russian media when creating diverse (not only negative but also neutral and positive) portrayals of non-heteronormative men. Initially aspiring to address the whole spectrum of LGBTQ identities, I limited my analysis to non-heterosexual masculine identities only. One reason for this limitation is the incredibly large volume of media data I was able to collect during my research project; the other reason is that it is discourses on male homosexuality that have been a particularly thorny issue for Russian society, throughout the Soviet, post-Soviet, and current time (see, for example, Kon

2009, Healey 2012 and 2018, Kay 2006, Yusupova 2016). This research focus shaped the aims and objectives of the thesis, which I outline in the next section.

2. Investigating the discursive shift: the aims and objectives of the research

The research presented in this thesis lies at the crossroads of two major fields of scholarship: Russian media studies and studies on post-Soviet Russian sexualities. By contributing to the scholarship in these fields, I aim to identify and analyse the discursive features of communication of NHM in contemporary Russian media. I approach this aim from the wider perspectives which include, on the one hand, a focus on the evolution of Russian media strategies against the background of transnational media trends, and on the other hand, - the overall evolution of contemporary Russian discourses on sex and sexuality.

The object of the study is the verbal and visual manifestation of the discursive strategies applied by a selection of Russian media outlets when communicating the non-heterosexual orientation of masculine subjects represented in media texts. The analysis draws on the media data obtained during the monitoring of the selected outlets in 2017 and 2018 (the methodology of media data collection and analysis is presented in section 3 of this introduction). Through a complex methodology of media data analysis, I achieve the following research objectives:

- to analyse the evolving Russian media discourses on NHM in a wider context of the complicated and problematic Russian discourse on sex and sexuality;
- to define the role of media outlets in the shaping of public discourses on sex and NHM;
- to identify to what extent the monitored media outlets sustain or challenge the binary concept of 'traditional vs non-traditional' sexuality imposed by the current 'traditional sexuality' legislation;
- to investigate and evaluate the discursive strategies applied by various outlets in creating verbal and visual portrayals of masculine subjects who can potentially be identified as non-heterosexual;
- to identify and classify the position of various Russian media outlets in the setting of agenda and the shaping of public discourses on NHM.

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of my project, I addressed the following research questions:

1. Do all the monitored and analysed media outlets participate in media discourses on NHM? If not, which ones do, and which ones do not participate? If yes, are there differences in the extent and level of participation across the outlets?
2. When participating in media discourses on NHM, do Russian media outlets construct a binary concept of sexuality in accordance with the binary approach to sexuality promoted by the legislation on 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' sexualities or do they challenge and re-interpret this approach?
3. What verbal and visual manifestations of mediated masculine subjects' non-heteronormative sexuality are applied across the investigated media outlets?
4. How do the differences in discourses on NHM contribute to the discussion about different kinds of media in Russia?

The theoretical grounds of my research are multifaceted, and the analysis presented in this thesis is informed by scholarship on sexuality, discourse theory, media and communication studies, as well as by studies on intersectionality and multimodality. This theoretical approach required a complex methodological foundation. The following section is devoted to the detailed account of the thesis methodology.

3. Capturing the evolving discourses: the methodology of the research

For the purposes of the research presented in this thesis, ‘discourses’ are understood, on the one hand, in Foucauldian terms, as historically contingent social systems that produce knowledge and meaning (Foucault 1969). On the other hand, they are perceived as semiotics or meaning-making (Fairclough et al. 2007: 10), as linguistically and textually mediated social practices (Fairclough 1992, 2003) analysed within the framework of power and politics (Fairclough 1989, Wodak 1997). Such an approach to discourses leads to a three-dimensional framework of a media discourse study, these dimensions consisting of text, discourse, and social context (Fairclough 1995: 9).

This three-dimensional framework where texts are treated as instantiations of discourse (Koller 2009) is also referred to in media studies scholarship as the micro-, meso- and macrolevels of media analysis (van Dijk 1985, Hall 1980, Fairclough 1995). The microlevel of discourse analysis involves such aspects of media texts as syntax, semantics, lexical style, rhetorical devices, text presentation and organisation. The mesolevel of analysis focuses on institutional forms of media production, distribution and consumption, as well as on intertextuality, while the macrolevel of analysis covers political regulations of media.

The ‘interrelatedness of text, context of production, distribution and reception, and wider social context’ which is ‘mirrored in the linguistic analysis itself’ (Koller 2009) forms the foundation of this study and enables an in-depth analysis of both the overall media trends and practices influencing media discourses on NHM, as well as specific individual media texts (verbal and visual) related to the theme of male homosexuality and circulated as part of the overall media coverage of the topic.

In the era of digitalisation of media, computerisation of culture (Manovich 2002) and media convergence (Jenkins 2006), the discourse analysis methodology, however, requires a critical revision. In the context of the growth of media prosumerism (García-Galera et al. 2014) and with the rise of amateur journalism performed on participatory media platforms (Bewabi and Bossio 2014), the concepts of media as the ‘fourth power’ which serves the agendas of political elites and which is used to control the citizens of a welfare state are problematic. Although the state can still use new media tools to exert ideological control and to pursue national political agendas (Hutchings 2018), in contemporary media operating through algorithms and digital platforms, discourse-driving powers move not only in the top-down way (from political elites to media and audiences), but also in bottom-up directions, from audiences to media outlets, and from media to political elites. Therefore, in this research, the discourse analysis of media coverage related to NHM focuses not on the Kremlin as the source of top-down discursive trends and regulations carried out through the work of media, but on the operations and mechanisms of Russian media and on the work of media outlets as agenda-setters.

The primary methodological challenge I faced when mapping the current research was linked to the process of sampling relevant media content – i.e. the selection of media

outlets for data collection and the selection of media texts for subsequent analysis. At the stage of the pilot study for this PhD project that was conducted in 2013-2015 and that was based on the newspapers *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (the mouthpiece of the Russian government) and *Novaya Gazeta* (one of the most influential oppositional outlets), I noted that the strategies of mediating LGBTQ-related topics which I observed in the collected texts by the two newspapers were quite complex, the same outlet publishing negative and positive portrayals of LGBTQ people. I also realised that, even though the topical media coverage was dominated by the debate around the 'traditional sexuality' legislation, both the newspapers included LGBTQ issues in wider socio-political contexts, ranging from education to celebrity lifestyles and international relations. The observations made during the pilot study demonstrated that the research I was then planning called for a method that would allow capturing all or most aspects of the evolving media discourses and which would enable an in-depth understanding of the outlet's stance and position in these new discourses. Having started this PhD research at the University of Leeds, I tested two approaches to collecting media data: the close monitoring of a selected media on a day-by-day basis and keyword searches (keywords including various LGBTQ-related terms such as '*LGBT*', '*gei*' (gay), '*lesbiianka*' (lesbian) through the publications by one outlet and across media, both the monitoring and keyword searches conducted online on the outlets' websites.

In contemporary scholarship on media studies, keyword searches as a method of sampling media content appear to be rather popular; however, this method reveals certain shortcomings. For example, Hansen and Machin (2019: 97-98) note:

As media and communications content is now predominantly communicated and archived in digital form, selecting content for analysis is primarily done with keyword searches. While this can be done reliably with great speed and efficiency and across large amounts of media content, it remains the case that this approach to sampling relevant content is only as good as the search terms used. Thus, the more general the topic under investigation (e.g. crime coverage), the more challenging is it to find a suitable combination of keywords. But even where the topic under analysis is identified by relatively unique terms (e.g. "solar energy", "Zika virus", "Brexit"), simple keyword analyses may still return a significant amount of communications content that is either peripheral or not relevant at all to the analysis.

Indeed, as I could see at the stage of methodology testing, one considerable disadvantage of the keyword search method was that it was not possible to define the overall context in which each LGBTQ-related publication appeared. It was impossible to establish whether the publication took place because of a certain event was unfolding at that time, because all other media were writing about it, or because LGBTQ-related news was an integral part of that outlet's coverage irrespective of media events. Another shortcoming of that method was the fact that the search sometimes returned a random set of articles not necessarily interconnected.

Moreover, the search results were predefined by the very choice of keywords, and as I demonstrate further in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, there are cases when a media text devoted to a non-heteronormative man does not contain words like '*LGBT*' or '*gei*' at all – non-heteronormative identities are portrayed without their sexuality being named or referred to. Keyword searches completely ignore such cases and do not indicate the media texts that portray non-heteronormative identities without naming them. More importantly, a pre-set keyword search is problematic in the situation of evolving and changing discourses due to the fact that the commonly used terms for referring to non-heteronormativity change

and evolve too. For example, the term '*gomoseksualist*' (homosexualist), which was commonly used in the Soviet and early post-Soviet contexts, has been consistently erased by its more inclusive version '*gomoseksual*' (homosexual) under the pressure from LGBTQ-rights activists, whereas the term '*goluboi*' (queer) which I observed during the pilot study stage in media texts published between 2012 and 2014 had completely disappeared from the media use by 2020. Thus, the constantly changing trends of naming and reference of non-heteronormative sexuality make keyword searches for relevant content difficult. Vice versa, as I could observe both at the stage of the pilot study and during the primary media data sampling, very often a publication containing LGBTQ-related terms did not address the topic of homosexuality or non-heteronormative gender performativity. In other words, the analysis of media data collected through keyword search only showed a potential to highlight the lexical choices made by individual outlets or individual authors when referring to LGBTQ themes; it failed to provide any insight into the discursive practices of Russian media or the overall cultural shift around NHM.

Another factor behind the decision not to use a keyword search method of sampling but to rely on the minute daily recording of evolving media coverage is the overall ethical approach of this research. Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's ideas of sexual orientation as a category with a great 'potential for rearrangement, ambiguity, and representational doubleness' (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990: 34), which is complicated by the fact that 'the differences between the homosexuality "we know today" and previous arrangements of same-sex relations may be so profound and so integrally rooted in other cultural differences that there may be no continuous defining essence of "homosexuality" to be known' (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990: 44), I choose for my positionality as a researcher an empathetic, involved and responsible approach to the mediated masculine subjects whose sexuality is under scrutiny. By not ascribing pre-set, determined specific terms to how these subjects can potentially identify themselves (and by taking into account the possibility of these subjects being against any self-identification on the grounds of sexual orientation), I achieve a deeper and more objective understanding of the evolving media discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities.

As for the day by day monitoring of a media outlet as a method of collecting thematic media data, at the stage of methodology testing, this method returned a lower number of media texts compared to keyword searches, but it proved to be highly effective for eliciting and analysing the overall media context in which a LGBTQ-related text was published. This method allowed me to identify what other topics related to discourses on sex and sexuality were in the focus of media coverage at that time; whether the publication was a one-off expression of interest in a LGBTQ-related event or whether it was part of a bigger media case; if the publication was the outlet's original content or if it was republished, quoted or copied from another outlet.

The daily monitoring process entailed several hours of reading (usually between 1.5-2 hours, on a day when little content on LGBTQ-related events was published, and up to six hours when there was a lot of content published on the same day). This method of media sampling, albeit laborious and time-consuming, returned excellent results. Not only did it enable me to identify multiple media cases related to the mediation of NHM, but it also allowed me to capture the cases which would have been completely overlooked had I used a keyword search approach and had I been looking for references to such words as 'gay' or 'LGBT' (e.g. 'Slutsky-gate' as the context of the homosexual harassment case could have been overlooked or captured not in full; the case of the killing of a gay police officer and subsequent

ceremony of posthumous marriage between the deceased and his male partner might have been left out).

The choice of the quality of sampled media content over the number of retrieved texts was in line with the overall focus of this research. The datafication of various aspects of language, discourse and culture which has taken place since the ‘computational turn’ of the 1950s (Berry 2011) invites for nuanced, interpretive, qualitative studies ‘into the contemporary transformation of society’ (van Es and Schäfer 2017: 16). Such nuanced studies rely on what Manovich (2017) defines as ‘wide data’ (Manovich 2017: 66) – a recent trend in cultural analytics and digital humanities to use multiple variables across a limited number of cases in order to obtain a more rounded and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (as opposed to the ‘long data’ studies of the past which focused on few variables tested across numerous cases of the same type). With the aims and objectives of this research focused on understanding and analysing cultural developments and discursive shifts my research is placed within the interpretative paradigm in the field of media and communication studies, which favours ‘qualitative methods for describing and investigating cultural issues of meaning and content in relation to communication processes’ (Hansen and Machin 2019: 3).

However, although employing qualitative methods allows a deep insight into the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of the discursive shift in the communication of non-heteronormative masculinities, this research also aims to define the extent, the levels of those discursive shifts: i.e. how common, wide-spread and representative the identified discourse instantiations are. The application of solely qualitative methods does not allow me to address that goal; therefore, a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods is applied (Hansen and Machin 2019), which is sustained by the theoretical triangulation of this interdisciplinary research.

In the current thesis, at the initial stage of the analysis of the sampled media texts content analysis was applied for a “systematic monitoring of trends and developments” in the media environment (Hansen and Machin 2019: 90) and for identifying the directions of agenda-setting with regard to the mediation of male homosexuality. In order to obtain a representative sample of material, the research was planned as comparative within time, across time and across media (Anderson 2012: 331). Comparative across media means that for content sampling several major Russian media outlets of various types were selected, ranging from pro-Kremlin to anti-Kremlin (this classification based on the outlet’s stance on the Kremlin was early on discarded as inefficient; see Chapter Two of the thesis for the rationale): the newspapers *Novaya Gazeta*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Kommersant*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*; the TV channels *Dozhd'* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia*; the internet radio *svoboda.org*; the news and entertainment portals *meduza.io* and *life.ru*; the *Pervyi Kanal* (Channel 1) makeover TV show *Modnyi Prigovor* (Fashion Verdict). The sampling also included an internet resource created by LGBTQ communities for LGBTQ audiences (*parniplus.com*) and the largest social media community for Russian-speaking LGBTQ people – the Facebook community ‘*LGBT Discussion Board*'.

The choice of the media outlets for monitoring and analysis was defined by the overall focus of this thesis. The exclusion of the top-down Kremlin-dominated discourses on NHM from the scope of my research led to the exclusion of the major state-aligned television channels as tools of the Kremlin propaganda. The current study being devoted not to the socio-political phenomenon of homophobia but to the discursive media trends initiated by the 2013 legislation, I discarded the idea of monitoring any openly homophobic (e.g.

nationalist, right-wing, or Orthodox) outlets. Thus, the findings presented in Chapters 2-4 are relevant for the selected sample of outlets and within the scope of the analysed cases.

Comparative within time means that the sampling of media content was obtained from each of the outlets equally throughout a selected period, and comparative across time means that the analysed media content was produced at different times. With regard to online news and entertainment media, the monitoring and media content sampling took place in two subsequent years – in the spring of 2017 and 2018. In 2017, the monitoring of all selected media outlets started on 27 March and finished on 27 April. After that, three media outlets were selected on the grounds of their most active involvement in the discourses that were observed throughout the monitored month: *life.ru*, *meduza.io* and *Dozhd'* were monitored for another month between 28 April and 28 May. In 2018, the monitoring of the outlets began on 1 March and finished on 31 March, after which four most representative outlets (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *meduza.io* and *parniplus.com*) were monitored for another month between 1 and 30 April. With regard to the *Pervyi Kanal* makeover show 'Fashion Verdict', three episodes were selected for analysis: the episodes broadcast on 7 March (before the popular public holiday 'International Women's Day' celebrated in Russia annually on 8 March) in 2013 (before the passing of the 'traditional sexuality' legislation), 2014 (one year after the introduction of the law) and 2017 (when the monitoring of online news and entertainment media began). The monitoring consisted in looking through news sections of the selected websites for several hours daily throughout the month. Other sections of the outlets' websites were also checked in case there were hyperlinks from the home page and news sections to LGBTQ-related materials published in those sections (e.g. 'Stories' in *meduzai.io* or 'dossiers'). Regardless of whether there was LGBTQ-related content noted on the outlets' websites on a given day, all the content I looked through was captured in the form of screengrabs as a reference to what was in the focus of media coverage on that day. Each LGBTQ-related media text was also captured in full, including accompanying visual images or adverts embedded on the page. All the screengrabs of the monitored outlets' web pages taken in 2017 and 2018 were sorted by media and by date and were then stored on a password-protected Microsoft drive.

The sampled content was then organised and divided into cases (Anderson 2012: 282): publications (for newspapers and news and entertainment portals), videos (for internet TV channels), social media posts (for the Facebook community), and makeover show episodes (for the *Pervyi Kanal* programme). The media cases were then analysed and interpreted through close reading: "the reading of, viewing of, or listening to the set of texts multiple times (at least three) with the goal of understanding the range and quality of content" (Anderson 2012: 288). The process of close reading allowed me to identify the primary categories for subsequent in-depth analysis: the verbally expressed examples of communication of masculine non-heteronormativity were then subjected to Critical Discourse Analysis, and visually expressed portrayals of non-heteronormative men were interpreted within the framework of multimodal discourse analysis.

The Critical Discourse Analysis presented in this thesis entails an overview of the media outlet; an outline of the context in which the media text was created; consideration of the section in which the text appeared, its graphic layout, headlines, and subheadings. The analysis focuses on the structure of the article, its themes and rhetorical means, the kind and form of argumentation, the logic and the composition, the implication and insinuations, the symbolism and metaphorism, its idioms and clichés, vocabulary and style, players and references, ideological statements (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 53). The CDA conducted as part

of this research focuses on the discursive strategies that were recognised as the most relevant to the thesis aims and objectives: i.e., the naming and referencing strategies, modality, the representation or non-representation of non-heteronormative subjects, the anonymisation or personalisation of mediated individuals.

When investigating visual strategies of communicating NHM, the discourse analysis draws on the scholarship in the fields of multimodality (Belting 2011, Kress and van Leeuwen 2001 and 2006, Machin 2016, O'Halloran and Smith 2011, Stanczak 2007, van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). To demonstrate how visual and verbal components of the discourse complement each other and how multiple semiotic modes correlate in a media text (Wodak and Weiss 2003: 302), the primary focus is put on the positioning of the viewer in relation to the image; on the representation and non-representation of participants in the image; and on what is happening in the image, what actions are being performed by the participants.

4. Unravelling discourses through media cases: the structure and the logic of the thesis

The multi-faceted complex methodology of identifying, capturing and analysing media discourses is reflected in the structure of the thesis. The first introductory chapter 'Contemporary Russian media and discourses on 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' sexuality: global trends and local challenges' provides an overview of the evolution of Russian discourses on sex, gender and sexuality, dwelling upon the discursive function of the 'traditional sexuality' legislation, or Russian 'section 28'. It also contains a rationale for the application of the term 'non-heteronormativity' in the context of Russian media coverage of events and themes related to male homosexuality. In addition, the introductory chapter explains the use of the term 'communication' in the analysis of media discourses and highlights the distinction between verbal and visual portrayals as units of discourse analysis in the current research.

Chapters 2-4 of the thesis are devoted to a discourse analysis of media case studies identified as the most pertinent to the research aims and objectives. The analysis starts with an investigation into NHM-related cases as part of domestic and transnational news coverage in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, the discourse analysis progresses to a narrower, more specific context of communicating NHM within the framework of a global hashtag activist campaign against sexual harassment. In Chapter Four, through a move from the analysis of photographic images used in the coverage of the cases explored in Chapters Two and Three to the episodes of a makeover TV show, the study finishes with an investigation into the manifestation of NHM in the context of prime-time television.

The second chapter of the thesis 'Communicating non-heteronormative masculinities in Russian online news media: intersection of transnational and domestic discourses' investigates the discursive strategies of naming and referencing applied by monitored online news and entertainment outlets when covering the media cases of the 2017 Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign and of the murder of a gay French police officer in a terrorist attack in Paris in 2017. The empirical part of the chapter presents a Critical Discourse Analysis of the collected media texts which are investigated within the frameworks of intersectionality and transnational media studies.

In the third chapter of the thesis 'Communication of non-heteronormative masculinities in the context of the global anti-harassment movement' I investigate how media portrayals of non-heterosexual men are communicated within the framework of the global

hashtag feminist campaigns and within the discourses on sexual harassment. By investigating the 2018 media coverage of a homosexual sexual harassment case involving a prominent politician and an openly gay journalist working for an oppositional media outlet I demonstrate how the intersection of the categories of sex, sexuality and gender in the context of an anti-harassment media campaign impacts the media portrayals of NHM.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis 'Visual communication of non-heteronormative masculinities in Russian online news media and prime-time television' I turn to the visual aspects of the discursive communication of NHM in Russian news and entertainment media. Through a multimodal discourse analysis, I interpret the visual portrayals of non-heteronormative men which were retrieved as part of media content sampling for the cases analysed in Chapters Two and Three. In this chapter, I also analyse the visual and bodily representations of masculine non-heteronormativity observed in the selection of episodes of Russian prime-time makeover TV show *Modnyi Prigovor*.

In the final part of the thesis, I revisit the aims and objectives outlined in this introduction; reiterate the thesis findings and draw together the main arguments of this study; highlight the contribution made by this thesis to the relevant fields of scholarship; and identify desirable directions for further research into contemporary Russian media discourses on non-heteronormative sexuality and gender.

The Library of Congress¹ transliteration system is used in this thesis whenever Russian words are introduced (e.g. *gei* for 'рей', Davletgil' deev for Давлетгильдеев). When rendering proper names known to general public (e.g. names of political figures or names of Russian media outlets), I rely on the transliteration version commonly circulated in media and scholarship (e.g. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy rather than Zhirinovskii; the *Novaya Gazeta* rather than *Novaiia Gazeta*). Unless otherwise stated, the translations of all quotes and titles from languages other than English are mine.

¹ Source: <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/roman.html>, accessed 1/04/2020

Chapter 1

Contemporary Russian media and discourses on 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' sexuality: global trends and local challenges

1.1. Non-heteronormative masculinities in media: directions of inquiry

In the year 2013, widely discussed and heatedly debated legislation was passed in Russia which affected simultaneously the Russian media sphere and Russian LGBTQ communities. After a series of regional laws had been passed in Saint Petersburg and several other cities of the Russian Federation (RF), a notorious piece of legislation against the promotion of 'non-traditional sexual relations' was introduced in June 2013 as a federal law affecting the whole country (Kondakov 2014, Sozaev 2012). On the one hand, this legislation jeopardised LGBTQ-rights activism, as well as the everyday life of Russian citizens who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). On the other hand, since the legislation imposed higher penalties fees and stricter sanctions for the promotion in the media of positive portrayals of 'non-traditional relations', it was effectively another law aimed at restricting and censoring the work of media outlets.² Being the first legislative attempt at restricting public discourses on non-heteronormativity since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Russia in 1993 (Healey 2018), this controversial law caused a spike in the coverage of LGBTQ-related themes by Russian media outlets and prepared the ground for a consistently growing and evolving media discourse on NHM which are at the heart of the current thesis.³ In this chapter of the thesis I explore the interconnection between restrictive public discourses on non-heteronormativity and their reflection on media discourses (section 1.1.); provide an analysis of the discursive nature of the 2013 legislation and its impact (section 1.2.); as well as define 'NHM' and 'communication' as the key concepts of this research (sections 1.3. and 1.4 respectively).

The primary purpose of article 6.21 of Federal Law No. 135-FZ was to protect 'traditional' sexual relations as part of the overall Kremlin's policy regarding the importance of a 'traditional' nuclear family defined as a man and a woman united for bearing and rearing children, which has recently been introduced as an amendment to the RF Constitution.⁴ The aim of the 'traditional sexuality' law was stated as the protection of minors from harmful information promoting the idea of equality of 'non-traditional' and 'traditional' sexual relationships. However, the notion of 'non-traditional' is not defined in the text of the law (nor does the law mention the term 'queer' or the abbreviation 'LGBT' or any of the specific identities included into that abbreviation). Nevertheless, despite the absence of a clear definition of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' sexuality, the law prohibits exposing minors to any information aimed at shaping in them non-traditional sexual *ustanovki* (aspirations) and at instigating interest in 'non-traditional' sexuality. Critics of the law highlighted that not only

² Other laws aimed at regulating or restricting media work include the recent 2019 federal law 90-FZ on sovereign (*suverennyi*) internet; the 2014 addition to the federal law on national language (53-FZ) of the article banning use of swear and obscene language in media, including internet and social media; and the 1998 law against pornography, which primarily targeted the media market.

³ For a full text of article 6.21 in English see here: <http://www.threefold.ru/russian-laws-amended-federal-law-no-135-fz-amending-certain-laws-russian-federation-view-protect-children>, accessed 22/01/2020

⁴ See, for example, 'Russia's Putin wants traditional marriage and God in the constitution', by the BBC, published on 3/03/2020, available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51719764>, accessed 29/04/2020

Russian legal codes lack a working definition of a ‘non-traditional aspiration’, but the very term ‘aspiration’ is one of psychology and not of jurisprudence, a fact which invites ambiguous interpretations and which can result in any public discussion around LGBTQ themes being classified as ‘promotion of homosexuality’.⁵ It was also pointed out that a minor’s interest in non-traditional sexual relationships does not necessarily signal development of a homosexual orientation but could be simply an expression of curiosity and desire to learn more about social diversity. Legal specialists also noted that the new legislation declared opinions about social equivalence (*sotsial’naia ravnotsennost’*) of ‘non-traditional’ and ‘traditional’ relationships to be dangerous and unacceptable, which could be interpreted as a direct call calling for discrimination against sexual minorities as a social group – something which contradicts the Constitution of the Russian Federation.⁶

From a wider perspective, the introduction of the Russian law restricting both the work of the media industry and the lives of LGBTQ people reflects the complicated relationship between LGBTQ communities and the media which has been characteristic of both western and non-western discourses. From the early days of LGBTQ-rights grassroots movements, the media have played a crucial role in the evolution of societal perceptions and of public discourses on LGBTQ issues. The complex relationship between the media and LGBTQ communities is multi-layered: it includes media reporting on news and events featuring LGBTQ individuals or tackling LGBTQ agendas; media covering LGBTQ-rights activism as a social movement (protest actions, petitions, pride marches); media reporting political debates and conveying state policies on non-heteronormativity and non-cisnormativity.

In view of the important role that the media play in LGBTQ issues, the juxtaposition of media studies and LGBTQ studies has been a popular trend in western scholarship. In cases where western scholarship approaches mediation of LGBTQ issues within the framework of cultural identity (e.g. Hall et al. 1992), it tends to focus on top-down discourses shaping and promoting societal attitudes to sexual minorities in the context of discussions of the welfare state, consensus politics and political pressure groups (e.g. Lichterman 1999, Soriano 2014). Another angle from which media scholars approach the relationships between media and LGBTQ communities concerns how sexual minorities are represented in the media, and how the representation of sexual minorities in media differs from that of ethnic and racial minorities (e.g. Gross 2001, Santos 2013). As one of the key actors in the field of public discourses, the media have always played a significant role in sustaining or challenging social stereotypes around LGBTQ individuals, a role which has been employed by LGBTQ-rights activism (e.g. Couldry and Curran 2003; Merskin 2011 Talbot 2007; Coleman and Ross 2010; Hedge 2011). Studies of on the interconnection between the progress of the LGBTQ-rights social movement and the mediation of such issues as anti-LGBTQ hate crimes, AIDS and same-sex marriage demonstrate the significant contribution that media outlets can make to fighting misconceptions about homosexuality as a threat to society (e.g. Castañeda and Campbell 2006).

Although this thesis addresses the social issues which Russian LGBTQ communities face and which Russian media can potentially help them overcome, its primary aim is to analyse media strategies of communicating NHM not through the lens of LGBTQ-rights

⁵ See, for example, ‘The ban on propaganda of homosexuality in the light of court practice (*Zapret propagandy gomoseksualizma v svete sudebnoi praktiki*), published by the legal information portal *Garant* on 19/06/2013, <https://www.garant.ru/ia/opinion/havanskij/479268/>, accessed 22/01/2020

⁶ Article 19 of the RF constitution proclaims equal rights for all RF citizens and protection against discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, religion and any other factors; source: constitutionrf.ru, available from <http://constitutionrf.ru/rzd-1/gl-2/st-19-krf>, accessed 13/10/2020

activism but from the perspective of the internal driving factors and trends of the media industry. By bridging the gap between the media studies and studies of non-heteronormative sexuality, this thesis demonstrates how socio-political changes regarding LGBTQ rights lead to the emergence and growth of media discourses on LGBTQ-related themes, and vice versa, how such media discourses contribute to raising societal awareness of the situation with LGBTQ rights in Russia.

Western scholarship on homosexuality and LGBTQ issues often intersects with research on gender in media. When studies approach gender in the media from a feminist perspective (e.g. Bukeima and van der Tuin 2009), they often focus on the issues of female sexuality, intergender relationships, gender equality and women's rights. Earlier works in this field tend to dwell on the feminine and explore how women are portrayed in modern mass media (e.g. Carter and Steiner 2004, Gill 2007) in a wide range of media forms – films, reality shows, glossy magazines, whereas similar works on the masculine are relatively rare. Scholars engaged in this type of research often investigate interrelations of media and gender from the perspective of power relations (e.g. Jansen 2002) or from the point of view of gendered visibility in a globalised transnational world (Hedge 2011, Parikka 2015). Works on gender and transnational media also deal with comparing the western and non-western contexts of mediation of gendered identities (e.g. Carter et al. 2014, Kosut 2012), often promoting the view of the dominance and superiority of western approaches – in the same way that studies on (trans)national LGBTQ issues and media tend to celebrate 'the dominance of a Western-centred concept of gay and lesbian community, and its democratic and citizenship ideals' (Pullen 2012: 9). By approaching the category of non-heteronormative masculinity from the intersectionality perspective and by analysing the media coverage of events related to NHM from the perspective of transnational media studies, I bridge gaps in scholarship on Russian gender and sexuality, as well as in scholarship on Russian media. I achieve that by investigating the intersection of masculinity and non-heteronormative sexuality in the context of transnational media events (Dayan and Katz 1994) and in the context of Russian and transnational media discourses.

With digitalisation of media (Couldry 2012) and mediatisation of everyday life (Gripsrud 2010), new directions of inquiry into the relationship between media and LGBTQ agendas have appeared. With media having grown into 'the main political institution' (Ampuja et al. 2014: 112), society is becoming more and more dependent on the 'logic of the media' (Lundby 2008: 11), and such aspects of mediation as self-representations in new media and digital storytelling gain special importance in identity-building practices. Some scholars, albeit admitting the ambivalence of online new media for the affirmation of LGBTQ identities, nevertheless celebrate the new opportunities offered by virtual environments to LGBTQ people to 'test their identities' and to make connections which would be impossible in offline physical spaces (e.g. Pullen and Cooper 2010). The advent of transnational new media is thus perceived by some as an empowering tool which 'offers new scope for sexual identity, in ways previously unseen' and crossing the boundaries between western and non-western societies (Pullen 2012: 6). The mechanisms of digital mediation and self-mediation of identities through sexuality performance are therefore pertinent to the subject matter of scholarship focusing on the digital construction or communication of sexuality.

The studies on the digital construction of sexuality draw on the concept of the internet as a gendered digital online space which is predominantly masculine (Huppertz 2012), and they investigate how gendered sexuality is constructed online, in what way gender and sexual identities influence individuals' internet communication, and how internet communication influences the emergence and existence of gendered identities (e.g.

Arvidsson and Foka 2015). Approaching gender from the perspective of feminist theory, such studies often position the woman at the focus of the inquiry, investigating the empowering force of media technologies and the evolution of women's relationships with digital technologies (Green and Adam 2001). However, studies of the role of digital media in men's lives, in particular in the lives of non-heteronormative men, are relatively rare and tend to restrict their focus to dating apps and gay men's use of online technologies for seeking sexual partners and casual encounters (e.g. Miskolci 2013, Reynolds 2015, Roth, 2016). Another dimension of studies of new (digital) media and non-heteronormativity that have appeared in recent years explores the influence of digital media and dating apps on self-mediation strategies applied by LGBTQ people, particularly by gay men: in the information economy with data used as a commodity (Castells 1996), the identity created on a dating app becomes 'an important facet' of gay men's identity (Mowlabocus 2010: 104). Although the aspects of the mediatization process and digitalisation of media listed above are not in the focus of the current thesis, its findings add to the relevant scholarship by demonstrating the leading role of media in shaping societal discourses on non-heteronormative masculinity. Apart from that, the findings of the thesis also reveal the mechanisms of the infiltration of social media and digital apps into mainstream media discourses, contributing to studies of online new and participatory media.

The analysis of media cases on NHM, which is presented in Chapters 2-4 of this thesis, places Russian media within global (western) media trends and mechanisms. In this respect, the current research departs from the scholarship on Russian media that opposes the Russian and western media spheres but contributes to the research which problematise the West vs Russia (Russia perceived as part of the East) divide in studies of media and journalism. In contemporary scholarship on Russian media, there is a tendency to interpret the developments that have taken place in Russia over the last two decades as an ongoing process of the infringement of freedom of the press (e.g. Azhgikhina 2008), deprofessionalisation of journalism and 'selling out' of journalists (e.g Roudakova 2017). Some scholars declare that not only has the era of Russian independent media ended but there has never been real freedom of the press in Russia (e.g. Beumers et al. 2009). Such trends in Russian media studies sustain the popular opposition between 'virtuous' western media which promote democratic values (Zielonka 2015: 305) and 'lagging behind' Russian media whose sole purpose is to promote state-imposed policies. These scholarly trends also support classifications of existing journalistic cultures which draw parallels between Russia and such countries as China, Chile and Uganda, where journalism is said to play the role of 'opportunist facilitator', to consist of mainly government partners and to support the government's leadership (Zielonka 2015: 104).

Although acknowledging the limitations that are imposed by Russian legislation infringing freedom of the press, I aim to demonstrate in this thesis that contemporary Russian media are not influenced solely by the top-down political discourses driven by the Kremlin's domestic politics. With the advent of internet new media and with the internet serving as a tool of social change (Hill 2013), 'politics migrates from its top-down, hierarchical, one-way, passive industrial form, becoming something fluid, networked, participatory, immediate, resistant, democratic' (Dartnell 2006: ix). Both Russian media and Russian politics have been affected by these global processes, with Russian media relying more and more on digital tools and with the Russian government preoccupied more and more with the freedoms and threats posed by the internet – to the point of intending to create a Russian 'Firewall', a sovereign internet protected from unwanted media interference. The project of Russian sovereign internet space nevertheless remains a work in progress, a fact that allows Russian media outlets to operate connectedly with their global counterparts and therefore be impacted by

global industrial pressure and media formats (Turow 2014: 22), as well as by global media challenges. These challenges are presented by the increase of importance of user-generated content for the media sphere, the rise of the amateur media practitioner and the infiltration of social media into mainstream media coverage (Bewabi and Bossio 2014: 14). New media challenges also arise from the tabloidisation of the press (Turner 2010: 26) which turns news outlets to hybridised infotainment (merging news and entertainment) genres under the pressure of commercial competition in a battle for audiences (Turner 2010: 72). As I demonstrate through the media analysis presented in chapters 2-4, these evolutionary changes in the Russian media sphere make the commonly used classification of or Russian media outlets into 'pro-Kremlin' and 'oppositional' obsolete and outdated. The reason for that is that in the internet media outlets are primarily concerned with audience numbers. Those outlets, therefore, have to offer their audiences the content the audiences seek, regardless of whether or not that content is in line with the Kremlin-imposed policies and regardless of the outlet's political stance. As I demonstrate in Chapters 2-4 of the thesis, the reliance of media outlets on digital tools and the competition among outlets for media audiences enable, among other discursive changes, the emergence of neutral and positive portrayals of NHM despite the existence of the restrictive 'traditional sexuality' legislation. For the first time in the scholarship on Russian media, the current thesis demonstrates the existence and continuous evolution of bottom-up discursive trends of democratisation in the Russian media sphere, enabled by the fact that similar processes are happening globally in the media industry.

My investigation of the ways in which contemporary Russian media communicate NHM is informed by the trajectories of media and LGBTQ studies outlined above. Thus, the analysis of media cases presented in Chapters 2-4 of this thesis is carried out against the background of Russian socio-political challenges which have placed LGBTQ individuals at the forefront as the state-appointed 'other'. This analysis is also included in the wider perspective of social changes, e.g. the strengthening of LGBTQ-rights and feminist grassroots movements, the rising social awareness of the issues of sexual violence and sexual harassment. Taking on board the argument about mediatisation of contemporary societies, I demonstrate the key role of media in initiating, sustaining, and directing Russian public discourses on NHM. By doing so, I compare and contrast the Russian context to similar western discourses, proving that regardless of the unbridgeable gap between Russia and western societies in terms of equal rights for LGBTQ citizens and LGBTQ-inclusive media coverage, Russian media are not opposed to western media trends but are fully included into those trends, rapidly developing neutral and pro-LGBTQ discursive strategies of portraying non-heteronormative individuals.

1.2 Russian 'Section 28' as the starting point of media discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities: the problem of interpretation

Both the starting point and focus of the research presented in this thesis is the Russian federal law banning the promotion of homosexuality to minors – the legislation which has been framing the discourse on homosexuality in Russia along the axes of 'traditional' vs 'non-traditional' sexuality. In western and Russian scholarship alike article 6.21 of Federal Law 135-FZ is consistently referred to by 'anti-gay-propaganda' or anti-homopropaganda' law (e.g. Kondakov 2019, Tolkachev and Vasileva 2019, Pronkina 2016, Hylton et al. 2017, Wilkinson 2013, Paul 2015, Postlethwaite 2014). However, this denotation of the notorious law is not simply inaccurate but also misleading: this reference reduces the actual effect of the legislation to repressions against gays and lesbians, and the use of the incorrect translation of

the wording of the law into English invites for inaccurate interpretations of the aims the law pursues.

In the Anglophone tradition, the term ‘propaganda’ stands for information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention to influence people's opinions’.⁷ In media studies, this term is used to denote ‘messages designed to change the attitudes and behaviour of huge numbers of otherwise disconnected individuals on controversial social issues’ (Turow 2014: 32). Therefore, an analysis of propaganda entails examining media messages that aim to sway the attitudes of masses on controversial socio-political issues.

In the Russian language, the term ‘propaganda’ means spreading and explaining ideas, knowledge and teachings in society, and it is very often used as a synonym for the term ‘canvassing’.⁸ In the Russian language interpretation, this word accentuates not the influence on opinions or one-sidedness of the argument but activities performed to lure people to become involved in a particular activity. This makes article 6.21 stand out among the rest of the articles of Federal Law 135-FZ which aim at protecting children from harmful information of all kinds, in particular – from pornography. This article bans not only dissemination of information aimed at forming non-traditional sexual attitudes among minors, but also ‘converting, turning’ minors into people of ‘non-traditional’ sexual orientation through information which presents ‘non-traditional sexual relationships’ in an attractive light.

This idea behind the controversial Russian federal law brings it close in its designed effect ‘designed effect’? why not just say ‘design’? to western examples of legislation aimed to protect minors from harmful information. One such example is the UK Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which was introduced to enforce ‘prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material’.⁹ The UK Section 28 vetted the intentional promotion of homosexuality ‘by teaching or publishing material’. The section banned the promotion of the idea that homosexual and heterosexual relationships can be equal. On top of that, it named homosexuality a ‘pretended family relationship’ and referred to it as a disease. This wording makes the UK section 28 and the Russian Federal Law against the promotion of homosexuality among minors remarkably similar. The fact that the UK section was passed by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher also enhances the similarity to the Russian law, which was introduced as part of the conservative political turn taken by the Russian government in the 2010s. To underline this similarity and not to engage in further spreading of misinterpretations and misconceptions of the 2013 legislation I refer to article 6.21 throughout this thesis as either the ‘Russian Section 28’ or ‘traditional sexuality’ law, discarding the commonly used term referring to propaganda.

However, despite the similarities between these two conservative legislative initiatives, the discursive grounds of Russian lawmakers’ avoidance of attempts at defining the notion of ‘non-traditional’ sexuality are quite specific and related to Russia’s complex history of discourses on sexuality and non-heteronormative sexual practices. From the forcible Christianisation of Russia in 988 which never completely erased pagan rituals and beliefs from the lives of Russian people, there remained a cultural duality in attitudes to and practices of sexuality. On the one hand, the Russian Orthodox Church imposed strict rules concerning sexuality (pre-marital sex, adultery, masturbation, sodomy – all these were

⁷ Source of definition: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda>, accessed 21/01/2020

⁸ Source of definition: <http://ozhegov.textologia.ru/definit/propaganda/?q=742&n=198748>

⁹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted>

serious offences and incurred heavy punishments), and with the growing influence of the Church on the state power, these puristic discourses gained more and more momentum. On the other hand, the heathen traditions of a pre-marital mating season continued to exist (in many Russian regions young people were allowed to spend nights together, assuming they remain innocent); common baths and men and women bathing together shocked many a foreigner; same-sex contacts were wide-spread. The same duality is observed in the accustomed gender roles. Even though the Russian family has always been based on the principles of patriarchy, it has also been characterised by matrifocality and Russian women played a relatively significant social role (Kon 1997). The first law restricting homosexuality was initiated by Russia's first emperor Peter the Great, whose primary goal and ambition was to build a strong army and fleet. The law against *muzhelozhstvo*, or 'man lying with man', was passed in 1706 and copied a similar law existing in Sweden. Initially, the law provided for men accused of sodomy and found guilty to be burnt alive, but in 1716 burning was substituted by corporal punishment and exile. This law did not apply to civilians and only affected the regular army (Kon 1998). It is only in the nineteenth century that such restrictions on sexual contacts between men started to be applied to all social groups. The legal code designed in 1832 contained an Article 995 according to which the punishment for sodomy, or anal sexual contact between men, was confiscation of all property and four or five years of exile in Siberia. In 1845 this article was transformed into Article 516 of the Criminal Code, which imposed a minimum of three months' imprisonment for the culprit and a three to eight years' prison sentence if the act of sodomy was aggravated by such circumstances as rape or having intercourse with a minor. The 1845 Criminal Code remained in force until the October Revolution of 1917, when the Bolsheviks abolished all the laws and regulations of Tsarist Russia, including the criminal punishment for same-sex sexual contacts between men (Healey 2001).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, homosexuality entered Russian medical discourse, the main point of the debate being whether homosexuality was a disease, and if it was, whether it should be cured or tolerated. In the fin-de-siècle Russia, homosexuality in particular and sexuality in general were the subject of wide public discussions, which were however restricted by the class and social boundaries and mainly involved the Russian intelligentsia (Blasius and Phelan 1997). Homosexual desire became part of the fashionable modernist image and prominent people of art and bohemian circles produced works devoted to homosexual liaisons. Thus, the Russian philosopher Rozanov published a paper on 'people of the moonlight' (*liudi lunnogo sveta*), where 'moonlight people' refer to homosexuals, whom he ascribed a whole range of positive qualities: creativity, courage, a talent for progress and modernity (Blasius and Phelan 1997: 199 – 200; Kon 1997: 98). In 1906, the writer Mikhail Kuzmin published his novel 'Wings' (*Kryl'ia*) in which he told the story of a young man's discovery of his homosexuality. In 1907, the poet and novelist Lidiia Zinovieva-Annibal published the novel 'Thirty-Three Monsters' (*Tridtsat' tri uroda*), a dramatic story of a love triangle involving a lesbian couple. These works caused a stir among Russian intelligentsia and were very widely discussed (Baer 2009, Healey 2001). However, the Russian proletariat was not part of that discourse, which later defined the policies of the new state after the October Revolution.

Initially, the revolution was followed by a short period of sexual liberation. The criminal punishment for male homosexuality was abolished as part of the abolition of the criminal law of the tsarist state. After the decriminalisation of male homosexuality, the rhetoric around homosexuals was used by the communist propaganda as one of the proofs of how humane the Bolshevik state was and how inhuman the capitalist West, where homosexuals were treated badly (Blasius and Phelan 1997: 197 – 215). However, the period

of liberalisation was short-lived. The start of Stalin's rule saw the repression of sexuality and infringement of women's reproductive rights (Essig 1999, Kon 1995, Kon 1997, Stella 2014). In 1936, abortions were prohibited and women's primary role as mothers was propagated: the early social experiments with 'liberating' women from household chores had failed and the new Soviet family still functioned in the 'traditional' way, with women having to cope with the 'double burden' of the paid employment and the unpaid household labour (Ashwin 2000; Stella et al. 2015). In 1934, Article 121 of the Criminal Code was introduced which recriminalized homosexuality (Essig 1999; Healey 2001; Stella 2015; Štulhofer and Sandfort 2005). Once again, the state's attitude to homosexuals was used in Soviet propaganda, only this time homosexuality was linked to the corrupted bourgeois morality and was condemned as an attempt at undermining the moral foundation of the new Soviet state. Linked to fascism and portrayed as an ideologically alien and harmful phenomenon, homosexual desire and homosexual relationships between men were proscribed and incurred up to five years' imprisonment. Female homosexuality, both in pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russia, remained invisible and was not regulated by the state to the same extent as male homosexuality. However, there was no tolerance of it either: though it did not rate as a criminal activity, it was viewed as a psychiatric disorder, and thus being outed as a lesbian often resulted in the woman being forcefully treated in a psychiatric institution (Essig 1999, Stella 2014).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to dramatic social changes. Post-Soviet Russia declared itself a democracy striving to develop in accordance with 'democratic values' towards liberalism, equality and freedom of its citizens, western-style business attitudes, and transparent political practices. These democratic values were recorded in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, and the political turmoil that was happening around the emergence of the new state was almost unanimously viewed by Russian citizens as a fight for democracy. One manifestation of that democratic turn was the abolition of Article 121 and the decriminalisation of same-sex contacts between men in 1993 (Healey 2018).

The democratic changes contributed to the emergence of women's rights and LGBTQ-rights movements and to the overall discursive shift in societal attitudes to gender and sexuality (Baer 2009; Essig 1999; Kay 2007). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, largely due to economic hardships and to the 'feminization of poverty' (Salmenniemi 2012), women started to resent the traditional 'double burden' pattern of gendered labour inherited from the Soviet era – the pattern that entailed women being expected to combine the roles of full-time workers and full-time mothers and primary carers (Stella 2014). This 'working mother' gender contract of the Soviet time was contested by the new post-Soviet gender contract of the self-made career woman, which appealed to many women in the circumstances of growing economic freedom and business opportunities. The negative attitude to the Soviet-style gender equality which distorted men and women's 'natural' gender roles by 'emasculating' men (by reducing their authority in the private sphere of the family) and 'masculinising' women (by granting them access to 'male' occupations and diverting their energies from their 'natural' calling as mothers and carers) (Stella and Nartova 2015: 37) ultimately led to the emergence of such new gender contracts as the 'housewife' and the 'sponsored contract' (Zdravomyslova and Tyomkina 2007; Pilkington 1996; Stella 2014,), as well as to the appearance of the new aesthetics and ideology of 'glamur' ('glamour') (Goscilo and Strukov 2011).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet liberation did not only bring more freedom for those who did not fit in with the heteronormative Soviet society with its rigid gender roles; it also led to an unprecedented level of pornography and erotica flooding both media discourse and society itself. The outburst of pornography and erotica in the

media, coupled with a number of already existing social challenges (the threats to the institution of the traditional family; a demographic crisis, the rapidly growing visibility of homosexual citizens) contributed to the backlash against new values and lifestyles, including a backlash against the growing media visibility of homosexuality after its decriminalisation in 1993. Coupled with socio-economic challenges caused by the political turmoil of the 1990s, the sudden rise in the visibility of male homosexuality posed a serious challenge to Russian masculinities, the consequences of which were so significant that some scholars refer to them as the post-Soviet crisis of masculinity (Goscilo and Hashamova 2010, Kay 2006). As Baer (2009) pointed out in his comprehensive research on homosexuality in post-Soviet Russia, the discursive configurations in which Russian homosexuality was situated after the dissolution of the USSR were complex: '(1) the predicament of the Russian male in post-Soviet society; (2) the problem of Russian identity in a post-Soviet world; and (3) the search for a post-Soviet aesthetics' (Baer 2009: 4). The rapidly growing visibility of male homosexuality in post-Soviet public and media discourses brought about beliefs that homosexuality was a western-style concept linked to western cultural imperialism and western politics (Baer 2009: 5). Societal attitudes to homosexuality were complicated by the post-Soviet crisis of masculinity which had been evolving throughout the 1990s. On the one hand, post-Soviet men were impacted by the economic and political turmoil of the 1990s which led to men's losing their positions on the economic and political arenas (Goscilo and Hashamova 2010, Kay 2006). On the other hand, they faced the consequences of the rise of nationalism and militarism in socio-political life (Sremac and Ganzevoort 2015). The unprecedented level of pornography and erotica flooding the media discourse further complicated these societal tensions around the categories of masculinity and sexuality, which resulted in a societal backlash against non-conforming gender and sexuality representations and identities, i.e. against the feminist and LGBTQ-rights movements, and which contributed to the rise of neo-conservative traditionalist approaches to masculinity and masculine sexuality.

One of the ways in which this backlash manifested itself was through new legislation restricting the work of the media in terms of disseminating information and restricting access to certain information for certain groups of audiences. Thus, Russian Federal Law 2124-1, which regulates the work of the mass media and which was passed in 1991, underwent several amendments reflecting the neo-conservative social politics of the post-Soviet state and the societal backlash against the liberalisation of the private sphere. The 1995 amendment to Article 4 of Federal Law 2124-1 introduced a prohibition of the 'promotion of pornography', whereas the 2000 amendment to Article 4 banned promoting information on making and using narcotic substances.¹⁰ Federal Law 436-FZ protecting children from information harmful to their health and development introduced age-based ratings into the Russian media sphere. The 2014 addition to the Federal Law on the National Language (53-FZ) banned the use of obscene language in the media, including the internet and social media. What united all these legislative developments is the ambiguity of the criteria employed to evaluate of media content: thus, there is no definitive term for 'propaganda of non-traditional sexuality'; there is no clear borderline between the use of swear words for artistic or discursive purposes and deliberate violation of the norms of the national language.

The conservative backlash coincided with the onset of the conservative turn in Russia's public sphere inspired and facilitated by the Kremlin's strategies in domestic and global politics. The conservative socio-political turn was largely reliant on the Kremlin's growing control over media and other public discourses. The task of controlling those discourses called for an increase in the level of regulation of the public sphere: 'one of Putin's

¹⁰ Source: <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/9003299>, accessed 22/01/2020

important failures, according to the August 2009 Levada centre poll, concerned the decline in morality and high culture. 44% of the respondents lamented the situation in these spheres, and 32% did not expect to see any improvements' (Chebankova 2013: 35). One of the responses to these social concerns was the Russian state's promotion of 'traditional values' and 'traditional gender roles.' The concept of 'traditional gender roles' inherits from the Soviet past the ideas of a male breadwinner and a dependent woman whose role is reduced to the private sphere of the home. These 'traditional gender roles' also comprise the Soviet 'working mother' gender contract and the post-Soviet contracts of the 'housewife' and 'sponsored woman' (Attwood et al. 2018: xvii). The conservative concept of 'traditional values' also includes the religious aspect, with the Russian Orthodox Church being the most influential and consistent proponent of this concept in Russian public discourses throughout the 2000s and 2010s (Sremac and Ganzevoort 2015, Stahle 2015).

As I have demonstrated above, the socio-political discourses around non-heteronormative masculinities and the 'traditional sexuality' legislation are complex and multi-faceted. They reflect the problematic Soviet legacy in terms of societal perceptions of the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality. They are also problematised by the conservative policies of the Russian state and by the considerable weakness of the pro-LGBTQ grassroots movement. With the absence of identity politics and of a Stonewall-like resistance on the part of Russian LGBTQ citizens, the civilisational conflict between the understanding of homosexuality as a 'western import' and the discursive realms of post-Soviet Russia results in what Laurie Essig defined as 'subjectivity without identity' (Essig 1999: 82). In this respect, the question arises regarding the applicability and pertinence of the term 'homosexuality' as a reference to identity when conducting research into Russian media discourses on NHM. In the following section I address this question.

1.3 'Homosexuality' vs 'non-heteronormative masculinity': the problem of nomination

In this research, I approach homosexuality within the Foucauldian framework on sex and sexuality as categories of power and control (Foucault 1978). Drawing on the concept of 'subjectivity without identity' as a characteristic feature of contemporary Russian discourses on sex and sexuality, I admit that in the situation of the discursive, cultural and political role of homosexuality as an identity category which is either unattainable or problematic for Russian non-heteronormative men, there is likely to be a simultaneous co-existence of multiple variants for non-heteronormative identification (Cleminson and Vázquez García 2007: 8) which non-heteronormative men can opt for and which they alternate between. These variants include, for example, the self-identification term *gei* (gay) borrowed from the English language and used to denote a LGBTQ identity; the term *gomoseksualist* (homosexualist) which is linked to the Soviet medical and legal discourses on criminalised homosexuality; the neutral term *gomoseksual* (homosexual); the outdated term *goluboi* (queer) related to underground subcultures of non-heteronormative people in pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. In terms of the Russian 'Section 28' law, apart from the vague wording and inconclusive ambiguous definitions of what is understood by 'non-traditional' sexuality, the legislation effectively confirms the co-existence of multiple variations by which individuals who are engaged in 'non-traditional' relations refer to their experiences. In other words, although the legislation bans the promotion of ideas about social equality of traditional and non-traditional relationships, it does not regulate the actual words, lexical terms used to describe those relationships, i.e. the media outlets covering LGBTQ-related

themes are free to choose any of the terms currently being used, ranging from the western identity term 'gay' to the Soviet terminology on 'sexual minorities'.

What it means in practice is that a media text devoted to LGBTQ- and homosexuality-related topic might not necessarily contain the lexical markers one would expect to find in such a text: thus, a positive portrayal of a homosexual person (e.g. as a national hero fighting against terrorism) can appear alongside non-LGBTQ inclusive terminology such as 'non-traditional sexual orientation'. Therefore, selecting media texts for analysis on the grounds of the use of certain keywords (e.g. 'gay', 'homosexual man', 'LGBT') does not fit the research aims and objectives I pursue in this PhD thesis. For the purpose of the current research, I employ the term 'non-heteronormative masculinities', which means that the media portrayals I am interested in when selecting the media cases for analysis are those of masculine subjects (people who identify as male) and whose sexuality is communicated in the corresponding media texts as potentially non-heterosexual (e.g. they are directly named as homosexual, their homosexuality is not named but can be inferred from the context, their sexuality is not identified in any way but certain markers of their gendered behaviour can be interpreted as expressions of non-heterosexual orientation). This approach to the nomination of NHM might not be in line with the contemporary conventional definitions, but if placed against the diachronic perspective of the evolution of discourses on homosexuality it appears to be a legitimate term due to the fluidity of the social category of sexuality.

Scholarship on the history of same-sex desire and same-sex practices demonstrates that, although the terms 'homosexuality', 'gay', 'homosexual/gay identity' are relatively recent, homosexuality as sexual behaviour or sexual preferences has existed in various societies, from the primitive to the contemporary western ones (Greenberg 1988). In some societies, e.g. in those that can be defined as 'kinship-structured' (e.g. Morocco, New Guinea, parts of island Melanesia, tribes of American Indians), 'transgenerational' homosexuality (i.e. same-sex sexual relations between representatives of different generations) and 'transgenderal' homosexuality (same-sex relationships in which one partner performs the roles usually ascribed to the opposite gender) played an important part in the structure and organisation of social life (Greenberg 1988: 25 – 88). In Ancient Greece, homosexuality and heterosexuality co-existed as complementary sexual practices (Dover 2016), with same-sex and heterosexual relationships playing different social roles (i.e. passing of experience and wisdom from an older male partner to a younger one vs relationship between men and women for procreation). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the practices of sexual asceticism and negative attitudes to sexuality, in general, caused negative discourses on homosexuality (Greenberg 1988: 184 – 241), which toward the nineteenth century ultimately developed into restrictive penalising legal and medical discourses on non-heteronormative sexual desire and practices.

It was only in the nineteenth century that the category of sexuality first became a subject of scientific observations, as well as medical and legal discussions. In the beginning, it was primarily in the focus of medical and psychiatric research and it was doctors, physicians who were shaping the official discourse on sexuality, which resulted in the medicalisation of homosexuality and its perceptions as a disease or deviation that could and should be treated (Oosterhuis 2000). The first attempts to define sexuality and to explain homosexuality were characterised by intermittent use of categories and terms. For example, in 1862, writer and law expert Karl Heinrich Ulrichs suggested a theory explaining the nature of sexual desire. He believed there was only one sexual desire – the sexual attraction to the opposite sex. Those who were attracted to the same sex, did not possess a 'wrong' sexual drive, but rather belonged to a separate, 'third' sex characterised by the 'wrong' desire – the attraction to the

'wrong' sex. Ulrichs came up with the notions of a Uranian man and woman (Urning and Urninde), different from 'true' men and women: the Uranian man was attracted to other men as if he were a woman and the Uranian woman was attracted to other women as if she were a man (Katz 2007: 51-52). Even though Ulrichs did describe the Urning and Urninde as deviant from the norm, he called for there to be no legal persecution or penalties for this sexual desire and offered visibility to people of non-heteronormative sexuality in public (legal and medical) discourses. By suggesting a third sex with a special referential name attributed to it, Ulrichs' theory did not only also question the male/female binary of sex but also attempted to legitimise non-heteronormative sexual and gender behaviour.

In 1868, in response to Ulrichs' theory of the 'third' sex, the writer and law expert Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the four terms describing different varieties of sexual desire, which laid the foundation for further researches into hetero- and homosexuality. Kertbeny divided sexual desire into monosexual (i.e. masturbation or absence of sexual attraction to another individual), homosexual (i.e. sexual attraction to individuals of the same sex), heterosexual (or attraction to individuals of the opposite sex) and heterogenit (or sexual attraction to other species rather than human beings). The terms 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' gradually became legitimate terms in the emerging medical discourse on sexuality (Katz 2007: 52-54). A significant contribution to the studies of and, at the same time, the discursive construction of sexuality was made by psychiatrists, among whom Richard von Krafft-Ebing's work (1840-1902) was quite influential in terms of the development of sexology, the science of sexuality. In his monograph 'Psychopathia Sexualis' (first published in 1886), which put special emphasis on male homosexuality, Krafft-Ebing approached same-sex desire or homosexuality as a mental illness (similarly to sadism or masochism), and it is this view that affected European medical and legal treatment of homosexuals throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and beyond (Oosterhuis 2000).

The interconnections between the individual's mental state and sexual behaviour, or to be more precise between the individual's unconscious and conscious mind and their sexual drive, were further investigated by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who developed his observations and analyses into a theory of sexuality. In his 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), Freud introduced the concepts of sexual object and sexual aim, the first denoting who or what arouses an individual's sexual desire and the latter denoting the way in which this desire is realised (Freud 1953: 135-136). Freud was much more interested in those of his cases where his patients' sexual object and sexual aim did not comply with what was considered the norm. When analysing and classifying sexual deviations, he divided them into inversions or 'deviations in respect of the sexual object' (Freud 1953: 136) and perversions or 'deviations in respect of the sexual aim' (Freud 1953: 149). The latter included absolute inverts, whose sexual object was of the same sex only, amphigenic inverts, whom Freud defined as 'psychosexual hermaphrodites' (Freud 1953: 136) and contingent inverts, who would be normally attracted to the sexual object of the opposite sex, but under certain circumstances could develop homosexual behaviour (Freud 1953: 136-137). The deviations connected with the sexual aim or perversions are 'sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the immediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim' (Freud 1953: 150), such as fetishism, for instance. Freud also attempted to resolve the dilemma that had been widely discussed by then: whether sexual deviations were innate or could be instilled. According to Freud, 'the nature of inversion is explained neither by the hypothesis that it is innate nor by the hypothesis that it is acquired' (Freud 1953: 140). Freud looked for an answer in the

individual's progression through the crucial stages of psychosexual development, especially in the Oedipus/Elektra stage, and he tried to explain the cause of inversion through the concept of bisexuality. What is especially valuable in Freud's theory is this attempt to find the balance between approaching homosexuality as a natural phenomenon which at the same time tends to manifest itself under certain developmental circumstances.

In the second half of the twentieth century, in the post-Freudian reality of rapidly changing societal discourses on sexuality and same-sex desire, the medicalised concepts of homosexuality as a perversion were gradually erased by the understanding of the role of patriarchal power relations in the social construction of homosexuality. In his foundational work 'The History of Sexuality' (1978), the philosopher Michel Foucault explored the historical evolution of such processes as the policing of sex, regulating sexualities, sanctioning 'perversions' and 'sexual irregularities'. Foucault claimed that pleasure and power 'are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement' (Foucault 1978: 48). According to Foucault, sex and sexuality belong to the realm of 'a biopolitics of the population' (Foucault 1978: 139) and are universal tools of power and control. Foucault suggested a set of consistent patterns illustrating the principal strategies and methods applied by institutions of power to monitor and manipulate subjects' sexual behaviour, and he also explained why specific strategies tend to be chosen at a specific stage of the state's development. Foucault argued that there were four main axes around which societies constructed sexuality: a hysterisation of women's bodies; a pedagogisation of children's sex; a socialisation of procreative behaviour and a psychiatrisation of perverse pleasure (Foucault 1978: 104), where regulations were primarily aimed at 'perversions' and 'aberrations', ranging from marital infidelity and prostitution to same-sex love. Developing this theory, the historian David M. Halperin placed Foucault's postulates in the context of queer studies. Halperin elaborated the idea of sex and sexuality being regulated by power and noted that 'one of the most distinctive features of the current regime under which we live is the prominence of heterosexuality and homosexuality as central, organising categories of thought, behaviour, and erotic subjectivity' (Halperin 2002: 3). Halperin argued that homosexuality and heterosexuality 'just represent one of the many patterns according to which human living-groups, in the course of reproducing themselves and their social structures, have drawn the boundaries that define the scope of what can qualify – and to whom – as sexually attractive' (Halperin 1990: 45).

Apart from the theoretical scholarly and scientific advances which discarded perceptions of homosexuality as a perversion and revealed the role of societies in maintaining negative attitudes to same-sex desire, other prerequisites for the emergence of the homosexual and gay identity were the sexual revolutions which took place in western societies – and also in Russia – throughout the second half of the twentieth century and the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemics in the early 1980s when it became clear both to LGBTQ-rights activists and heterosexual majorities that homophobia could be deadly. In the twenty-first century, after the introduction of positive legislative, social, educational and media policies which improved the situation with LGBTQ-rights in various countries (not only western but also non-western) and forged acceptance and appreciation of sexual diversity (Herzog 2011), new challenges to the rights of non-heteronormative people come from the rise of the far-right and nationalist forces around the globe and from the inadequacies of identity politics. In these new circumstances, queer discourses take the earlier LGBT-rights achievement further, offering frameworks and language to talk about sexual desire outside of identity labels. For contemporary Russia, where state-imposed 'Section 28' legislation co-exists with the continuously strengthening LGBTQ-rights movements, with prolific media discourses on LGBTQ themes, as well as with rich and diverse queer cultural scene, the term

'homosexuality' which belongs to identity-based discourses of 'coming-out' and gay rights is not as productive as non-heteronormativity: while Russian queers are deprived of the opportunity to be publicly open about their sexuality, they nevertheless have the right to express their sexual and gender identity in a way different from heteronormative norms. The use of the term NHM in this thesis enables me to address the 'pressing challenges of homonationalism' (Heckert and Cleminson 2011: 8) and to decolonise the media discourses on LGBTQ-related themes.

1.4 Verbal and visual portrayals of non-heteronormative masculinity: the language of communication

As the following chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, contemporary Russian media discourses on masculine non-heteronormativity are prolific, diverse, and constantly evolving. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, it was only with the introduction of the 'traditional sexuality' legislation into Russian media coverage that Russian media outlets began to shape and explore various aspects of non-heteronormativity and non-cisnormativity. This was also the starting point for the emergence and development of LGBTQ-inclusive language (the process of which is analysed in detail in chapters two and three). In this respect, non-heteronormative masculinity is still being discursively constructed in Russian media, and therefore the findings which the current research arrived at through capturing the currently evolving media discourses cannot be treated as definitive and cannot be interpreted as an exhaustive analysis of discursive strategies of mediation of homosexuality in Russia. With this in mind, the analysed media cases are approached from the point of view of verbal and visual communication of NHM. In other words, the analysis of the media texts presented in Chapters 2-4 reveals which tools of visual and verbal communication used in a specific media text open the door to interpreting the portrayal or image of the man to whom the text is devoted to as that of a non-heterosexual male person. When it comes to the verbal language of communicating NHM through a media text, my investigation is informed by the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk 1985; Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995, 2003; Wodak 2011; Wodak et al. 2009). In Chapters Two and Three I focus on such aspects of discourse analysis as referential strategy or strategy of nomination (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 29), and in Chapter Three I also focus on such aspects of discourse analysis as the use of confessional personal narratives.

Although the media data captured and selected for the current thesis offers considerable opportunities for in-depth textual analysis and very deep delving into discursive tools of verbal communication of NHM, I sacrificed these opportunities for the sake of including a chapter on visual communication of NHM in Russian media. The inclusion of that chapter reflects the global trend of 'the growing emphasis and social reliance upon visual communication' (Dewdney and Ride 2013: 28) and 'the contemporary dominance of the visual' (Stocchetti and Kukkonen 2011: 1). The increasing reliance on visuality has also led to media convergence: 'the digital tools used for media production in which software combines the manipulation of the moving with the still, the graphic with the photographic, the typographic with the filmic, the visual with the sonic' (Dewdney and Ride 2014: 101) have enabled, facilitated and sped up the convergence of mainstream and new digital media – which in its turn has facilitated the process of democratisation of media discourses in the world.

Visuality is also an especially pertinent aspect to a study on non-heteronormative gender and sexuality performances due to 'commodification of homosexuality' in TV and video entertainment and infotainment content (Stocchetti and Kukkonen 2011: 236) which takes place when media portrayals of 'characters defined as gay are concentrated on the market-driven stereotypes of wealthy gay men in possession of effeminate consumer expertise focused on bodily management and self-promotion' (Stocchetti and Kukkonen 2011: 239). Chapter Four of the current thesis is devoted to multimodal discourse analysis (Bateman et al. 2017; O'Halloran and Smith 2011; Kress 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001) of photographic images used in the media texts on NHM which were retrieved as part of the media cases investigated in Chapters Two and Three, as well as to the analysis of commodified media portrayals of NHM on Russian makeover TV.

In this, the first chapter of the thesis, I have provided an analysis of how restrictive public discourses on non-heteronormativity can impact the mediation of non-heteronormative people. I have also reflected on the ways in which media discourses can affect the development and discursive shifts in societal perceptions of non-heteronormativity. I have presented an in-depth account of the discursive value of the 2013 'traditional sexuality' legislation and provided a rationale for the application of the category of 'non-heteronormative masculinity' in this research. Having identified the key aspects of the communication analysis employed in this thesis, I devote the next chapter to an investigation into the use of verbal strategies of communicating NHM in Russian online news media.

Chapter 2

Communicating non-heteronormative masculinities in Russian online news media: the intersection of transnational and domestic discourses

2.1 Introduction

As I highlighted in the thesis introduction, the logic according to which this research unfolded arises from the empirical findings obtained through daily media monitoring and subsequent content and discourse analysis. These findings made during the 2017 and 2018 monitoring allowed me to identify media cases related to communication of NHM. The analysis of two most significant media events (Dayan and Katz 1994) observed in April-May 2017 is presented in the following chapter: one event concerned a news report on unlawful detainment, torture and murder of Russian men suspected of homosexual orientation; the other related to the murder of a French police officer in a terrorist attack in Paris.

The first media case started developing on 1/04/2017 and concerned the reports of a new wave of large-scale human rights violations in the Chechen Republic of the RF. In the investigative report published on the morning of 1 April by the daily newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, it was revealed that men suspected of non-heterosexual orientation or involvement in same-sex sexual contacts were being unlawfully rounded up, tortured by the Chechen police, and even murdered. This report was quoted, republished, and reposted by numerous and diverse media outlets. The media which covered this case on the same day of 1 April included news agencies (e.g. *Interfax*, *newsru.com*), major media conglomerates (e.g. *RBC*), national newspapers (e.g. *Argumenty i Fakty*), local and regional media (e.g. the Saint-Petersburg-based online newspaper *Fontanka*, the Moscow-based radio *Govorit Moskva*, the online outlet *Kavkazskii Uzel* focusing on the North Caucasus region).

Having started as a domestic event, the Chechen case grew to become part of western media coverage. The investigative report by *Novaya Gazeta* was quoted, translated, and referenced across various western media. For example, on 1 April 2017 the *New York Times* published an article under the title ‘Chechen Authorities Arresting and Killing Gay Men, Russian Paper Says’¹¹, which opened with a reference to the past conflicts between the Kremlin and Chechnya (referred to in the article as the ‘two-decade war against Islamic insurgents’) and which contextualised the *Novaya Gazeta* report in the framework of human rights violations. The article also contained multiple references to ‘traditional Muslim values’ as prevailing in the ‘Muslim region’ of southern Russia, and the publication effectively opposed the notions of ‘Islam’ and ‘gay-rights’.

The *BBC Russian service* reacted to the release of the investigative report with a publication under the title ‘Kadyrov’s Press Secretary: if there were gays in Chechnya, they would have ceased existing already’ (*Press-sekretar’ Kadyrova: Esli by v Chechne byli gei, to ikh by uzhe ne bylo*).¹² The article emphasised the comments made by the representatives of the Chechen authorities concerning the *Novaya Gazeta* report, including the statement by the Press Secretary of the Head of the Chechen government that there were no men of a non-

¹¹ Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/world/europe/chechen-authorities-arresting-and-killing-gay-men-russian-paper-says.html>, accessed 8/04/2020

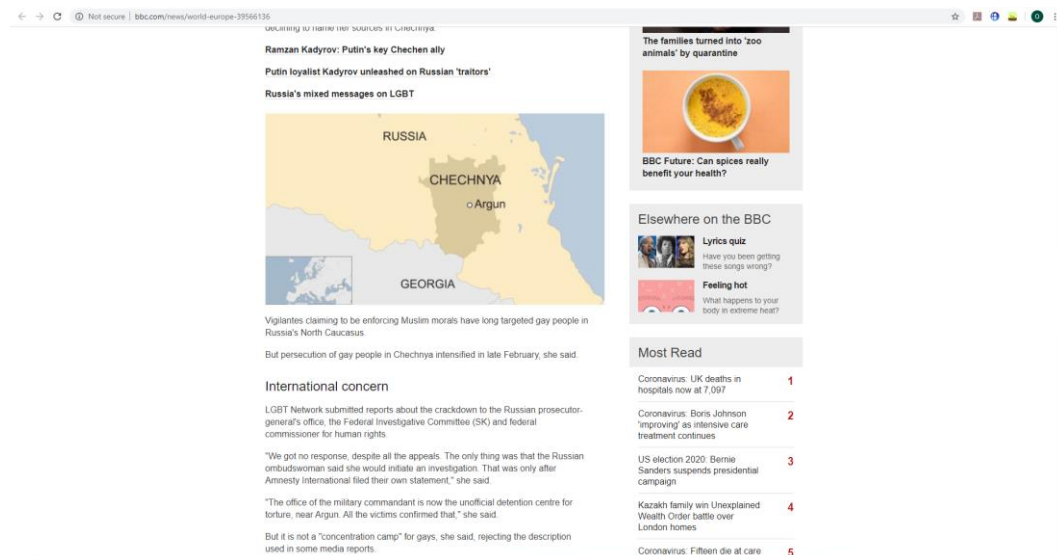
¹² Source: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-39469672>, accessed 8/04/2020

heterosexual orientation in Chechnya, which meant that detainments and tortures could not be taking place either, as it was impossible to oppress those who did not exist.

The *BBC* explored this media case further with the 11 April publication titled 'Chechen police 'kidnap and torture gay men' - LGBT activists'.¹³ In that article, the focus was primarily on the actions of LGBTQ-rights activists who were working with Chechen men facing the risk of detainment on the grounds of their sexuality and who were arranging evacuation, legal and financial aid, as well as psychological and information support. The article contextualised the media event as part of the discourse on LGBTQ-rights and homophobia in Chechnya. It also emphasised the special relations between the Kremlin and the Chechen authorities which made the republic stand out from the rest of the administrative subjects of the RF. Thus, the body of the article contains an inline image showing Chechnya on the map, framed above with the hyperlinks to articles under the titles 'Ramzan Kadyrov: Putin's key Chechen ally', 'Putin loyalist Kadyrov unleashed on Russian 'traitors'', 'Russia's mixed messages on LGBT', and below – with a quote which discursively juxtaposes Islam and LGBTQ-rights: 'Vigilantes claiming to be enforcing Muslim morals have long targeted gay people in Russia's North Caucasus' (see image 2.1.1). The article then further opposes 'Muslim morals' and traditions sustained in Chechnya to the (western) concepts of LGBTQ rights and human rights with the closing paragraph being titled 'International concern' and referring to complaints from the LGBT Network, from global organisations in charge of human right protection (e.g. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch), and from western governments and political bodies (e.g. the EU and the US Department of State).

Image 2.1.1. A screengrab of the *BBC* publication 'Chechen police 'kidnap and torture gay men' - LGBT activists'.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39566136>, accessed 8/04/2020



On 2 April 2017, the *Guardian* published the article 'Chechen police 'have rounded up more than 100 suspected gay men',¹⁴ where it quoted not only the *Novaya Gazeta* report but also the first official comments on the report from various representatives of Russian authorities. The publication? positioned the case in the framework of LGBTQ-rights

¹³ Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39566136>, accessed 8/04/2020

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/02/chechen-police-rounded-up-100-gay-men-report-russian-newspaper-chechnya>, accessed 8/04/2020

violations, mentioning that it is the 2013 ‘traditional sexuality’ law and the strong customs of the Chechen Republic of North Caucasus that force gay men in Chechnya to stay closeted. The publication also dwelt upon the contribution of Russian LGBTQ-rights activists to helping the men facing the risk of detainment and torture in Chechnya.

The Russian service of the German radio and TV company *Deutsche Welle* (or *DW*) reported on the news about detainments and tortures in Chechnya on 1 April 2017. On their Russophone website www.dw.com/ru, there appeared a publication under the title ‘“Novaya Gazeta” reports on large-scale detainments of homosexuals in Chechnya’ (*‘Novaya Gazeta’ soobshchaet o massovykh zaderzhaniyakh gomoseksualov v Chechne*).¹⁵ With the very opening paragraph, the *DW* publication introduced the discourse of terror, referring to the media event as the ‘terror unfolded by Chechen authorities against homosexuals’ (*terror, kotoryi chechenskie vlasti razvernuli v otnoshenii gomoseksualov*). The article interpreted the *Novaya Gazeta* investigative report in the context of LGBTQ-rights, mentioning the protests against LGBTQ-pride parades which took place in North Caucasus earlier that year, providing a contact email for those homosexual Chechens who were under threat, as well as embedding hyperlinks to other *DW* publications on LGBTQ-related themes (on Russian LGBTQ asylum seekers and homophobia in Russia and Kyrgyzstan).

In France, the *Novaya Gazeta* report was translated into French and published by the weekly newspaper *Courier International* on 5 April 2017. The article was released under the title ‘Wave of repression against homosexuals in Chechnya’ (*Vague de répression contre les homosexuels en Tchétchénie*).¹⁶ The publication appeared in the subsections of the website devoted to European news (Europe/Russia/Novaya Gazeta – Moscow), and the lead image featured the Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov on the right and the Head of the Chechen Parliament Magomed Daudov on the left (see image 2.1.2.).

Image 2.1.2. A screengrab of the publication ‘Wave of repression against homosexuals in Chechnya’, featuring the headline and the lead image of Kadyrov and Daudov.

Source: <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/russie-vague-de-repression-contre-les-homosexuels-en-tchetchenie>, accessed 8/04/2020



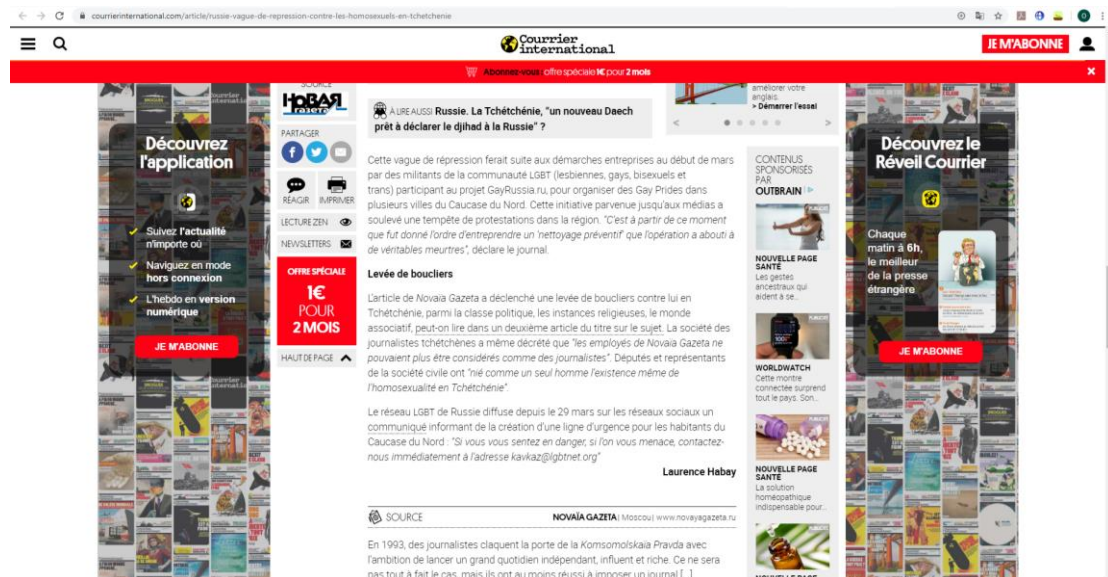
¹⁵ Source: <https://bit.ly/39Oivzm>, accessed 8/04/2020

¹⁶ Source: <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/russie-vague-de-repression-contre-les-homosexuels-en-tchetchenie>, accessed 8/04/2020

The use of the Chechen political figures in the lead image contextualised the media case within the media discourse on political power, within the framework of legitimate and illegitimate political opposition. *Novaya Gazeta* is consistently referred to as an investigative, independent, oppositional newspaper (*journal d'enquête; le journal d'opposition*), below the closing paragraph of the article there is a link to a webpage devoted to the origins and the history of the creation of *Novaya Gazeta* in 1993 as a 'quality newspaper, which uncompromisingly denounces the flaws of Russian society' (*un journal de qualité, qui dénonce sans complaisance les failles de la société russe*).¹⁷ In the article devoted to the *Novaya Gazeta* investigative report on human rights violations in Chechnya, the newspaper is presented as a legitimate opposition to the Chechen authorities, whereas the latter are portrayed as a potential threat not only to homosexuals or the *Novaya Gazeta* journalists but to the Russian Federation security. Thus, the body of the article contains a hyperlink to further reading, which leads to the 20/02/2016 publication entitled 'Chechnya, "a new Daesh ready to declare jihad on Russia"?' (*'La Tchétchénie, "un nouveau Daech prêt à déclarer le djihad à la Russie"?'*) (see image 2.1.3). The comparison of Chechnya to Daesh, which is the Arabic acronym for Islamic State (IS), introduces the theme of 'terror' and 'war on terror'. It also creates a binary opposition between the newspaper representing Russia as a European society (and the detained and tortured men as part of that European society) and Chechnya as a non-European discursive space.

Image 2.1.3 A screengrab of the publication 'Wave of repression against homosexuals in Chechnya', showing a link to the article 'Chechnya, "a new Daesh ready to declare jihad on Russia"?' at the top of the webpage.

Source: <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/russie-vague-de-repression-contre-les-homosexuels-en-tchetchenie>, accessed 8/04/2020



In line with the western media trends outlined above, the domestic media coverage of the anti-LGBTQ campaign in Chechnya, as I demonstrate in section 2.3 of this chapter, also involved a discursive framework of the 'war on terror' and the opposition between the European concept of LGBTQ rights as human rights and 'non-European' Muslim values, i.e. the non-heteronormative sexuality of the male subjects of the investigative report placed them within the discursive spectrum of the 'European'. It also developed the theme of

¹⁷ Source: <https://www.courrierinternational.com/notule-source/novaia-gazeta>, accessed 8/04/2020

'traditions', where the traditions of Chechnya as an administrative subject of the RF were contrasted with the 'traditions' of the hegemonic 'European' Russian discourse.

The second media event in the focus of this chapter, which started unfolding on 20/04/2017 and which is analysed in section 2.4, also developed along the axes of Islam, 'war on terror', western values (and homosexuality and LGBTQ rights as part of them) as opposed to non-European traditions. On 20 April 2017 in central Paris, the French police officer Xavier Jugelé was killed during an attack performed by a terrorist who was killed by the police force and who was later found out to be linked to the IS. Jugelé's homosexuality became known to the public soon after the identities of the perpetrator and the victim were disclosed (he was described as a gay rights activist). When the solemn ceremony of his funeral, which was attended by the prime minister of France as well as other figures of power and authority, was broadcast by western and Russian media outlets, the coverage included the emotional speech delivered by the male partner of the deceased officer, Etienne Cardiles. Thus, similarly to the case of the Chechen men, the case of Xavier Jugelé's murder was mediated within the frameworks of power and authority, of Europe fighting against Islamist terrorism, and of homosexuality as part of the discourse on the 'European civilisation's' values.

In this chapter of the thesis, for the first time in scholarship on Russian media and Russian sexuality, I analyse the intersection of media discourses on NHM, tradition, Islam, and 'war on terror'. By bringing together, comparing and contrasting media cases of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign and the killing of a French gay police officer in a terrorist attack, I investigate the discursive juxtaposition of non-heteronormative masculine subjects, who are mediated as European and therefore a priori non-Muslim subjects, and of the Muslim 'other', who is by default represented as non-European.

In line with the research objectives of this research, I conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis of media texts related to the cases described above to identify the role of various Russian news media outlets in the process of setting an agenda on NHMS. The analysis presented in sections 2.3 and 2.4 allows me to define and investigate the discursive strategies applied by Russian news media when communicating to their audiences about the non-heterosexual orientation of the male subjects mediated as the focus of the news coverage. This analysis also enables me to identify and evaluate the wider discursive framework applied by Russian news media when approaching the concept of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' sexuality.

While carrying out a content analysis and critical discourse analysis of the media data on the two cases, I reveal how media outlets refer to the non-heterosexual orientation of the mediated masculine subjects when covering the cases of violence against men in Chechnya and the murder of the French policeman. I also discover whether there is a consistent interconnection between the socio-political stance of the media outlet and the way it approaches the non-heteronormativity of the masculine subjects. Another question I address is whether all the outlets make references to Islam when covering the two media cases and whether all the outlets approach the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign from the perspective of the European concept of human rights. Through the discourse analysis of the empirical findings presented in this chapter, I bridge a gap in the studies of media discourses on Russian (homo)sexuality approached in the context of (religious) tradition, as well as contribute to the existing scholarship on Chechnya and Russian Islam, a brief overview of which I provide in the next section of the chapter.

2.2 Discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities and Islam: the problem of othering

The purpose of this section is to contextualise the media discourse analyses presented in sections 2.3 and 2.4 and to provide an overview of the scholarship which informs my approach to the communication of NHM in the contexts of human rights violations, ‘war on terror’ and non-European Islamic traditions. In this chapter, I approach the media portrayals of Muslim and non-Muslim non-heteronormative masculine subjects as mediated images of ‘Other’, where the othering is taking place along the axes of discourses on ‘terror’ and ‘tradition’. I start this section with an outline of studies on Chechnya and Islam and then highlight the aspects of scholarship on intersectionality and transnational media that inform my analysis of the two media cases which are in the focus of this chapter.

According to the 2017 *Pew Research Center* report ‘Religion and nationality in Central and Eastern Europe’,¹⁸ 71% of the Russian population identify as Christian, 10% as Muslim, 15% as no religion, 5% as following religions other than Christianity and Islam, which makes Islam the second most widely spread and important religious confession in Russia after Christianity. Moscow, with a population of over 400,000 Muslims,¹⁹ is the biggest Muslim city in Russia and one of Europe’s most Muslim capitals (March 2010: 84). Islam is not only followed by a high number of Russian citizens, it is also supported and promoted across Russian regions by 3038 officially registered Muslim organisations.²⁰ The regional organisations are headed by the Council of Russian Muftis (*SMR – Sovet muftiev Rossii*) and by Muslim Spiritual Administrations (*DUMs – Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul’man*), which operate across and within administrative subjects of Russia²¹ and which in their turn are headed by the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation.²² Although in contemporary Russia, multi-confessional multi-ethnicity is ‘constitutionally enshrined’ (Hutchings et al. 2010: 65), the discourse on Russia as a multi-religious, multi-confessional and multi-ethnic country is effectively constructed as a discourse on the privileged hegemony of Orthodox Christianity vs Islam and its attempts at religious unity and influence (Verkhovsky 2008). Thus, the 2016 conference initiated by Kadyrov carried out a resolution which included a definition of what Sunni Islam is and what it is not, and which excluded ‘Wahhabism’ from that definition. This led to a conflict among Islamic leaders when it was revealed that neither the conference nor the resolution was endorsed by the Kremlin, and the resolution was criticised as aimed at splitting Russia’s Muslim community (Kemper 2019: 3).

One of the reasons why Islamic unity in Russia is problematic lies in the administrative structure of the country and in the fact that the administrative subjects of the RF enjoy various levels of independence when it comes to religious governance. Thus, in the North Caucasus region, the ‘muftiates act independently’ of Inner Russia and ‘the major personality is Chechnya’s President Ramzan Kadyrov (Kemper 2019: 3), who assumed upon himself the role of the spokesperson for all Muslims in the RF.

¹⁸ Source: <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>, accessed 9/04/2020

¹⁹ Source: ‘3-4 millions? How many Muslims there really are in Moscow’ (*3-4 million? Skol’ko na samom dele musul’man v Moskve*), available from <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2019/09/22/12669085.shtml>, accessed 9/04/2020

²⁰ Source: ‘Russian Islam in numbers’ (*Islam v Rossii v tsifrakh*) <https://muslim.ru/articles/272/7520/>, accessed 15/04/2020

²¹ Source: ‘Muslim organisations in RF’ (*Musul’manskie organizatsii v RF*), <http://www.islamio.ru/structure/>, accessed 6/04/2020

²² Source: the official website of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation (*DUMRF – Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul’man Rossii*), <http://dumrf.ru/common/org>, accessed 6/04/2020

The attempts at unity and influence are complicated by the fact that Russia has no undisputed Islamic authority in theological or legal matters: there is no 'Islamic Patriarch' (Kemper 2019: 2). Despite that, Russian muftis claim to represent the same mainstream Sunni Islam (Kemper 2019: 3) and to follow the 'traditionalism' paradigm, where 'traditional' stands for home-grown, loyal, peaceful, tolerant and aligned with the policies and values promoted by the Russian state (Kovalskaya 2017). The emphasis on traditionalism and alignment with the state originates from the complex relationship between Islam and the Russian state (Kovalskaya 2017: 142). The history of this relationship includes the 1994-1996 and 1999-2001 wars in Chechnya, as well as the ongoing threat of Islamic terrorism in the North Caucasus region and major cities of the Russian Federation. This relationship is complicated by Russia's involvement with internal affairs in Syria, as well as by a rise in Russian ethnic nationalism and anti-Islamic anti-immigrant sentiment (Verkhovsky 2006; Kozhevnikova et al. 2008).

Discourses around Islam in Russia intersect with discourses on traditionalism not only along the lines of loyalty to the Russian state and the values it promotes but also along the lines of discussions about traditional religions and traditional forms of Islam (Kovalskaya 2013). Islamism and religious extremism referred to in Russia's anti-extremist legislation, the 2002 Federal Law 114-FZ on 'Counteraction against extremist activity' (*Federal'nyi zakon N 114-FZ "O protivodeistvii ekstremistskoi deiatel'nosti"*),²³ 'focuses on 'religious extremism', which is conceived of as the opposite of 'traditional' religion' (Kovalskaya 2017: 142). The law is enforced not only by the Russian state but also by critical experts on Islam and by RF muftis who oppose 'traditional' Islam to its 'non-traditional' forms (Kovalskaya 2017: 153), which tend to be referred to in Russian public discourses as 'Wahhabism' (Hutchings et al. 2010: 73; Kovalskaya 2017: 143).

The complex religious and political discourses on Islam in Russia outlined above are reflected in the mediation of events and people linked to the North Caucasus region. As I demonstrate further in section 2.3, Russian media discourses on Islam are complex and multi-layered. On the one hand, there are manifestations of what Edward Said referred to as 'Orientalist' views and stereotyping of Islam (Said 1997) – a discursive trend sustained by western media in general, irrespective of the country of origin. On the other hand, there are manifested domestic discursive trends that complicate the mediation of Islam in Russia. Those trends reflect the specific features of Russian Islam (as compared to the rest of the Muslim world) that are rooted in Russian imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet history (Dannreuther 2010: 25). Those trends are also in line with the Kremlin's declarations of Russia being 'a Muslim power' and the Kremlin's ambitions for Russia to 'play a major role in Muslim global affairs' (Dannreuther and March 2010: 1). Due to the 'Russian governmental efforts to downplay Islam's role in domestic terror' (Hutchings et al. 2010: 66), federal media (e.g. such as Russia's state-aligned TV channel *Pervyi Kanal*) tend to mediate Islam-related themes within the framework of cultural integration and multi-ethnicity and not in the framework of extremism (Hutchings et al. 2010: 63-65). Following the rhetoric of the political and religious leaders, media also oppose Wahhabis to Muslims, tending to refer to terrorist crimes with the generic term 'crime'. As a result, there tends to be a discursive discrepancy between the mediation of global issues related to Islam and domestic events, which leads to media dividing 'the image of Islam between a bureaucratized, official faith, and an alien criminal element emanating from elusive foreign sources' (Hutchings et al. 2010: 75). In sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the current chapter, through a critical discourse analysis of the media cases related to tortures and honour killings of non-heteronormative men in Chechnya and to the killing of a French gay

²³ Source: <http://base.garant.ru/12127578/#ixzz6JfuJely4>, accessed 15/04/2020

policeman in an Islamist terrorist attack, I demonstrate how the overall media discourse on domestic Russian Islam vs foreign 'criminal' Islam impact the mediation of NHM.

The complexity of the political, religious and legal discourses around the Chechen Republic, its relations with the Kremlin and its policies regarding its LGBTQ citizens has seen a spike in research interest since the first media reports of the anti-LGBTQ violence taking place in that part of the RF. However, even though it is the report of investigative journalists of the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* that made the case known to audiences in Russia and beyond, very little if any scholarship focuses on the actual work of media in constructing and disseminating the information about the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign. The research on the Chechen case available at the time of this thesis being written tends to focus on the factual aspects of what has been happening in the republic seen through the perspective of human rights (e.g. Sartorio 2019). When a reference to media texts on the Chechen case is used, that is done not to reflect on how Russian or western media constructed the case of 'Chechen gays' but as a source of factual information (e.g. Kondakov 2019) or as a foundation for an analysis of the case through the perspective of political visibility and Russian LGBTQ policies (e.g. Brock and Edenborg 2020). When the theme of homosexuality in Chechnya is investigated, it tends to be interpreted through a colonial western perspective of the Foucauldian theory of sexuality and desire (e.g. Portillo 2018, Scicchitano 2019).

In section 2.3 of this thesis, for the first time in the existing scholarship, I investigate the case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign as a media event captured as it developed, in real time, and through media data obtained by minute recording. By comparing the Chechen case to the case of the killing of a gay police officer in an Islamist attack in Paris, I compare the mediation of Islam in Russia in the context of domestically originated and global (western) events. I also compare the discursive strategies used by Russian media when mediating Russian and western non-heteronormative masculine subjects.

Whilst addressing these objectives and analysing the two media cases, I draw on the literature in the fields of intersectionality and transnational studies. In the context of a complex multi-ethnic and multi-religious society such as Russia, intersectionality theory becomes the key approach in analysing the mediations of individuals belonging to multiple minority groups (Crenshaw 1991: 1242). In view of the marginalised position of non-heteronormative people in Russia and bearing in mind the interethnic tensions resulting from various social processes within Russia (e.g. citizens' migration and the growth of North Caucasus diasporas in large cities of inner Russia), the intersectionality approach allows me to define how media as a symbolic power situate non-heteronormative agents: i.e. to identify how the mediation of non-heteronormative subjects includes them into or excludes them from particular social categories and groupings (Yuval-Davis 2011: 23). The categories and groupings the intersection of which is in the focus of the current analysis include sexuality, religion, ethnicity and race, where I approach ethnicity as a category which gets racialised as a result of Russian colonial discourses on cultural racism and ethnic, national and cultural hegemony (Yusupova 2016: 148).

Following Kuntsman and Miyake, who were the first in current scholarship to raise the issue of queer visibility in the context of studies of race and who argue that studies on queer visibility in contemporary public discourses should investigate 'raciality' and 'queerness' together (Kuntsman and Miyake 2008:1), I aim to define how the intersecting sexual, ethnic and religious identities of the victims of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign are constructed in media when contextualised as part of discourses on 'war on terror': whether these intersecting identities are mediated as an integrated whole or whether the media

outlets focus on a certain preferred identity of the victims. As Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco underline (2014), the concept of ‘the war on terror’ has shaped the 21st-century postcolonial reconstruction of ‘the West’, and islamophobia has become the discursive tool of this reconstruction. Analysing how the homosexuality of the French policeman is mediated against the Islamist nature of the terrorist attack in which he was killed provides a deeper insight into the discursive construction of queer Muslims in Russian media.

Apart from intersectionality theory, the discourse analysis presented in the current chapter is informed by transnational studies, in particular - by transnational media and transnational LGBTQ studies. The media serve as a prerequisite for the cultural phenomenon of globality (Eide et al. 2008). Not surprisingly, with the advent of globalisation, media culture in the 21st century has become increasingly transnational due to audiences gaining access to a wide range of national and transnational media outlets (Skovmand and Schrøder 2017).

One of the implications of this transnational media culture for European societies is that European culture has been discursively constructed in the media through its opposition to non-European cultures, e.g. through its opposition to Islamic culture (Boukala 2019). As Said illustrated in his work *Orientalism* (1978), there is a long-term (and, arguably, still ongoing) trend in European culture (or the nominal ‘West’) to approach the Orient (or the nominal ‘East’) as Europe’s ‘Other’. Said points out that it is through the opposition to the Oriental ‘other’, which is infallibly irrational or childlike or passive, that the European is defined as rational, mature, and virtuous. This binary opposition lies in the foundation of all public discourses involving ‘West’ and ‘East’ – discourses which are ‘characterized by a continuity in which the Orient is always subordinate and inferior to Europe’ and which always reflect ‘the power and domination of the West over the Orient’ (Siapera 2010: 123). In this respect, it is important to identify whether the media data on the Chechen anti-LGBTQ purge and the French policeman’s murder entails the discursive juxtaposition of Islam as a non-European phenomenon and homosexuality as a part of European culture (i.e. the juxtaposition of the two identities that have been consistently ‘othered’ in European and Russian media).

It is the advent of transnational media culture that is claimed to have offered new approaches to a sexual identity outside of the predominantly western discourse and across diverse nations including the countries of the ‘Third World’ (Pullen 2012: 6). At the same time, it is pointed out that these new approaches have come to serve as a form of postcolonial control due to the global media flows spreading the hegemony of the West as the locus of progressive sexual politics (Hedge et al. 2011:3). Nevertheless, from the perspective of transnational LGBTQ rights and LGBTQ-activist discourses, the globalisation of sexual identities and politics (including the spread of the concept of a ‘Global Gay’ identity; Sutton 2007) that has been possible due to the global circulation of mass media is a positive thing and an important tool of promoting equality for LGBTQ citizens worldwide (Thoreson 2014:6). Although Russia is usually excluded from scholarship on transnational LGBTQ which tends to focus on Global South, Latin America, or African countries (e.g. Browne et al. 2015, Khagram and Levitt 2008, Ruvalcaba 2016, Wahab 2015), the two key notions employed by transnational LGBTQ studies apply to Russian society, too. One is the decolonisation of the discourses on gender and sexuality (Grewal and Kaplan 2001) and the other is the contestation of the universalising vector of the western sex-gender system (Ruvalcaba 2016).

Most importantly, the transnational studies approach is crucial to the analysis of the two media cases described in the current chapter as it allows the highlighting of the global-to-local and local-to-global trajectories of the evolving media discourse. Although the media

outlets in focus can be classified as national in the sense that they offer national frames of interpreting global media events, transnational media events which enter the discursive field involving those outlets challenge national frames of domestication of global events and prompt new meanings and interpretations (Eide et al. 2008:12). The case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign demonstrates the mechanism of local news gaining global status, thus positioning the victims of the purge in the contexts of transnational media coverage and transnational LGBTQ rights. The case of the murder of Xavier Jugelé, on the contrary, demonstrates how domestic media approach global news, e.g. which aspects of the media event are covered, and which are omitted. The analysis of these two media cases as examples of the opposite discursive trajectories complicates and problematises current discussions on transnational media which tend to exclude Russia.

2.3 Media discourses on Russian Islam and non-heteronormative masculinities: from a local investigation to a transnational media event

2.3.1 Contextualising the media event: the intersection of discourses on sexuality and tradition

From its very start on 1 April 2017, the global coverage of the media case of the persecution of non-heteronormative men in Chechnya was developing within the frameworks on human rights, LGBTQ rights and investigations into ongoing human rights violations taking place in the North Caucasus republic headed by Ramzan Kadyrov. The media coverage of the anti-LGBTQ violence led to multiple protests against ‘gay concentration camps’ and ‘gay genocide’ that were taking place across Europe, North America and Australia. Petitions were signed and official complaints were filed calling for actions to be taken against Kadyrov and demanding a thorough investigation by the Kremlin into the reported violence. However, amid that coverage and among the protest voices important aspects of the evolution of the Chechen case were either lost or misrepresented: thus, the voices of Russian human rights activists saying that human rights violations in Chechnya go beyond homophobia and affect the whole population and that it is harmful, wrong and unproductive to frame this case as solely anti-gay violence – those voices were not heard.²⁴ Bridging this gap in the conceptualisation of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ purge, the analysis of the coverage on the case from day one of its development provides insights into the complexity of the discourses around this significant domestic and global media event.

The case of Chechen anti-LGBTQ oppression was introduced into media coverage by the liberal oppositional newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, an outlet that has a long history of investigative journalism aimed at unearthing information about war crimes during the Chechen military campaigns, as well as about human rights violations and Islamist activities in Chechnya during and after the Chechen Wars (Evangelista 2002, Politkovskaya 2001 and 2004, Roudakova 2017, Tishkov 2004, Zassoursky 2004). The title of the investigative report, ‘Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist’s Ambitions Evoke a Horrible Ancient Ritual in Chechnya’ (*Ubiistvo chesti. Kak ambitsii izvestnogo LGBT-aktivista razbudili v Chechne strashnyi drevnii obychai*) which was published by *Novaya Gazeta* on 1 April 2017, introduced two themes that were key in the evolution of the media case. Those two themes were that of non-heteronormative (non-traditional) sexuality and that of tradition in the meaning of

²⁴ Andreevskikh, O. (2017) ‘Report reveals the full brutality of anti-gay purges in Chechnya’, by *The Conversation*, published on 30/05/2017. Source: <https://theconversation.com/report-reveals-the-full-brutality-of-anti-gay-purges-in-chechnya-78373>, accessed 7/04/2020

'horrible', ancient, uncivilised, outdated customs. It is those two themes that defined the perspectives of the critical discourse analysis of the media data I collected on the case.

The media data for the subsequent analysis was collected following the methodology of media data sampling which I presented in the Introduction of this thesis. The daily monitoring of selected media outlets started on 27 March 2017, and I was able to capture the development of the Chechen case as of day one, immediately following its coverage in *Novaya Gazeta* and across other outlets. Throughout one month, until 27 April 2017, I monitored the homepages, news, and other relevant sections (interviews, dossiers, stories, etc.) of the websites of the selected news and entertainment media outlets for all content related to the investigation into the anti-LGBTQ violence in Chechnya. The outlets included the newspapers *Novaya Gazeta*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Kommersant*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*; the TV channels *Dozhd'* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia*; the internet radio *svoboda.org*; the news and entertainment portals *meduza.io* and *life.ru*. Initially, the 2017 sampling also included an Internet resource created by LGBTQ communities for LGBTQ audiences (*parniplus.com*) and the largest social media community for Russian-speaking LGBTQ people – the Facebook community *LGBT Discussion Board*. Although I continued media data sampling for another month in May 2017 (I monitored *life.ru*, *meduza.io* and *Dozhd'*), due to the large volume of data retrieved in April 2017, I limit the analysis presented in this section only to the media sampling collected from the ten news outlets between 1 and 27 April.

The sampling consisted in close monitoring of homepages and news sections of the media websites for several hours daily. Other relevant sections of the outlets' websites were also identified whenever there were hyperlinks from the home page and news sections to LGBTQ-related materials published in those other sections (e.g. 'Stories' in *meduzai.io* or 'dossiers' in *svoboda.org*). The media content was captured in the form of screengrabs and was used for subsequent close reading and discourse analysis.

Having carried out the content analysis of the captured media data, I performed a close reading of the selected texts. The purpose of the close reading was to define what lexical units the media outlets used when referring to the non-heteronormative sexuality of the mediated subjects (e.g. 'LGBT people/person', 'gay', 'homosexual', 'homosexualist', 'person/people of non-traditional sexual orientation'). I also defined whether the lexical terms of referring to non-heterosexuality were used in the immediate proximity to the lexical tools referring to Islam, tradition, or the ethnicity of the mediated subjects. The retrieved lexical tools were used as the basis for a critical discourse analysis of the strategies of naming and referencing with the help of which the selected outlets communicated to their audiences that the mediated men were non-heterosexual. The purpose of the Critical Discourses Analysis was to identify whether the non-heteronormative masculine subjects are represented as personalised or impersonalised, as individuals or collective, specific or generic, nominalised or functionalised, anonymised or aggregated (Hansen and Machin 2019: 127-129).

The focus on the discursive strategies of naming and reference is chosen because the means of naming and referencing people in a media text are known to influence the way these people are perceived by media audiences (Fairclough 2003, Kress 1989). The analysis of the lexical devices used for naming subjects of media coverage allows an insight into the nuances of the representation of the participants of the discourse (Hansen and Machin 2019). With regard to non-heteronormative male subjects of media coverage, for example, the use of the English borrowing '*gei*' (gay) would place the non-heteronormative man in the framework of post-Stonewall western(ised) discourses on LGBT identities, whereas the use of the Russian

term '*netraditsionnaia seksual'naia orientatsiia*' (non-traditional sexual orientation) positions the mediated male subject within the framework of discourses inherited from the Soviet past. The choice between the medicalised term '*gomoseksualist*' (homosexualist) and the less stigmatising term '*gomoseksual*' (homosexual) would demonstrate how versed the media outlet is in the LGBTQ-inclusive lingo promoted by Russian LGBTQ-rights activists fighting against homophobic hate speech in Russian media.

2.3.2 The development of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign as a media event

As I mentioned in section 2.1 of this chapter, the 1 April investigative report, the information in which was claimed to have been checked and confirmed by Chechnya's Ministry of Internal Affairs, the administration of the Head of the Chechen republic, the Federal Security Service Directorate on Chechnya, Chechnya's Prosecutor Office, as well as by local LGBTQ-rights activists, was quoted and republished by numerous mainstream and digital media in Russia and the West. It was also followed by comments from Chechen and Russian governmental officials. Thus, on the same day of 1 April, the Press Secretary of Chechnya's president Alvi Karimov and member of Chechnya's Council for Human Rights Kheda Saratova denied the fact that the report could be true claiming that there are no gay people in Chechnya.²⁵

The backlash against the *Novaya Gazeta* report on the part of the Chechen government started escalating on 3 April when Chechen religious leaders held a meeting to condemn the allegations and to call for reprisal against the *Novaya Gazeta* journalists. The peak of the Chechen backlash was observed on 13-15 April 2017, when the Chechen authorities accused liberal journalists of provocation aimed to offend the Chechen people and Chechnya's President Ramzan Kadyrov suggested *Novaya Gazeta* should apologise for the false allegations. These statements were supported by Kheda Saratova, who claimed that detained and arrested Chechen men are not homosexuals but terrorists, thus justifying the tortures reportedly used against the detainees.²⁶

The first official comment from the Russian government came through on 3 April too, when Putin's Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov confirmed that the Kremlin was aware of the *Novaya Gazeta* report, followed on 6 April by Russia's High Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Moskalkova promising to start an official enquiry into the case. Following the threats towards the *Novaya Gazeta* journalists, Dmitry Peskov condemned any calls for violence, and on 16 April the Public Prosecution Service of the RF announced that an enquiry into the Chechnya case had been initiated. The Kremlin's reaction to the news of human rights violations against gay men in Chechnya reached its peak on 19 April when President Putin and President Kadyrov held a meeting to discuss the matter. This was followed by an official statement from the Kremlin's spokesman that there was no evidence of men being

²⁵ See for example, 'Kadyrov's Press-Secretary: if there were gays in Chechnya, they would be sent to a place of no return' (*Press-sekretar' Kadyrova: esli by v Chechne byli gei, ikh otpravili by po adresu, otkuda ne vozvrashchayutsia*) by *meduza.io*, 1 April 2017, <https://meduza.io/news/2017/04/01/press-sekretar-kadyrova-esli-by-v-chechne-byli-gei-ih-by-otpravili-po-adresu-otkuda-ne-vozvrashchayutsya> (1/04/2017)

²⁶ Reports on police, FSB and prison officers using torture against suspects in both criminal and administrative offence has been in the focus of Russian media attention throughout the 2010s. See, for example, the recent 2017-2018 'Penza case' – arrests of antifascist activists in Penza and Saint Petersburg on suspicion of being part of a terrorist organisation 'Network': <https://zona.media/theme/penza-spb>.

persecuted in Chechnya on the grounds of their non-heterosexual orientation and that the journalists' reports might be a provocation.

In other words, the discourse around the report of anti-LGBTQ violence in Chechnya started developing as a debate around two primary questions. The first question concerned the possibility that a Chechen Muslim man can be of homosexual orientation, i.e. whether there can be gays in Chechnya, the Chechen authorities denying this and insisting that the detainees were arrested for drug use or terrorism. The second question concerned the ongoing discussions on the state of things regarding human rights protection in the Chechen Republic of the RF – the discourse rooted in the Chechen wars, in the failed investigations into the murders of journalists like Anna Politkovskaya and oppositional politicians like Boris Nemtsov, and socio-political tensions around the ambiguous figure of Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the republic. Before dwelling on the first question, below I provide an outline of the complexity of discourses around Chechnya and in particular – around the relationships between Chechen leadership and Russian oppositional investigative journalism.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the North Caucasus Republic of Chechnya (see image 2.3.1 for the map of the republic) saw a rise of a separatist movement resulting in a series of wars for independence, also known as the Chechen-Russian Russo-Chechen? conflict, which continued between 1994 and 2000. In May 2000, the military conflict ended in Russia's forces gaining control over Chechnya's capital, the city of Grozny. However, the battle phase was followed by nine years of resistance on the part of Chechen Islamist separatists operating in the region. Both the battle phase and the subsequent campaign against separatists and terrorists in Chechnya contributed significantly to the evolution of Russia's sovereignty (Rigi 2007) and to the growth of the political capital of current Russian president Vladimir Putin, to his image as a strong political leader and the overall popularity with Russian citizens. Throughout their duration, the Russo-Chechen conflict was consistently portrayed in Russian media as anti-terrorist operations (Beumers et al. 2009: 107), and it also tended to be viewed in religious terms, i.e. the separatists' imposing their version of Islam on Chechen people (Beumers et al. 2009: 108). It is this interpretation of the concept of 'the war on terror' that gained a special significance and a special status in the building of the 'vertical of power' during Putin's presidencies (Beumers et al. 2009: 106). Since the end of the Chechen military campaigns, the Kremlin and the Republic of Chechnya have reached a status quo where Chechnya's president Ramzan Kadyrov enjoys full control over Chechnya in exchange for demonstrating loyalty to President Putin.

Novaya Gazeta has been known as the media outlet most actively covering reports on human rights violations in the Chechen Republic, which led to numerous conflicts between the outlet and Chechen authorities. The *Novaya Gazeta* columnist and human rights activist, dual U.S.-Russian citizen Anna Politkovskaya (1958 – 2006) devoted the last few years of her life to reporting on the Chechen Wars and investigating human rights abuses committed by the Islamist separatists, Russian forces and the Chechen administration of Chechnya's first president Akhmad Kadyrov and his son and successor Ramzan Kadyrov alike (Politkovskaya 2001; Politkovskaya 2004). Acting as a critic of the post-Soviet regime in Russia and the Chechen regime of the Kadyrovs, Politkovskaya experienced numerous acts of violence and health threats and was assassinated in 2006. Another conflict worth mentioning in relation to the analysed media case is that between *Novaya Gazeta* and Alexander Bastrykin, President Putin's classmate, and Head of the Investigative Committee of Russia. Displeased with the unfavourable critical articles by the *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Sergei Sokolov, Bastrykin

ordered Sokolov to be forcibly taken into an area outside of Moscow, where Bastrykin threatened the correspondent (Roudakova 2017:177-178).

Image 2.3.1. A map of the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation.

Source: <https://www.ecoi.net/en/countries/russian-federation/maps/?page=3> (12.07.18)



The history of confrontation between *Novaya Gazeta* and the Chechen authorities determined the angle at which the media outlet presented the report of a new wave of human rights violations in Chechnya, this time allegedly affecting LGBTQ individuals. A special emphasis in the 1 April publication was put on the role that the religious and cultural specificity of the Chechen republic played in the spiralling of anti-LGBTQ violence in the region. The discursive thread of the Chechen religious and cultural (Muslim) traditions is introduced from the very start of the publication, with the lead image showing traditional Chechen male costumes and with the title that refers to the anti-LGBTQ campaign as ‘honour killing’ and ‘horrible ancient ritual in Chechnya’ (see images 2.3.2 and 2.3.3).²⁷ This discursive thread is further consistent polarisation of the concepts of a non-traditional sexual orientation and the traditions of Chechen society. The inclusion of the ‘Chechen tradition’ discourse in the context of an investigative report adds another dimension to the discourse on what is traditional and what is not: i.e. the intersected othering through ‘tradition’, where a man’s non-heteronormativity puts him against Chechen traditions, while the Chechen ‘Oriental’ traditions frames any Chechen man as ‘non-traditional’ when compared to the hegemonic ‘Russia’ as part of Europe.

²⁷ The visual images used in this and subsequent section are analysed in Chapter 4 of this thesis which is devoted to visual communication of non-heteronormative masculinities in contemporary Russian media.

Image 2.3.2. A screengrab of the lead image of the Novaya Gazeta 1 April publication ‘Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist’s Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya’

Source: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti> (1.04.17)

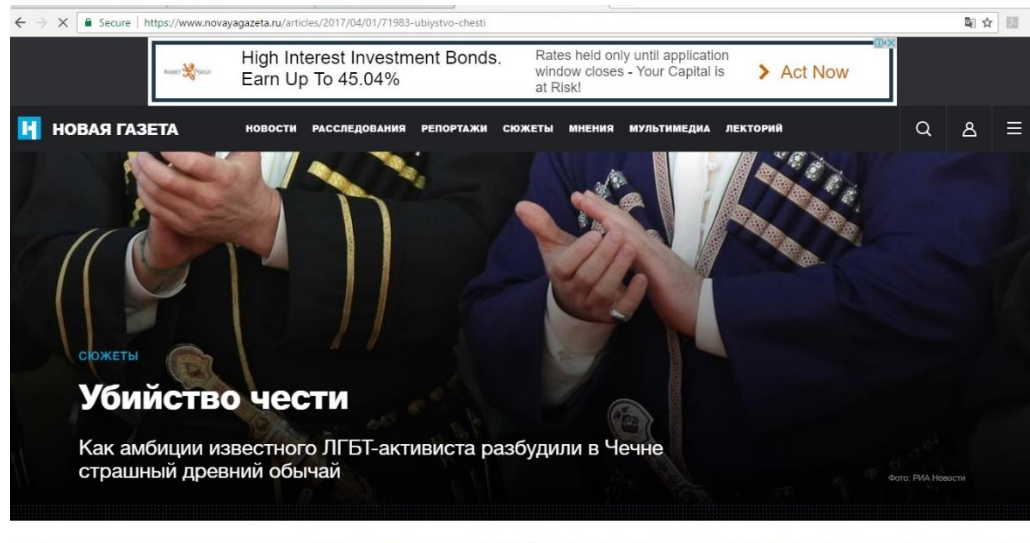
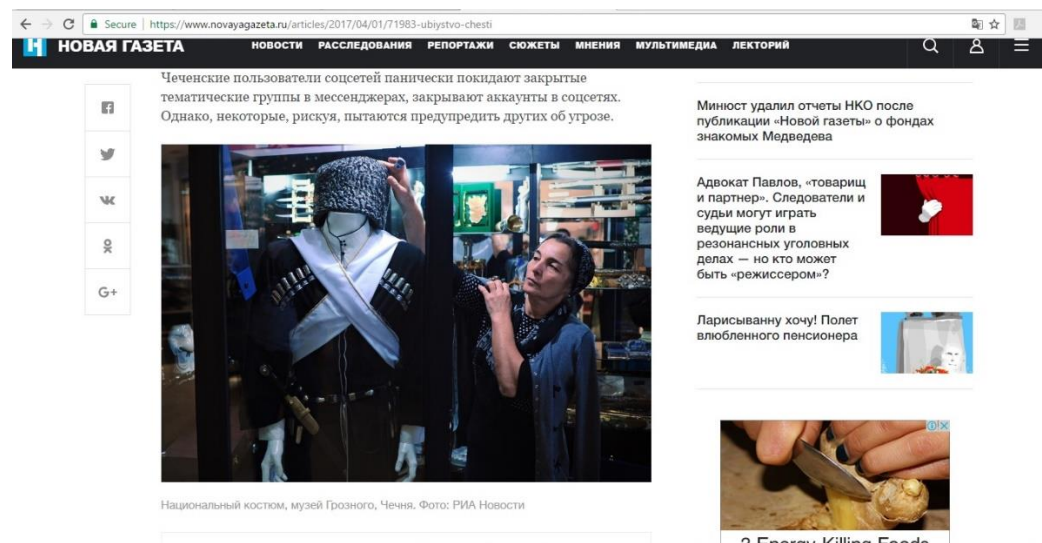


Image 2.3.3. A screengrab of the photo featuring a Chechen national dress displayed in the Grozny city museum.

Source: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti> (1.04.17)



Thus, the paragraph providing examples of the social and professional background of the victims of the anti-LGBTQ violence (representatives of the Chechen muftiat, or Muslim clergy; two well-known TV presenters), is followed by an explanation that none of these people demonstrated their special sexual orientation in any way – in the Caucasus, it would amount to a death penalty. It was explained, that in the traditional Chechen society, the members of which are closely tied with social connections, such things as a non-heterosexual orientation get revealed fast and are impossible to hide. The idea of homosexuality equalling death by honour killing in Chechnya is supported by the inclusion in the body of the article of embedded video footage of an anti-LGBT protest meeting in one of the Caucasus towns (see

image 2.3.4) and a video circulated via WhatsApp in Chechnya containing threats to LGBT-activists (see image 2.3.5).

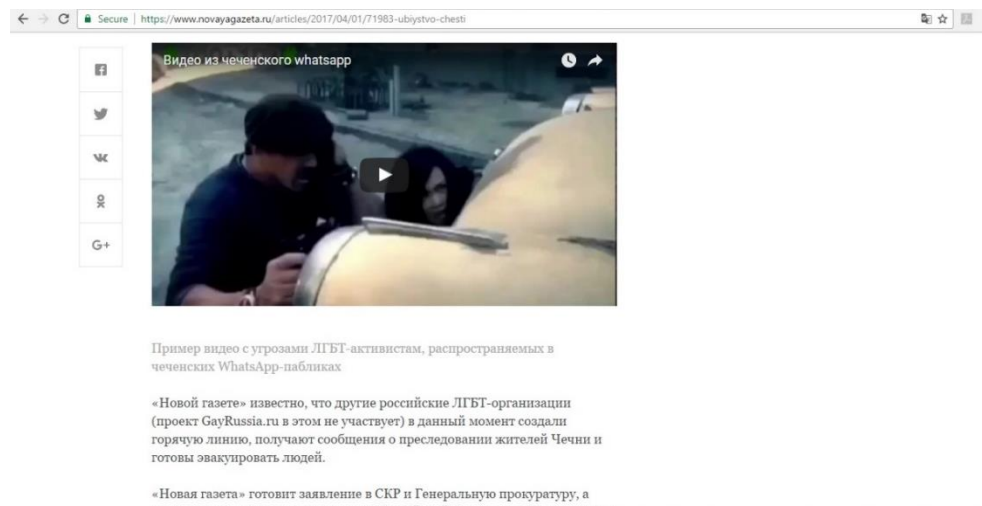
Image 2.3.4. A screengrab of the *Novaya Gazeta* 1 April publication ‘Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist’s Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya’ with an embedded video footage showing an anti-LGBT protest meeting

Source: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti> (1.04.17)



Image 2.3.5. A screengrab of the *Novaya Gazeta* 1 April publication ‘Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist’s Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya’ with an embedded WhatsApp video threatening LGBT-activists

Source: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti> (1.04.17)



The introduction of LGBTQ-rights activists into the narrative sets a discursive thread of human rights (and LGBTQ rights), which later evolved and developed with the growth of the media case. According to the author of the article, journalist Elena Milashina, it is the actions of LGBT-rights activist Nikolai Alekseev that could have brought about the anti-LGBT violence in the North Caucasus: Alekseev submitted an appeal to the councils of several towns in the region asking for permission to hold LGBT pride parades in those towns. As Milashina

points out, it is the backlash against the very ‘allegation’ that there can be gays in the Muslim republics of Russia that spurred detainments and arrests of men suspected of being gay. The debates whether there can or cannot be gays in the Muslim republic of Chechnya comprise one of the leading discursive threads in the media case coverage. In this respect, the strategies of naming and reference of mediated subjects’ potential non-heterosexuality become an insightful tool of discourse analysis.

By investigating these discursive strategies in the context of the media case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ violence, I define whether all the monitored media outlets equally participate in developing media discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities and how the differences in their participation in the discourse correlate with their political stance. I also identify whether the development of the media discourse on Chechen purge around the axis of ‘tradition’ involves reinforcing the concept of ‘traditional’ vs ‘non-traditional’ sexuality promoted by Russian legislation. I also specifically focus on the intersectional mediation of non-heteronormative Muslim men and define what kind of portrayals are created in the media because of the intersectional ‘othering’ along the vectors of sexuality and religion/ethnicity. By addressing these research questions, I aim to conceptualise the role of Russian news media outlets in setting the agenda and in shaping discourses on NHM in the context of a domestic-gone-global media event.

2.3.3 Discursive strategies of naming and reference in the verbal communication of non-heteronormative (Muslim) masculinities

In the following section of the chapter, I present the findings of a critical discourse analysis of 166 publications published by the ten news and entertainment outlets between 1 and 27 April 2017. The first step of the analysis involved a quantitative interpretation of the data: I looked at the number of publications on the Chechen anti-LGBTQ purge released by each outlet, and I also identified at which point of the discourse development each of the outlets joined the media coverage of the case. I also noted the discursive peaks in the coverage, i.e. the days with the highest number of publications on the case.

As demonstrate in figure 2.3.1 below, all the ten outlets participated in the coverage of the case at some point of the evolution of the discourse. 14 April 2017 is the date when all the ten outlets produced publications on the case, following the threats towards *Novaya Gazeta* from the Chechen authorities on 13/04/2017 and following an official statement for President Putin’s Press-Secretary Dmitry Peskov condemning those threats on 14/04/2017.

In total, three peaks of the media discourse were observed:

- on 3 April, when Chechen religious leaders hold a meeting at which they call for reprisal against the newspaper and when Putin’s Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov confirms that the Kremlin is aware of the *Novaya Gazeta* report;
- on 14 April, when the first official commentary on the situation from the Kremlin was circulated;
- and on 19 April, when President Putin and President Kadyrov hold a meeting during which the Chechen president shares his views on the *Novaya Gazeta* report being false allegations (see figure 2.3.2).

Figure 2.3.1. A graph showing daily participation of the observed media outlets in the coverage of the Chechnya case between 1st and 27th April 2017.

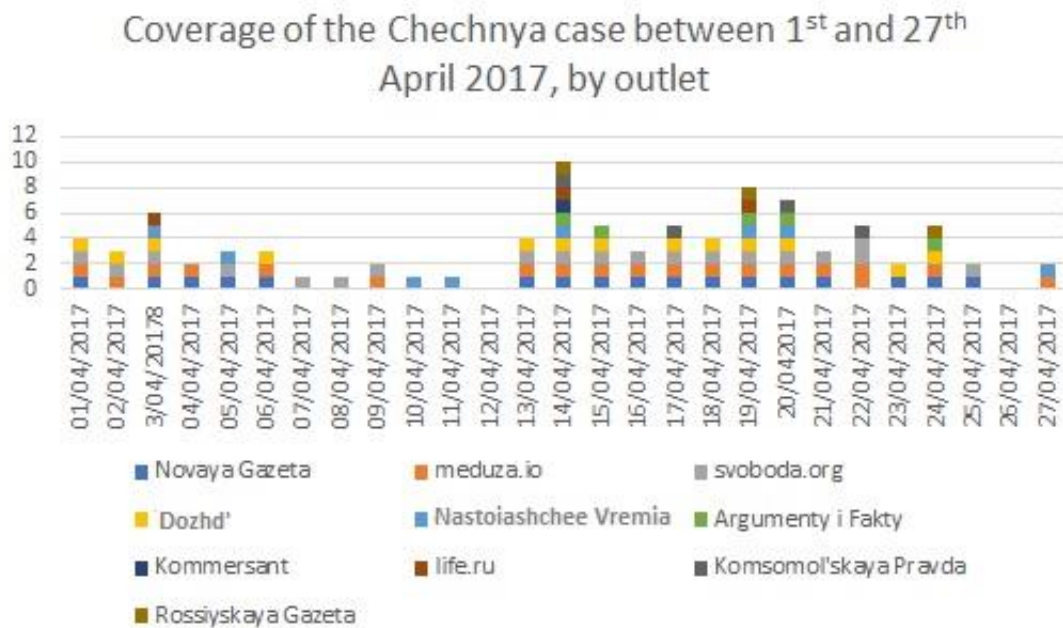
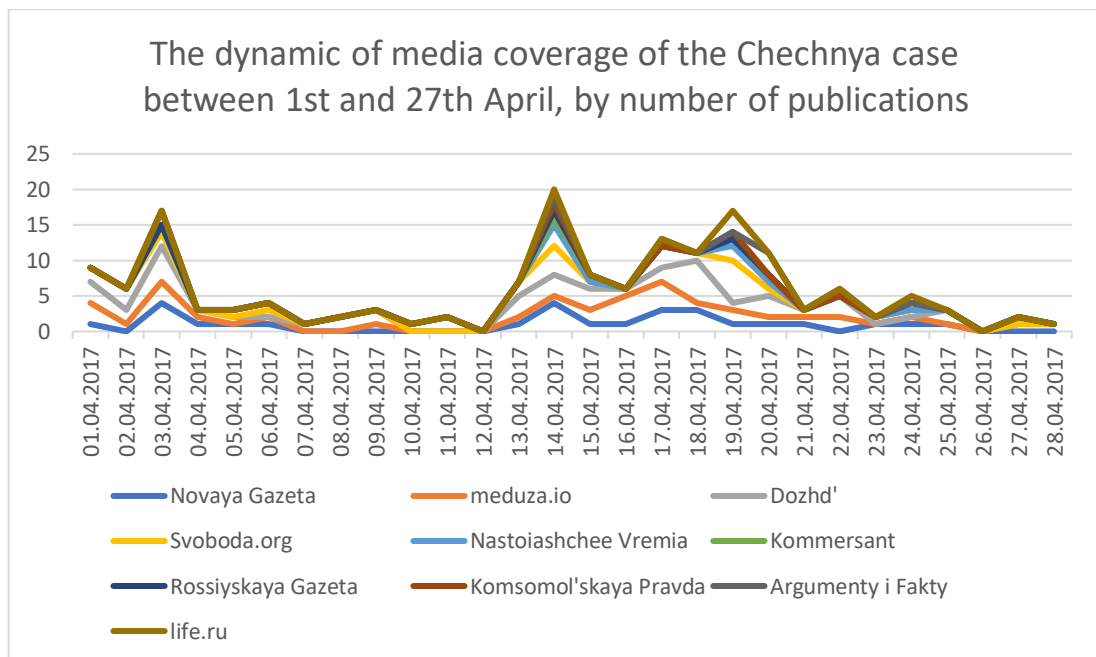


Figure 2.3.2. A graph demonstrating the dynamics in the number of the case-related publications by date.



The graph in Figure 2.3.2 illustrates how official statements from the political elite spur peaks in media activity covering the case, involving new outlets in the discourse. For example, the news and entertainment portal *life.ru* joins the discourse on 3 April, while the developments of 14 April involve five more outlets in the discourse – *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and *Kommersant*. This demonstrates that the inclusion of the outlets into a LGBTQ-related discourse depends on the outlet's agenda: in the case when the outlet consistently covers LGBTQ-related themes regardless of socio-political

events (e.g. *meduza.io*), they joined the discourse immediately; when the outlet's interest in LGBTQ-related themes is conditional and depends on comments of politicians or celebrities talking about those topics (e.g. *life.ru* or *Kommersant*), they joined the discourse in response to an official statement from the Kremlin.

Out of the ten outlets, the higher total numbers of publications on the media case belong to those which position themselves as liberally biased. They are also the outlets that consistently covered all the aspects of the case throughout the monitored period regardless of the Kremlin's reactions: *Novaya Gazeta*, *meduza.io*, *Dozhd'*, *svoboda.org* and the *Nastoiashchee Vremia* (see figure 2.3.3). The outlet which paid the least attention to the case is the conservative *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, and the five outlets which can be placed between these two opposite stances (the *Argumenty i Fakty*, the *Kommersant*, *life.ru* and the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*) covered only some aspects of the case sporadically.

This figure below demonstrates that the outlets which, from the very onset of the media case, consistently covered all the events and themes comprising the media case and which can also be classified as the discourse setters are the four liberally biased ones: *Novaya Gazeta*, *meduza.io*, *Dozhd'* and *svoboda.org*. All the four of them started reporting on the case on the same day of 1 April 2017, immediately after the release of the *Novaya Gazeta* publication about honour killings and tortures of homosexual men in Chechnya, three of the other liberal media outlets joined in, republishing the information of *Novaya Gazeta* and adding new facts which were not included in the *Novaya Gazeta* report. *Dozhd'* and *meduza.io* added two case-related publications each, where were quoted the comments on the *Novaya Gazeta* report made by the Chechen President's Press Secretary and the Chechen Councillor for Human Rights, both disproving the allegations. Apart from publishing an article with references to the *Novaya Gazeta* report, *svoboda.org* added a publication with quotes of the Chechen Council for Human Rights justifying the violations against homosexual men.

Figure 2.3.3. A table showing the total number of Chechnya case related publications by outlet

Media outlet	Total number of publications on the Chechnya case, ranked from highest to lowest number
Dozhd'	45
meduza.io	32
svoboda.org	28
Novaya Gazeta	27
Nastoiashchee Vremia	13
Argumenty i Fakty	6
Kommersant	5
Life.ru	5
Komsomol'skaya Pravda	4
Rossiyskaya Gazeta	1
10 outlets together	166

The other six media outlets joined the discourse at later points – on 3 and 14 April, and only covered some aspects of the case throughout the monitored month. On 3 April 2017, another liberal outlet *Nastoiashchee Vremia* and the tabloid newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* joined in the coverage of the Chechnya case, the former quoting head of Russia's Council for Human Rights who called for an investigation into the report of human rights abuse and the latter referring to the Kremlin's press service which confirmed that President

Putin is aware of the possible detentions of Chechen men on the grounds of their homosexuality. This observation proves that there is no direct connection between whether the outlet is pro- or anti-Kremlin biased and the stage at which it joins the LGBTQ-related discourse. In other words, the pro-Kremlin and pro-LGBTQ stances are not mutually exclusive in contemporary Russian media but can and do co-exist.

The newspapers *Kommersant*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Argumenty i Fakty*, as well as the news and entertainment portal *life.ru* joined the discourse on the Chechnya case on 14 April, after the statement of Dmitry Peskov, which shows that the interest of non-liberal media outlets in covering cases of LGBTQ rights violation is boosted by such storylines becoming a part of official political discourse. Topic-related media statements made by politicians serve as a signal to such outlets that the case has become a legitimate topic of media coverage. What is especially important is that no matter how much later these outlets join the general discourse on the LGBTQ case, they demonstrate full awareness of the media discussions that had been circulated before, which proves that all Russian media outlets are involved in and aware of LGBTQ media discourses, regardless of whether they publish on these issues continuously or sporadically, whether they are aligned with the state or not.

The close reading of the 166 publications on the case demonstrated a wide range of lexical tools used across the ten media outlets to refer to the victims of the unlawful detentions, arrests, tortures, and murders. These lexical tools range from the identity-building LGBTQ-rights related term 'gay' (*gei*) and the neutral 'homosexual' (*gomoseksual*) to the mildly homophobic medicalising term 'homosexualist' (*gomoseksualist*) and the pathologising term 'non-traditional (sexual) orientation' (*netraditsionnaia seksual'naia orientatsia*). As the table below shows, the choice and variety of the naming tools do not directly correlate with the political stance of the outlet or with the outlet's take on LGBTQ rights. For example, the generally LGBTQ-friendly *meduza.io* makes use of the mildly homophobic term 'non-traditional orientation', the liberal oppositional outlets *svoboda.org* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia* use the politically incorrect term 'sexual minorities' (*seksual'nye men'shinstva*), whereas the tabloids *AiF* and *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, as well as the pro-Kremlin newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, use LGBTQ-friendly terms 'gay' (see figure 2.3.4).

The analysis of the lexical markers of the discursive field of the media case shown in the figure above revealed that the terms 'gay', 'homosexual', 'homosexualist', 'non-traditional sexual orientation' and 'sexual (sex) minorities' are most common across outlets. Comparing how the variety and frequency of the use of naming tools are distributed in the publications of each outlet confirmed there is not always consistency of such use if classified by type of outlet (see figure 2.3.5). For example, the oppositional internet channel *Dozhd'* uses the terms 'gay' and 'homosexual' equally and interchangeably, whereas *meduza.io* clearly shows preference towards the identity-linked term 'gay'. The oppositional *svoboda.org*, *Novaya Gazeta* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia* tend to use LGBTQ-friendly terms 'gay' and 'homosexual' and avoid the mildly homophobic 'homosexualist', but they also include into their publications such mildly homophobic terms as 'non-traditional sexual orientation' and/or 'sexual minorities'. The entertainment portal *life.ru* applies only homophobic terms when referring to the victims of the anti-gay purge, and the other four outlets use both neutral and homophobic references. The politically correct inclusive term 'LGBT' (representatives of LGBT, LGBT people, LGBT community) is used by three of the five liberal outlets, as well as by the news and entertainment portal *life.ru*.

Figure 2.3.4. A table demonstrating the use of LGBTQ-related references by each monitored outlet.

	Dozhd'	meduza	svoboda	NG	Nast. Vremia	AiF	Kommer-sant	Life	KP	RG
gay	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
homosexual	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
homosexualist	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
homosexualism			✓							✓
Homosexual orientation / relations			✓	✓						
homosexualism	✓		✓	✓						
homosexuality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Non-traditional sexual orientation /relationship	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Non-traditional orientation	✓	✓	✓			✓				
Special / alternative sexual orientation				✓	✓					
Wrong orientation	✓									
Sexual (sex) minorities	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	

Figure 2.3.5. A table comparing the most frequent lexical tools of naming the victims of anti-LGBTQ purge across the ten media outlets.

	Dozhd'	meduza	svoboda	NG	Nast. Vremia	AiF	Kommer-sant	Life	KP	RG
gay	✓ 64	✓ 115	✓ 49	✓ 33	✓ 51		✓ 4		✓ 5	✓ 1
homosexual	✓ 65	✓ 20		✓ 45	✓ 21					
homosexualist							✓ 2	✓ 1	✓ 6	
homosexualism										✓ 1
Non-traditional (sexual) orientation /relationship	✓ 20		✓ 30	✓ 26		✓ 8		✓ 2		
Sexual (sex) minorities			✓ 13		✓ 2	✓ 3	✓ 1		✓ 1	
LGBT (people, community, representative)		✓ 21	✓ 38		✓ 8			✓ 1		

The analysis of media data presented in the figures above reveals two important features of the contemporary Russian media discourse on LGBTQ issues. Firstly, it demonstrates that the discourse is constantly evolving, changing and is highly responsive to

domestic media events. It shows how under the influence of the domestic and global media agenda a LGBTQ-related event enters the media discourse and permeates coverage of various types of outlets regardless of their political stance – in other words, regardless of their stance on Russia’s 2013 legislation. Secondly, the lack of consistency in the use of neutral or homophobic lexical tools when referring to the Chechen victims of anti-LGBTQ oppression illustrates the non-homogeneity of Russian LGBTQ media discourse in terms of promoting or challenging state-imposed homophobia and the ‘soft’ borders between LGBTQ-friendly and homophobic rhetoric applied by the same outlet.

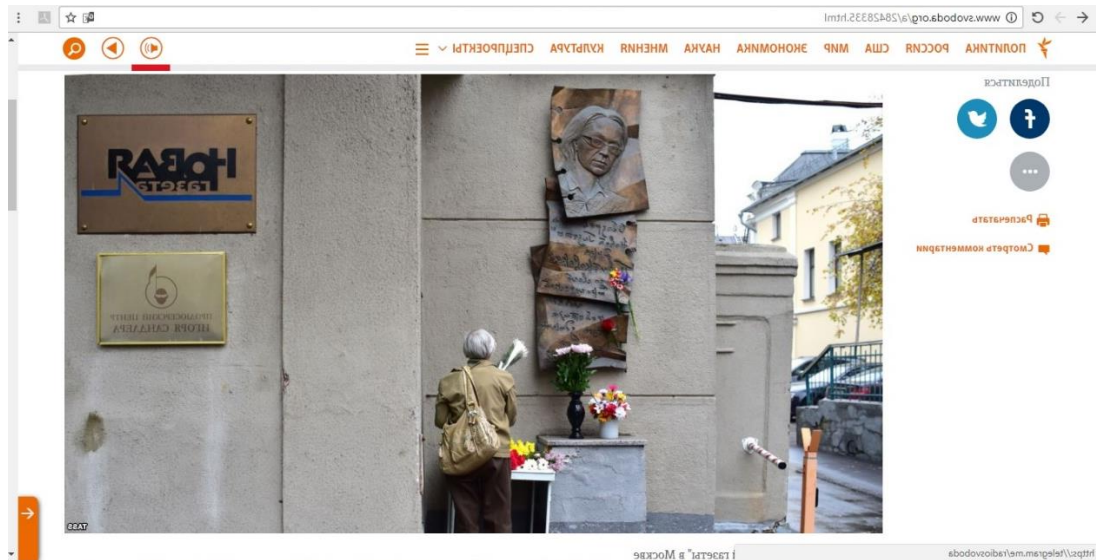
The use of the term ‘non-traditional’ regarding NHM introduces an important discursive trend. The default positioning of the men detained and tortured in Chechnya being that of a victim and therefore deserving compassion puts them in the discursive opposition to the Chechen authorities violating human rights. The ‘traditions’ which the Chechen authorities quote as grounds for persecution and human rights violation are therefore represented as barbaric, inhumane? and alien to the European discourses which the Moscow-centric news media are part of. Thus, the ‘non-traditional’ orientation in this discursive twist loses the negative implications, while the concept of ‘traditional sexuality’ promoted by the Chechen authorities through barbaric rituals, tortures and unlawful arrests becomes discursively ambiguous. This ambiguity is reinforced by various references to ‘tradition’ used by the observed media outlets when depicting the barbarity of the Chechen practices. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the collected media publications revealed that the more the outlet is leaning towards the oppositional agenda, the higher the number of its references to the traditions of Chechen society and the richer the variety of references to the ethnic background of the male victims. Thus, the publications by the openly anti-Kremlin *Novaya Gazeta* include multiple references to Chechen customs and traditions: ‘patriarchal Caucasus’ (*patriarkhal’nyi Kavkaz*), ‘local specificity’ (*mestnaia spetsifika*), ‘Chechen/local people’ (*chechenskie/mestnye liudi*). The Internet channel *Dozhd’*, whose political stance is also critical of the Kremlin’s policies, also refers to the Caucasus as a ‘patriarchal and traditional society’ (*patriarkhal’noe i traditsionnoe obshchestvo*). The liberal oppositional radio *svoboda.org* uses phrases ‘traditional society’ (*traditsionnoe obshchestvo*) and ‘tradition’ (*traditsiia*) when describing the case. *Meduza.io* also sustains the discourse on Chechnya viewed through the prism of ‘traditions’: the outlet’s texts contain references to ‘honour killings’ and quotes from the Chechen spokesmen’s speeches about *Novaya Gazeta* disrespecting Chechnya’s traditions and customs.

Apart from the theme of patriarchal tradition, the liberally biased outlets also include in their publications various allusions to the history of Russo-Chechen relations. For example, the *Novaya Gazeta*, *svoboda.org* and *Dozhd’* publications include references to the anti-LGBTQ violence in Chechnya as ‘a preventive cleanse’ (*profilakticheskaia zachistka*), which echoes the history of ethnic cleansing in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1944. In the context of the Chechen authorities threatening the *Novaya Gazeta* journalists, the outlet positions the anti-gay purge case as yet another example of outrageous and bold crimes committed by Chechens on the instruction of the Chechen authorities, other crimes of this kind being the assassinations of oppositional leader Boris Nemtsov in 2015, Natalia Estemirova in 2009 and Anna Politkovskaya in 2006. In the same vein, *meduza.io* makes references to the murders of Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova in its 13 April article informing of threats to the *Novaya Gazeta* journalists from Chechnya. In the 13 April publication about the threats to *Novaya Gazeta* coming from Chechnya, although not mentioning directly the murders connected with Chechnya and the Chechen wars, *svoboda.org* uses an illustration showing the memorial plaque to Anna Politkovskaya at the

entrance to the *Novaya Gazeta* office, thus introducing an allusion to this significant event of the Russo-Chechen recent history (see image 2.3.5).

Image 2.3.5. A screengrab of an illustration of the *svoboda.org* publication ‘The *Novaya Gazeta* blames the Chechnya governments for the threats against the journalists’, which shows a memorial to Anna Politkovskaya

Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28428335.html> (13.04.2017)



All the five liberally biased media outlets, when describing the LGBTQ-rights violations in Chechnya, use lexical tools that emphasize their mass character reminiscent of Stalin’s repressions or Nazi Germany’s atrocities. Thus, *Nastoiashchee Vremia* and *Novaya Gazeta* refer to the detainments and arrests as ‘mass repressions in Chechnya’ (*massovye repressii v Chechne*). *Meduza.io* speaks about a ‘mass campaign’ (*massovaiia kampaniia*) and ‘genocide’ (*genotsid*). *Dozhd’* brands the anti-LGBTQ violence ‘repressions’ (*repressii*) and ‘Holocaust’ (*kholokost*), referring to the secret prisons where the arrested men are kept as ‘concentration camps’ (*kontslager*). *Svoboda.org*, apart from using the terms ‘genocide’, ‘repressions’ and ‘mass detainments and murders’ (*massovye zaderzhaniia i ubiistva*), also speaks about the societal background of the case as the ‘totalitarian regime’ (*totalitarnyi rezhim*) in Chechnya, thus creating a Soviet-like, dissident type of discourse.

On the contrary, the other five outlets of the neutral or pro-Kremlin stance, do not include references to repressions, tortures, or Chechen traditions at all. For instance, the *Argumenty i Fakty* publications do not mention tortures against the Chechen LGBTQ people but instead use a broader reference to ‘persecution’ (*presledovanie*) or ‘oppression’ (*pritesnenie*). *Kommersant* does mention the ‘secret prisons for gays’, but when writing about round ups and murders it does not specify the scale of the events and does not identify them as ‘mass’ murders or detainments. *Life.ru* uses the word combination ‘mass round up’ (*massovye zaderzhaniia*) when talking about arrests but does not provide any further details of the arrests. *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* does not highlight the fact that the detainments and murders of LGBTQ people in Chechnya are happening on a mass scale, and the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* omits that important fact too. This refraining from interpreting the events from the perspective of the Kremlin vs Chechnya history creates a discursive ambiguity: on the one hand, this interpretation diminishes the scale of the human rights violation, but on the other

hand, it keeps the focus of the discourse on the victims of the human rights violation rather than on the political history behind the Chechen authorities.

Having outlined the discursive trends around the Chechen anti-LGBTQ purge commonly used across all outlets, the contribution made to this discourse by one outlet is worth a separate point in the analysis. This outlet, the oppositional internet TV channel *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, appeared to be the only one of the monitored ten which made the use of the term 'identity' (*identichnost'*) when referring to the non-heteronormative sexuality of the victims. In an interview with the Head of Chechnya's Youth Union,²⁸ the *Nastoiashchee Vremia* correspondent is asking the interviewee to confirm that homosexual people in Chechnya tend to hide their identity. *Nastoiashchee Vremia* is also the only media outlet that includes into its publication any reference to same-sex sexual activities or relations. In the 11 April interview with a LGBTQ-rights activist from Dagestan,²⁹ the *Nastoiashchee Vremia TV* journalist speaks about adverts placed by Chechen and Dagestan people on specific websites for seeking partners for sex and friendship. Whereas the other liberally biased outlets only hinted at the kind of sexual activity the detained men might have been involved in by using broad terms like 'relations' or by mentioning dating apps like 'Hornet' but not going into detail about the goals which the arrested men might have pursued using it, *Nastoiashchee Vremia* makes a more direct, clearer reference to what kind of 'crime' the victims of the anti-LGBTQ violence might have committed. It also clearly states that being 'gay' or 'homosexual' is an identity, thus including the discourse on the Chechen men case not only into the sphere of sexual desire but also into a socio-political context.

The same 11 April publication by *Nastoiashchee Vremia* contains such LGBTQ-specific terms as 'to come out of the closet' (*vyiti iz shkafa*), 'openly gay' (*otkrytyi gei*) and 'coming-out' (*kaming-out*). These terms were quoted in the article 'Not Under a Rainbow Flag' as part of an interview with Alexander Kondakov, a Russian academic specialising in queer studies and LGBTQ rights. *Nastoiashchee Vremia* also quotes Kondakov talking about LGBTQ people with strong religious beliefs, e.g. Judaism or Islam, and the challenges faced by LGBTQ people living in orthodox religious communities. Thus, *Nastoiashchee Vremia* turns out to be the only monitored media outlet that portrays the Chechen male victims of anti-LGBTQ violence not as alien to the conservative Muslim society, but as its integral part. If the overall discourse on the Chechen men case poses the question of whether there a Muslim Chechen man can be gay, *Nastoiashchee Vremia* declares that a homosexual person can be a devoted believer.

The way in which *Nastoiashchee Vremia* applies communicative strategies of naming and reference of the NHM of the victims of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ oppression can be interpreted as an example of what scholars of visibility and diversity politics refer to as a double-edged sword of visibility (e.g. Edenborg 2019 and 2020, Brock and Edenborg 2020), when the visibility of a non-heteronormative person in public discourses, on the one hand, provides them with a political and social agency; on the other – makes them a target of political backlash and, potentially, a victim of hate crime. By ascribing the political identity of 'gay' and 'homosexual' to the male victims of the anti-LGBTQ campaign, by leaving no

²⁸ See 'If a person is born with such deviations, he suppresses them". Head of Chechnya's Youth Union on the investigation into kidnappings of homosexuals in Chechnya' (*Esli chelovek s takimi otkloneniiami rodilsia – on ikh gasit. Glava Soiuza chechenskoy molodiozhi o rassledovanii pokhishchenii gomoseksualov v Chechne*), by *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28414498.html> (6.04.2017)

²⁹ See 'Not under a rainbow flag. Why tortures and murders of gays in Chechnya are perceived as a norm' (*Ne pod raduzhnym flagom. Pochemu pytki i ubiistva geev v Chechne vosprinimaiutsia kak norma*) by *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28422314.html> (11.04.2017)

ambiguity as to what their sexual orientation is, the media outlet effectively 'outs' those men and creates a discursive space for their potential shaming and stigmatisation. In other words, by labelling the unlawfully detained and tortured men as 'gays' the media outlet leaves no option for any other interpretation of their identity and the reasons why they became victims of the purges.

I, therefore, argue, that with regard to discourses on Chechen non-heteronormative men (and as I demonstrate in Chapters Three and Four of the thesis, on Russian non-heteronormative masculinities in general), the western concepts of visibility and identity politics are either inapplicable or should be applied with caution. Researching those discourses outside of the cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts inevitably makes such an approach colonial, and it leads to one-sided and superficial results. Contemporary Russia is a society with no identity politics at work and with many individuals engaged in same-sex relationships or contacts not identifying as 'gay', 'homosexual', 'bisexual', or 'lesbian'. The diversity of lexical tools applied by media outlets when referring to mediated subjects' non-heteronormativity demonstrates how the search for a media language to write about these new evolving phenomena of non-heteronormative behaviour reflects an interplay of western borrowings such as 'gay' and domestically used terms like 'non-traditional orientation'. Whether this search will stop at fully adopting the western terms or developing a new set of domestic Russian terms accepted both by LGBTQ individuals and the agents of the public discourses around them, is still an open question.

The analysis of the media discourse around the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign proved that, despite the existence of the 'traditional sexuality' legislation which censors positive media portrayals of LGBTQ individuals, all the ten monitored media outlets participated in the coverage of the case, depicting them as victims of violent crimes, i.e. deserving compassion and sympathy. The intensity and the high number of publications on the case produced within the monitored month across the ten observed outlets show that the outlet's involvement happens regardless of the media type and the outlet's overall political stance, but rather is prompted by the overall media discourse and political and social agendas. This fact reveals that Russian media are included in western discourses on LGBTQ-related topics and that contemporary Russian media discourses are shaped and impacted not only by restrictive pressure from above such as censoring legislation but also by western media trends and domestic societal processes.

The example of a global media case triggered by a journalist report based on the evidence obtained directly from LGBTQ-rights activists and LGBTQ individuals gives grounds to argue that media discourses in Russia are influenced not only by top-down dynamics (i.e. the impact of the 'traditional sexualities' legislation) but also by bottom-up dynamics (i.e. the influence of activists, grassroots movements and media consumers in general).

The analysis of the naming and reference strategies used by the observed media outlets demonstrates that in terms of communication of the non-heteronormative sexuality of mediated male subjects there is no consistency or interconnections between the political stance of the outlet and the use of LGBTQ-friendly politically correct terminology or homophobic language: oppositional outlets can occasionally use homophobic terms, and pro-Kremlin ones, following the discourse setters, can occasionally use LGBTQ-friendly expressions.

The discursive feature in which there is a consistency, however, is the use of 'othering' in mediating Chechen society as a background to the media case. Through the allusions to

Stalinist totalitarian regimes and references to patriarchal traditions, the five liberally biased media outlets create the image of the Chechen ‘other’ as opposed both to the non-heteronormative victims of the purge and to the rest of Russian society. The five neutral and pro-Kremlin outlets, on the contrary, avoid such allusions and references. In other words, the category of ethnicity overrides that of sexuality in what concerns the manifestation of an outlet’s overall political stance. It is also the liberally biased outlets that include the discourse on the anti-LGBTQ purge in the context of the complicated history between the Kremlin and Chechnya, the latter being branded as a potential source of a domestic terrorist threat. In the next section of the current chapter, I further explore the intersection of the non-heteronormative and Muslim ‘others’ and the role of the context of the ‘war on terror’ on the mediation of NHM.

2.4 Media discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities and ‘war on terror’: local re-evaluations of transnational media events

2.4.1. The media case of the 20 April 2017 attack in Paris and discourses on ‘war on terror’: the intersection of multiple ‘others’

On 17 March 2019 in Paris, a protest riot broke out on the capital’s glamorous venue, the Champs-Élysées. The riot was started by the fractions of ‘yellow vests’ – the protest movement that began in France in November 2018 as a backlash against increased taxes and overall economic recession.³⁰ Not only luxury stores, restaurants and banks were vandalised during the riot but also the plaque commemorating Xavier Jugelé – a police officer who was killed by an Islamic extremist in the 20 April 2017 terrorist attack on the Champs-Élysées (see image 2.4.1).

Image 2.4.1. A screenshot of the publication by the French newspaper *Le Figaro* entitled ‘The commemorative plaque devoted to the policeman Xavier Jugelé vandalised’ (*La plaque commémorative dédiée au policier Xavier Jugelé dégradée*).

Source : <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/la-plaque-commemorative-dediee-au-policier-xavier-jugelé-degradée-20190317> (19/03/2019)



³⁰ See ‘Yellow vest protests: Paris police sacked, rally bans planned’, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-47609978> (18/03/2019)

The vandalism of the commemorative plaque was widely covered in French media and drew public criticism.³¹ A participant of the anti-terrorist operation at the *Bataclan* theatre in 2015, Xavier Jugelé died performing his duty as a policeman, and the commemorative plaque celebrates his heroic deeds of defending France from Islamic terrorism. By the act of leaving the ‘anarchy’ sign on his commemorative plaque, the protesters symbolically equalled the deceased policeman with the power of the state which he represented and reinforced. Symbolically, this act of vandalism reveals the discursive trend which was driving the media coverage of the Champs-Élysées from 20 April 2017: i.e., the figure of the gay French police officer representing the European state in a collision with an Islamist terrorist which led to his heroic death. Similarly to the media case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaigns, from its very start, the media case of the killing of Xavier Jugelé was a case of a non-heteronormative man falling victim to a crime motivated by discourses on Islamic tradition. This discursive trend also framed the transnational media event of a terrorist attack as an intersection of multiple ‘others’ – the representative of a sexual minority being mediated as the protector of the state and the representative of an ethnic and religious minority portrayed as a discursive threat to the said state, both mediated against the discursive background of the ‘war on terror’.

The analysis of the discursive construction of mediated cultural identities often reveals this construction as involving the use of intersectional othering: a tool of constructing sameness and difference between social groups divided on various grounds – sex, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ethnicity (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, Jensen 2011). The primary issue with intersectional othering is the loss of the complexity of the constructed identity and the agency of the constructed subject, therefore when applied in the process of mediating minority identities, intersectional othering tends to lead to the creation of negative, objectified, or reduced portrayals of minority identities. These negative portrayals are? common, for example, when LGBTQ identities are constructed within the context of a state-promoted heteronormativity (Pronkina 2016; Siebler 2016) or as a tool of creating and reaffirming the dualistic discursive divide between the ‘pro-gay’ West and the ‘anti-gay’ East (Wiedlack 2017). Besides, such limitational portrayals are often encountered in mediations of Muslim identities within the context of predominantly Christian society or within the context of the ‘war on terror’ (Creutz-Kämpfi 2008, Kamenova 2014, Lazaridis and Campani 2017, Nurullah 2010).

The mediation of minority identities in the globalised world of transnational media complicates the intersectional othering of such identities. In the context of culturally hybridized transnational mediated texts, the dichotomies of West-East do not hold; the discursive oppositions of the pro-LGBTQ West vs anti-LGBTQ East are outdated; and the oppositions between the anti-terrorist (Christian) West vs the (non-Christian) potentially terrorist East fail (Darling-Wolf 2015, Skovmand and Schrøder 2017). At the same time, it is important to identify whether the transnational LGBTQ identity mediation goes beyond local discursive binaries of heteronormative vs non-heteronormative sexuality and whether it appropriates discourses on decolonisation and global human rights (Pullen 2012, Ruvalcaba 2016). Going beyond the prisms of Islamophobia and ‘war on terror’ as tools of constructing the neo-colonial neoliberal ‘anti-terrorist’ West (Haritaworn, Kuntsman and Posocco 2014),

³¹ See, for example, ‘France cleans up Champs-Élysées after yellow vest rioting’, *The Washington Post* https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/france-cleans-up-champs-elysees-after-yellow-vest-rioting/2019/03/17/31f56b04-4890-11e9-8cfc-2c5d0999c21e_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9f27a63a72bb (17.03.2019)

the transnational Muslim identity mediation is othered and queered in a similar way as the transnational LGBTQ identity (Puar 2007).

The media case of the Xavier Jugelé's murder adds to the discussions on the Russian 'traditional values' discourse, the latter normally presented through the prism of heterosexual marriage or partnership only (Stella and Nartova 2015). As this case demonstrates, in certain circumstances the state-sustained discourses on heteronormativity and 'traditional' sexuality and family values do not exclude positive media portrayals of same-sex relationships as - although marginalised - still an integral part of that discourse. Due to the Russian media landscape being non-homogenous (Rosenholm et al. 2010), various media outlets demonstrate different takes on the discourse of 'traditional values.' As I explain further in this section, the individual agenda of a media outlet permitting, neutral or positive media portrayals of same-sex couples and same-sex marriage become possible regardless of the legislation banning such portrayals from the media discourse.

This analysis of media cases allows me to further complicate debates on queer visibility in Russian media, which tends to be viewed as regulated from above (Edenborg 2017), censored and limited (Slavtcheva-Petkova 2017), thus reflecting the ongoing trend of the gradual loss of any press freedom in Russia (Azhgikhina 2008; Beumers, Hutchings & Rulyova 2009; Lipman 2014). By presenting this media case, I aim to define what strategies are applied by contemporary Russian media outlets when covering censored topics, such as the LGBTQ agenda. I investigate to what extent the constantly growing interest on the part of Russian media in marginalised themes such as non-heteronormative masculinities can be considered as an attempt at discursive resistance to the top-down attempts at infringing freedom of the press.

2.4.2. From victim to fallen hero: the evolution of the Xavier Jugelé media case

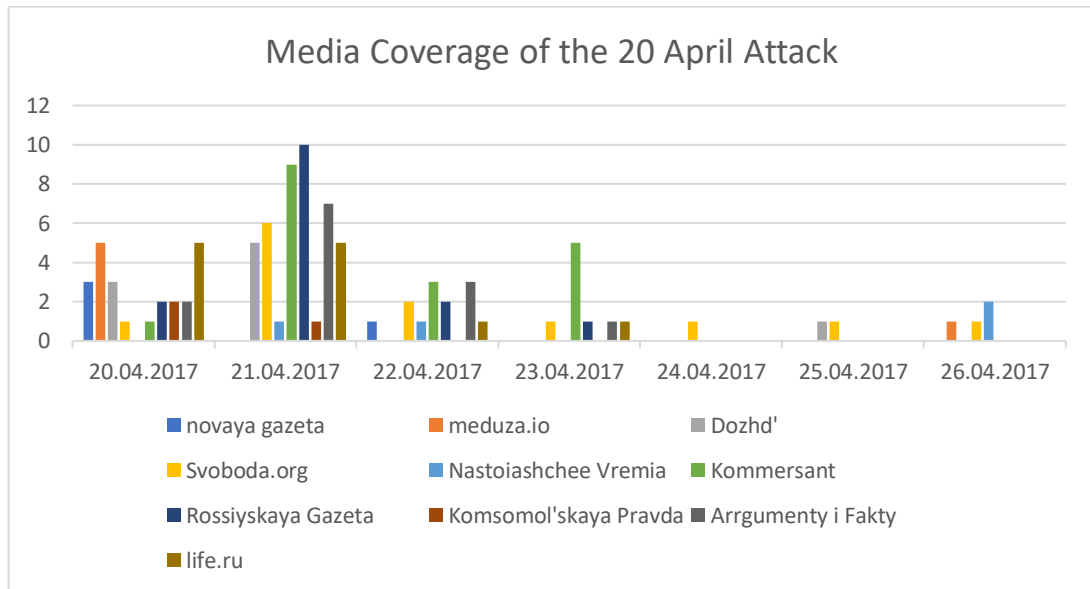
On the night of 20 April 2017, amid the coverage of the presidential elections in France the first round of which was to take place on 23 April, Russian media reported on a terrorist attack that took place in Paris.³² It was reported that a French policeman was killed by the terrorist during the attack and the terrorist was shot in police retaliation. Over the next few days, from 21 to 26 April, further details of the attack were disclosed, with identities of the terrorist and the victim revealed and the IS connections with the attack confirmed.

Nine of the ten monitored media outlets covered the case from its start on 20 April with *Nastoiashchee Vremia* joining the discourse on 21 April (see figure 2.4.1). The peak of the media coverage took place on 21 April and dried out after 23 April, when the results of the first round of the presidential elections became known. Only five media outlets (*svoboda.org*, *Kommersant*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *AiF* and *life.ru*) mentioned the Champs-Elysees attack in their 23 April publications in the context of the French elections. The 25 April funeral of the policeman and the eulogy delivered by his same-sex partner Etienne Cardiles was covered only by four outlets (*Dozhd'*, *meduza.io*, *svoboda.org* and *Nastoiashchee*

³² See, for example, 'The attacker who shot a policeman in Paris is killed in backfire' (*Zastrelivshego v Parizhe politseiskogo ubili otvetnym ogniom*), *Novaya Gazeta*, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/04/20/130915-v-parizhe-v-rezultate-strelby-pogib-politseyskiy> (20.04.2017); 'Media: one policeman killed, another injured in a Central Paris fire' (*SMI: pri perestrelke v tsentre Parizha odin politseiskiy pogib, vtoroy ranen*), *Argumenty i Fakty*, http://www.aif.ru/incidents/smi_pri_perestrelke_v_centre_parizha_odin_policeyskiy_pogib_vtoroy_ranen (20.04.2017)

Vremia). Five of the observed media outlets (*svoboda.org*, *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *AiF* and *life.ru*) included the news of the posthumous marriage between Jugelé and Cardiles in their publications, the ceremony of which took place on 30 May: *life.ru*, *AiF* and *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* mentioned the ceremony in publications of 31/05/2017, and *svoboda.org* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia* - on 1/06/2017.

Figure 2.4.1. A graph showing the dynamic of the coverage of the Champs-Elysees attack by the ten observed media outlets between 20 and 26 April.



The context of the ongoing presidential elections in France and of the vicious attack which could affect their outcome contributed to the level and volume of coverage of the case in Russian media. The intersection of the discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities, 'war on terror' and Islam created a complex discursive space for communication of the non-heteronormative identity of the murdered police officer. To unravel this discursive complexity, I identify how the monitored media outlets referred to the identity of Xavier Jugelé: whether they include a reference to his homosexuality and his male partner into their coverage, and when they do, what lexical tools they use. I also look at the possible correlation between the references to the identities of the murdered policeman and the Muslim attacker who was shot during the event: I seek to define whether the mediation of a homosexual man as juxtaposed to a Muslim perpetrator affects the outlet's choice of communicative strategies for disclosing the policeman's sexual identity. Following the methodology of media sampling and analysis performed in the previous media case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ purge, I collected quantitative media data on the Xavier Jugelé case through daily monitoring of the homepages and news sections of the selected outlets, which I then processed through qualitative analysis (close reading and a critical discourse analysis of the naming and referencing strategies).

The daily monitoring of the ten selected media outlets revealed that Russian media reacted to the news of the Champs-Elysees attack immediately: on the same day, 20 April 2017, *meduza.io* and *life.ru* devoted to the news five publications each; *Novaya Gazeta* and *Dozhd'* – three each; *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* – two each; *svoboda.org* and *Kommersant* – one each. At this stage of the media coverage of the case, all publications across the outlets demonstrate homogeneity in terms of content: all

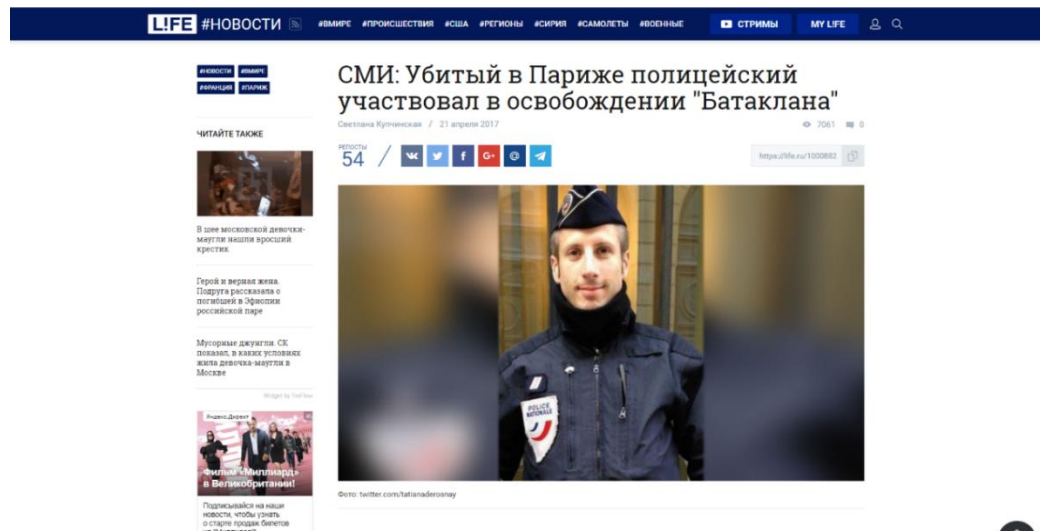
of them conveyed the details that were already known to the media at that point – the shooting took place in Paris and one police officer was killed by the perpetrator of the attack.

However, as of 21 April, the strategies of covering the case across the outlets begin to vary. For example, *Novaya Gazeta* and *meduza.io* ignore the case completely on 21 April, the former publishing only one more article on 22 April analysing the attack in the context of the presidential elections³³ and the latter returning to the topic on 26 April only with a publication about the police officer's funeral (both *Novaya Gazeta* and *meduza.io*, meanwhile, continued covering the Chechen case during those dates).³⁴

Rossiyskaya Gazeta and *Kommersant* continue covering the event and publish the highest number of publications on the case among the observed outlets, ten and nine, respectively. The publications by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* focused on the details of the investigation that proved that IS is responsible for the attack, and the publications by *Kommersant* covered the investigation too and also emphasized the reaction to the attack on the part of the candidates for the French presidency and US President Donald Trump.

The 21 April publications of all the eight outlets addressing the case on that day contained a reference to the identity of the attacker (either his name, age, nationality, or relation to the IS, or all of those), but it is only the news and entertainment portal *life.ru* that, among its five publications devoted to the Champs-Élysées attack, mentioned the identity of the victim on 21 April – the first of the observed outlets to do so. In the article entitled 'The policeman murdered in Paris took part in the liberation? of the Bataclan' (*Ubityi v Parizhe politseiskii uchastvoval v osvobozhdenii Bataklana*), *life.ru* includes the photo of the murdered policeman, his full name (Xavier Jugelé), details of the 2015 Bataclan theatre massacre and the details of the 20 April Champs-Élysées shooting (see image 2.4.2).

Image 2.4.2. A screengrab showing Xavier Jugelé's photo as part of the *life.ru* publication. Source: <https://bit.ly/2WUwGg3> (19/03/2019)



³³ See 'France is big but there is little choice' (*Velika Frantsiia, a vybirat' nekogo*), by *Novaya Gazeta*, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/22/72255-velika-frantsiya-a-vybirat-nekogo> (22.04.2017)

³⁴ 'I have no hate, hate is not like you' (*Vo mne net nenavisti: nenavist' nepohozha na tebia*), by *meduza.io* <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/04/26/vo-mne-net-nenavisti-nenavist-ne-pohozha-na-tebya> (26.04.2017)

The identity of the perpetrator was established by the French police on 21 April, and it became part of the coverage for nine of the ten monitored media outlets: each except for *Novaya Gazeta* published texts referring to the identity or the background of the perpetrator in this or that way. Although the identity of the victim was disclosed at the same time, two of the outlets – *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Kommersant* – did not include any personal references to Xavier Jugelé in their publications, which focused on the attacker’s connections with the IS and the effect the attack could potentially have on the outcome of the first round of French presidential elections that was to take place on 23 April 2017.

The two case-related publications by *Novaya Gazeta* on 21 April inform that the Champs-Élysées attacker had been on the list of France’ intelligence service³⁵ and that the IS claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack, but they do not disclose the terrorist’s name.³⁶ On 22 April the newspaper publishes a detailed analysis of the election campaigns of each of the five candidates for the post of the president of France, one of the subsections of the article entitled ‘Terror as a means of political battle’ (*Terror kak sposob politicheskoi bor’by*)³⁷ and focusing on the Islamophobic reaction to the attack on the part of the two right-wing candidates – Marine Le Pen and François Fillon. After the results of the first round became known – Marine le Pen and Emmanuel Macron staying to battle to become French president – the newspaper dropped the media case altogether. It is clear from the relatively low number (four in total) and the focus of the case-related publications that the *Novaya Gazeta* did not take much interest in the media case, which I explain by the case being on the margins of the newspaper’s agenda. *Novaya Gazeta* positioning itself as liberal and anti-Kremlin, it does not follow the ‘war on terror’ discourse propelled by the Kremlin, where Vladimir Putin’s presidency and high ratings themselves were built on various campaigns against Islamist terrorism. The newspaper, therefore, avoids dwelling too deeply on the topic of ‘war on terror’, only publishing the basic facts connected with the attack and omitting details, i.e. who exactly was killed and who was the killer.

A different attitude to the media case is demonstrated by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which also followed the case only until the first tour of the presidential elections was over. The newspaper did not mention the identity of the victim of the terrorist attack but otherwise followed the media case closely, providing full details of the attacks and reaction to the event on the part of Le Pen and Fillon.³⁸ However, unlike *Novaya Gazeta*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* reveals the terrorist’s name, age and national identity in a 22 April publication,³⁹ informing that it was a 39-year-old man of Arab descent born in the Seine-et-Marne department in the Île-de-

³⁵ See ‘Media: The Champs-Élysées attacker was known to French intelligence’ (*SMI: frantsuzskaia razvedka znala streliavshogo na Eliseiskih poliah*), by *Novaya Gazeta*, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/04/21/130916-smi-frantsuzskaya-razvedka-znala-strelyavshogo-na-eliseyskih-polyah> (21.04.2017)

³⁶ See ‘IS claimed responsibility for the Paris attack against the police’ (*IG vzialo na sebia otvetstvennost’ za napadenie na politseiskih v Parizhe*), by *Novaya Gazeta*, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/04/21/130917-ig-vzyalo-na-sebya-otvetstvennost-za-napadenie-na-politseyskikh-v-parizhe> (21.04.2017)

³⁷ See ‘France is big but there is little choice’ (*Velika Frantsiya, a vybrat’ nekogo*), by the *Novaya Gazeta*, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/22/72255-velika-frantsiya-a-vybirat-nekogo> (22.04.2017)

³⁸ See ‘Fillon and Le Pen cancel pre-elections trips because of the shooting’ (*Iz-za strel’by v Parizhe Fion i Le Pen otmenili predvybornye poezdki*), by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, <https://rg.ru/2017/04/21/iz-za-strelby-v-parizhe-fion-i-le-pen-otmenili-predvybornye-poezdki.html>, (21.04.2017)

³⁹ See ‘France confirms the name of the Champs-Élysées terrorist’ (*Vo Frantsii ofitsial’no podtverdili imia terrorista s Eliseiskih polei*), by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* <https://rg.ru/2017/04/22/vo-francii-ofitsialno-podtverdili-imia-terrorista-s-elisejskikh-polei.html> (22.04.2017)

France region. The newspaper highlighted that Karim Cheurfi had been previously convicted for an assault on a police officer and mentioned the evidence proving the connection between Cheurfi and Daesh (the IS): near his body, the police found a letter with an oath of allegiance to the IS, and in his car – a list of addresses of police stations, weapons and a Qur'an. The newspaper quotes a Latvian politician saying that it is the West that created terrorism and explains that the criminal was not being monitored by special services and there was no evidence of his connections to radical Islamists. The outlet also quotes interviews with the terrorist's neighbours who said they had never seen Cheurfi pray but had seen him consuming alcohol and smoking, i.e. committing sins from the point of view of orthodox Islam.

The comment on the terrorist's probably not being a true devout Muslim and the use of the Arabic equivalent of the name 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria' (Daesh, which stands for D.I.I.S. - *ad-dawla al-islāmiyya fī l-irāq waš-šām*) are an interesting characteristic feature of the newspaper's coverage of the case. Emphasising the fact that the terrorist was linked to Islamist terrorism but demonstrated behaviour which would be condemned and criticised in a Muslim can be interpreted as othering the terrorist as opposed to Muslims in general. The consistent reference to the terrorist organisation as Daesh rather than IS or Islamic State further develops this othering, setting a border between peaceful Islam and devout Muslims and Islamist terrorism supported by non-devout Muslims. By inserting into the body of the article '*Vo Frantsii ofitsial'no podtverdili imia terrorista s Elisejskih polej*' a link to the comment by a Latvian politician saying that it is the West that created terrorism (*Zapad i porodil terrorism*; see image 2.4.3), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* reinforces the binary opposition between the Islamophobic West whose actions led to a flourishing? of terrorism and the non-Islamophobic Russia which protects peace and fights against terrorism.

Image 2.4.3. A screengrab of the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* publication with a hyperlink to the text 'The West created terrorism'

Source: <https://rg.ru/2017/04/22/vo-francii-oficialno-podtverdili-imia-terrorista-s-elisejskih-polej.html> (24/03/2019)

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the article 'Во Франции официально подтвердили имя террориста с Елисейских полей' on the Rossiyskaya Gazeta website. The article text includes the following key points:

- Французские власти официально подтвердили имя террориста, [расстрелявшего](#) полицейских на Елисейских полях. Им оказался уроженец департамента Сена-и-Марна арабского происхождения 39-летний Карим Шерфи. Ранее он имел судимость, в том числе и за нападение на сотрудника полиции, сообщает телеканал Euronews.
- По данным прокурора Парижа Франсуа Моленса, возле тела Шерфи находилось письмо с присгой на верность ДАИШ (арабское название запрещенной в России группировки "Исламское государство"). Кроме того, в машине найдена записка с адресами полицейских участков, оружие и Коран.
- Преступник не находился под контролем спецслужб. А во время его заключения у правоохранительных органов не было сведений о его связях с радикальными исламистами.
- В настоящий момент полиция продолжает следствие по делу Шерфи. По месту жительства террориста был проведен обыск. Соседи утверждали, что не видели его за молитвой, более того - злоумышленник курил и злоупотреблял спиртным.
- Напомним, в результате нападения в непосредственной близости от администрации президента Франции один полицейский был убит, еще двое получили ранения. Легкие ранения получила туристка из Германии. Шерфи был ликвидирован ответным огнем стражей порядка. Ответственность за теракт взяла на себя ДАИШ.

Below the article, there is a quote from a Latvian politician: 'Экс-глава МИД Латвии: Запад и породил терроризм'. The article also includes a link to a comment by a Latvian politician: '*Vo Frantsii ofitsial'no podtverdili imia terrorista s Elisejskih polej*'.

Similarly to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant's* coverage of the Xavier Jugelé's media case includes the reaction to the terrorist attack on the part of the candidates for the French presidency, as well as information about the IS being involved in the attack and about the

terrorist's identity. The focus of the *Kommersant* publications on the case is completely on the role of the terrorist attack for the results of the elections – what sort of anti-terrorist measures are suggested by each of the candidates and how the terrorist attack might influence voters' choices. The newspaper even labels the event the 'pre-election terrorist attack' (*predvybornyi terrakt*).⁴⁰ As early as 21 April the newspaper publishes the article entitled 'The final push: which of the candidates for French presidency has the biggest chances to win' (*Finishnyi ryvok: kto iz kandidatov v prezidenty Frantsii imeet naibol'shie shansy na pobedu*)⁴¹ the author of which directly asks the question: 'How will the incident affect the results of the elections?'

The newspaper also discloses the identity of Karim Cheurfi, mentioning his name in the 21 April publication entitled 'Prosecution confirmed the identity of the implementer/executor of the terrorist attack' (*Prokuratura podtverdila lichnost' ispolnitel'ia terakta na Eliseiskih poliah*).⁴² In this publication the newspaper highlights that, although it was reported that a letter with an oath of allegiance to the IS was found near the body of the perpetrator, the connection between the perpetrator and the IS, which has claimed responsibility for the attack, had not yet been established, which gives the outlets grounds for a neutral naming of Cheurfi as a terrorist attack executor rather than a terrorist (see image 2.4.4). In the subsequent publications on the topic, the newspaper informs of Cheurfi's connection with the IS and further explores the effect of the attack on the presidential election campaigns.

Image 2.4.4. A screengrab of the 21 April *Kommersant* publication 'Prosecution confirmed the identity of the implementer/executor of the terrorist attack'

Source: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3280098>



Relatively less (compared to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, for example) focus on the identity of the attacker and no attention to the identity of the victim on the part of *Kommersant* can be explained by the outlet's overall agenda. The newspaper caters to Russian businesspeople and aims to provide neutral objective coverage of events, therefore the Champs-Elysees attack is perceived from the point of view of its effect on politics and economy, which makes

⁴⁰ See 'Paris shocked by the pre-elections terrorist attack' (*Parizh sotrias predvyborny terrakt*), by *Kommersant*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3277209> (21.04.2017)

⁴¹ Source: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3280094>

⁴² Source: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3280098>

the politicians' reactions and the outcome of the elections in the context of a terrorist attack more important than the identities of Karim Cheurfi and Xavier Jugelé.

Among the outlets which conveyed the identity of Xavier Jugelé as the victim of the 20 April terrorist attack, the strategies of portraying his killer also differ from outlet to outlet. For example, the *AiF* does not quote his name at all. The name, age, previous prison sentence mention of ISIS connections and IS aliases (Abu Yusuf al-Baljiki, i.e. Abu Yusuf of Belgium) of Karim Cheurfi is provided in the 21 April publication by *svoboda.org*.⁴³ The *life.ru* publications of 21 April⁴⁴ and 23 April⁴⁵ disclose Cheurfi's name (although misspelling it as Cheufri), IS nickname, age. *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* mentions that the 39-year-old criminal was on the police database of extremists, but do not disclose his full name, only first name and nationality. *Nastoiashchee Vremia* informs of the killer's connections with the IS by publishing his IS alias. On 21 April, *Dozhd'* publishes a detailed account of Karim Cheurfi's home search, evidence of his criminal intent to kill a police officer, information on his connections with the IS.⁴⁶ In its 20 April publications on the case, *meduza.io* limits its references to the attacker by mentioning that he was on the database of the special services⁴⁷ and by quoting his IS alias - Abu Yusuf al-Baljiki.⁴⁸ The strategies of naming the perpetrator of the attack vary from omitting his name to mentioning only his IS name to providing exhaustive information on his identity. However, there is no consistent interconnection between the strategy chosen by each of the seven outlets and its political stance, regardless of the outlet positioning itself as liberal or pro-Kremlin, entertainment, or analytical. Each of the seven outlets mentions the terrorist's connections with the IS and each provides a reference to the Arab ethnicity of the attacker (either through his first name, or full name or IS nickname), i.e. performs the strategy of othering the attacker by placing him in the outgroup (Tajfel and Turner 1979) of non-Christian, non-western people who present a potential threat. The section below analyses

⁴³ 'The identity of the man who attacked police officers in Paris is confirmed' (*Ustanovljena lichnost' napavshego na politseiskih v Parizhe*), by *svoboda.org*, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28444774.html> (20 .04.2017)

⁴⁴ 'Prosecution confirms identity of the Paris shooter. The IS claimed responsibility for the attack, the terrorists' statement names Abu Yusuf as the shooter' (*Prokuror: Lichnost' parizhskogo strelka ustanovljena. Otvetstvennost' za ataku vziala na sebia gruppirovka IGIL, v zayavlenii govoritisa, chto strelka zvali Abu Yusuf*), by *life.ru* https://life.ru/t/%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8/1000590/prokuror_lic_hnost_parizhskogho_strielka_ustanovliena

⁴⁵ 'British intelligence looks for connections between Paris and London attackers' (*Britanskaia razvedka ishchet sviaz' mezhdru ispolniteliami atak v Parizhe i Londone*), by *life.ru*, https://life.ru/t/%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8/1001253/britanskaia_razvedka_ishchiet_sviaz_miezhdru_ispolniteliami_atak_v_parizhie_i_londoni

⁴⁶ 'Prosecution confirmed identity of the Champs-Elysees attacker shooting police officers' (*Prokuratura ustanovila lichnost' strelyavshego v politsiiu na Eliseiskih poliah*) https://tvrain.ru/news/prokuratura_parizha_ustanovila_lichnost_streljavshego_v_politsiju_na_elisejskih_poljah-433016/; 'Media reports detainment of relatives of the Paris attacker who shot police officers' (*SMI uznali o zaderzhanii napadavshego na politseiskih v Parizhe*) <https://tvrain.ru/news/zaderzhala-432976/>

⁴⁷ 'Reuters : Paris police officers' attacker was known to special services' (*Reuters: napavshii na politseiskih v Parizhe prestupnik byl izvesten spetsluzhbam*) <https://meduza.io/news/2017/04/20/reuters-ubivshiy-dvoih-politseyskikh-v-parizhe-prestupnik-by-l-izvesten-spetssluzhbam>

⁴⁸ 'IS claimed responsibility for the attack against Paris police officers' (*IG vzialo na sebia otvetstvennost' za napadenie na politseiskih v Parizhe*) <https://meduza.io/news/2017/04/21/ig-vzialo-na-sebya-otvetstvennost-za-napadenie-na-politseyskikh-v-parizhe>

whether similar strategies of othering are applied by these seven outlets when writing about the victim of the attack, a gay French policeman.

2.4.3. Portraying same-sex couples in the context of ‘war on terror’ discourse: legitimization of non-heteronormative masculinities

Out of the ten monitored media outlets seven (*life.ru*, *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, *Dozhd'*, *meduza.io*, *svoboda.org*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*) included references to the victim of the terrorist attack Xavier Jugelé (his name, personal details and/or photo) into their coverage of the case. Of these seven, all indicated the French policeman's sexual identity. Four outlets - *meduza.io*, *Dozhd'*, *svoboda.org* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia* – disclosed the sexual identity of the policeman during coverage of his funeral on 25-26 April: at the funeral, a eulogy was delivered by Xavier's same-sex partner Etienne Cardiles, and that speech became the focus of the media coverage. Five outlets - *Svoboda.org*, *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, *life.ru*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty* – published articles and news bites informing of the posthumous same-sex marriage between Cardiles and Jugelé that took place on 30 May 2017. Thus, the media texts tackling the issue of Xavier Jugelé's homosexuality can be divided into two thematic groups (devoted to the funeral ceremony and the ceremony of posthumous marriage), and the sections below analyse the discursive strategies of communicating NHM that were used by the seven media outlets. The ceremony of the funeral of Xavier Jugelé took place on 25 April 2017 and the first two outlets including it into their daily media coverage were *Dozhd'* and *svoboda.org*.

The publication by *Dozhd'* was entitled "You will not get my hate": A strong and moving speech of the boyfriend of the policeman shot in Paris' ("*Vy ne poluchite moei nenavisti*": *sil'naia i trogatel'naia rech' boifrenda politseiskogo, zastrelennogo v Parizhe*).⁴⁹ It contained an embedded video of Etienne Cardiles' unabridged speech streamed by the French news channel *Public Senat*. The video is in French with Russian subtitles, runs for two minutes 49 seconds and is placed at the top of the page (see image 2.4.5).

Image 2.4.5. A screengrab of the *Dozhd'* publication on Xavier Jugelé's funeral

Source: https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/videooftheday/rech_boifriend-433288/ (26.04.2017)

The screenshot shows the website of the Russian news outlet 'Dozhd' (ДОЗДЬ). The main article is titled 'Ксавье, в четверг утром я как всегда ушел на работу, а ты еще спал.' (Xavier, on Thursday morning I went to work as usual, and you were still sleeping). The article features a video player with a French flag and a man speaking. Below the video, there is a Russian translation of the speech by Etienne Cardiles. The website header includes navigation links for 'НОВОСТИ', 'ПРОГРАММЫ', 'РЕПОРТАЖИ', 'LITE', 'КИНО', 'TED', 'BBC', 'ЕЩЕ'. There are also smaller images and text on the right side of the page, including a photo of a hand holding a small object and a photo of two men.

⁴⁹ Source : https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/videooftheday/rech_boifriend-433288/

An introductory paragraph summarising the details of Xavier Jugelé’s death (including the fact that Karim Cheurfi killed him with a Kalashnikov gun) was placed under the video, and the paragraph finishes with the following sentence “During the funeral ceremony his partner Etienne Cardiles delivered an incredibly moving speech”. The rest of the publication contains a full transcript of Etienne’s speech translated into Russian.

The first of the two publications by *svoboda.org* which tackled the funeral of Xavier Jugelé appeared on 25 April and was entitled ‘Macron and Le Pen attended the funeral of the policeman murdered in Central Paris’ (*Makron i le Pen prishli na pokhorony politseiskogo, ubitogo v tsentre Parizha*).⁵⁰ It has no reference to Etienne Cardiles’s speech, and the leading image for the article uses the photo of presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron (image 2.4.6). On the following day, on 26 April, in the daily section ‘All you need to know on the early morning of...’ (*Vse, chto nuzhno znat’ rano utrom ...*) the outlet publishes a news bite about the policeman’s funeral with a hyperlink to a video of Etienne Cardiles’ speech published in the *Twitter* account of *Channel 4 News*.⁵¹ The video runs for two minutes and 42 seconds and is in French with English subtitles. In the news bite, *svoboda.org* refers to Cardiles as the husband (*muzh*) of the murdered policeman. This publication also contains references to the politicians who were present at the funeral ceremony – then French president François Hollande, Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen – and finishes with a link to the publication about hacker attacks on Macron’s headquarters for the presidential elections campaign.

Image 2.4.6. A screengrab of the *svoboda.org* publication on Xavier Jugelé’s funeral.

Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28451048.html> (25 April)



Nastoiashchee Vremia publishes two articles mentioning Xavier Jugelé’s funeral on the same day of 26 April. The morning one, under the section ‘All you need to know on the early morning of...’⁵² duplicates the reference to the funeral made in a similar publication by *svoboda.org*. The second publication entitled ‘Partner of a policeman shot in Paris: I do have ‘no hate for his murderers’ (*Partnior zastrelennogo v Parizhe politseiskogo: vo mne “net nenavisti” k ego ubiitsam*) contains an embedded abridged video of the speech running for

⁵⁰ Source : <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28451048.html>

⁵¹ Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28452200.html>

⁵² Source : <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28452192.html>

45 seconds. The video is in French with Russian subtitles and it is not accompanied by a transcript but by an explanatory paragraph finishing with the sentence “The funeral of Xavier was attended by President Hollande, and Jugelé’s partner delivered a speech full of love” (*Na pokhorony Ksav’ie priekhal prezident Olland, a partnior Zhuzhele proznios polnuiu liubvi rech*).⁵³

On 26 April, *meduza.io* publishes an embedded abridged video of Etienne Cardiles’s speech in French with Russian subtitles running for one minute 29 seconds under the heading “I have no hate, hate is not like you”. The speech of the husband of the policeman shot by an Islamist in Paris’ (“*Vo mne net nenavisti, nenavist’ ne pokhozha na tebia*”. *Rech’ muzha politseiskogo, zastrelennogo islamistom v Parizhe*)⁵⁴. The publication contains a script of the eulogy, followed by a correction and apology on the part of the outlet for erroneously referring to Etienne Cardiles as ‘boyfriend’ and ‘partner’ whereas the two men lived as husbands. By making this correction the outlet made a mistake: Xavier and Etienne did live together but were not actually married (the posthumous marriage only took place on 30 May 2017). However, it is not uncommon for same-sex cohabitating partners to refer to each other as husbands or wives, and perhaps this affected the interpretation of the outlet which failed to differentiate between legally bound same-sex marriage and cohabitation or partnership).

Of the four outlets outlined above, all included the speech of Xavier Jugelé’s partner, either full or abridged, and the references to Etienne Cardiles chosen by each outlet leave the audience no doubt about the nature of the relationship between the two men. All of them also included references to the identity of the terrorist or his connections to the IS into their publications about Xavier Jugelé’s funeral. The *Dozhd’* publication⁵⁵ mentions the name of the terrorist and the type of the gun he used (Kalashnikov); *svoboda.org* quotes the name of the terrorist, his ethnicity and nationality (French citizen of Arab origin); *meduza.io* places the reference to the Islamist terrorist in the headline; the *Nastoiashchee Vremia* provides details of the attack under the video and explains that the IS claimed they were responsible for the attack. The inclusion into the media case coverage of a negative portrayal of the anti-Western pro-terrorist Islamist Arab serves as a convenient and helpful background for challenging the state-imposed discourse of heteronormative sexuality and ‘traditional values’. Othering the Arab terrorist and juxtaposing his by default negative image to the image of the policeman makes the latter into a positive portrayal, which also allows the observed outlet to include into their coverage a positive uncensored mediation of a same-sex couple and their relationship.

The posthumous marriage between Xavier Jugelé and his partner Etienne Cardiles took place on 30 May 2017 and made news immediately. Five of the monitored media outlets - *svoboda.org*, *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, *life.ru*, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty* – wrote about this event in their publications and news bites. *AiF*, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* and *life.ru* did so on 31 May in detailed publications on the topic, whereas *svoboda.org* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia* mentioned it in a news bite included into their respective daily publications ‘All you need to know on the early morning of 1 June’.

⁵³ Source : <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28452931.html>

⁵⁴ Source : <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/04/26/vo-mne-net-nenavisti-nenavist-ne-pohozha-na-tebya>

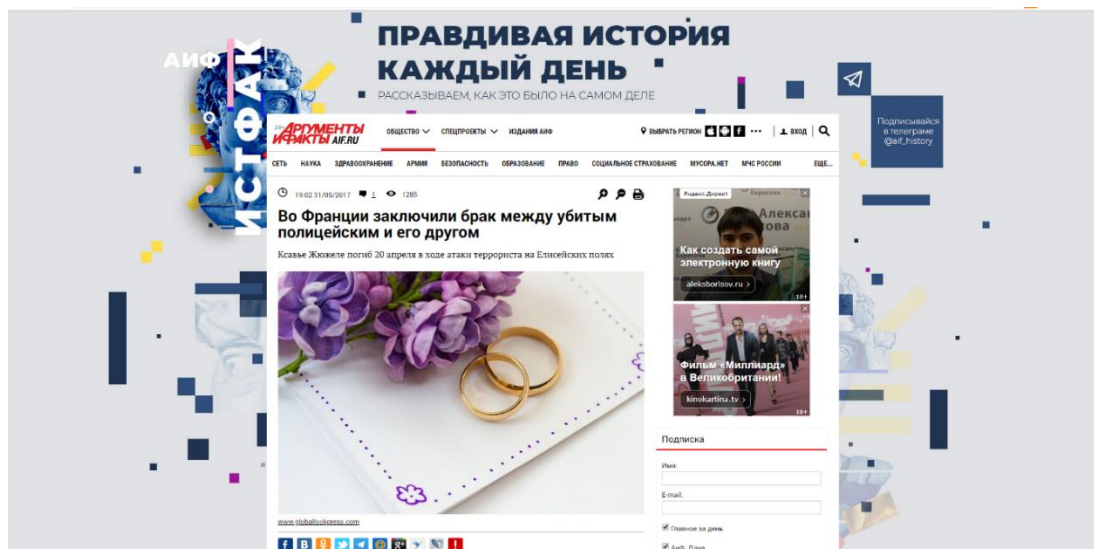
⁵⁵ “You will not have my hatred”: strong and touching speech of the boyfriend of the policeman shot in Paris’ (“*Vy ne poluchite moey nenavisti*”: *sil’naya i trogatel’naya rech’ boifrenda politseyskogo, zastrelennogo v Parizhe*) https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/videooftoday/rech_boyfriend-433288/ (25.04.2017)

The 31 May publication by *AiF* is entitled ‘A marriage is registered in France between a murdered policeman and his friend’ (*Vo Frantsii zakliuchili brak mezhdub ubitym politseiskim i ego drugom*). It starts with a short explanatory subheading stating that Xavier Jugelé died on 20 April during the Champs-Élysées terrorist attack. The leading photo for the article features a traditional wedding image comprising flowers, a wedding invitation card and two wedding rings, one of which could be female as it looks a bit smaller than the other (see image 2.4.7).

Image 2.4.7. A screengrab of the *AiF* publication on the posthumous marriage between Jugelé and Cardiles

Source:

<http://www.aif.ru/society/vo-frantsii-zaklyuchili-brak-mezhdub-ubitym-policeyskim-i-ego-vozlyublennym> (31.05.2017)



The body of the article opens with the news of the posthumous marriage between Xavier and his beloved (*vozlyublennyi*), quoting the French media outlet *Parisien* as a source of information. The paragraph after that summarises the details of the attack and contains a reference to Karim Cheurfi and his connections with the IS. This information is followed immediately by a paragraph about Jugelé’s involvement with a gay-rights activist group for French police forces and an explanation that death during a terrorist attack is one of the grounds for requesting permission for a posthumous marriage, which in the case of Xavier and his beloved was granted by the President of France. The closing paragraph of the article highlights that the marriage ceremony was attended by prominent French politicians - the former president of France, the mayor of Paris, and the minister of internal affairs.

On the same day of 31 May, the portal *life.ru* published an article entitled ‘The boyfriend of the policeman murdered in Paris marries him posthumously’ (*Boifrend ubitogo v Parizhe politseiskogo sochetalsia s nim posmertnym brakom*). The leading image for the article is a portrait of Xavier in his police uniform (see image 2.4.8) and it also includes an image featuring Etienne giving his speech at Xavier’s funeral. The opening line informs that the policeman’s partner signed the necessary paperwork on the evening of 30 May, and then, quoting French media, the article explains that the posthumous marriage was made possible thanks to the help of the mayor of Paris and the ex-president of France.

Image 2.4.8. A screengrab of the *life.ru* publication on the posthumous marriage of Jugelé and Cardiles

Source: <https://bit.ly/2D21UKJ> (31.05.2017)

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Life.ru website with various news categories like #НОВОСТИ, #МИР, #ПРОИСШЕСТВИЯ, etc. The main article title is 'Бойфренд убитого в Париже полицейского сочетался с ним посмертным браком'. Below the title, there is a sub-header 'Герой и верная жена. Подруга рассказала о погребении в Орлеане российской паре'. A large photo of a police officer in uniform is featured on the right side of the article. The article's URL is <https://life.ru/1012969>.

The publication highlights that prior to the policeman's death the two men had registered a so-called PACS – a civil solidarity pact (*pact civil de solidarité*), the French equivalent of same-sex civil partnership, which gives cohabitating partners limited legal rights. The article underlines that in France permission for a posthumous marriage is granted personally by the president of the country and only in exceptional circumstances, such as long-term cohabitation or special circumstances of death such as a terrorist attack. The closing paragraph of the attack contains a mention of the 20 April attack with a note that the IS took responsibility for the incident.

Komsomol'skaya Pravda covered the news of the two men's posthumous marriage on 1 June with a publication entitled 'The cohabitee of the policeman murdered by terrorists in Paris marries him posthumously' (*Sozhitel' ubitogo terroristami politseiskogo iz Parizha vstupil s nim v posmertnyi brak*). The subheading of the article informs that the former president of France François Hollande attended the ceremony, and the leading image for the publication features Hollande standing next to Xavier's portrait giving a speech at his funeral, the bottom caption of the image saying that Xavier Jugelé was posthumously awarded a Legion of Honour (see image 2.4.9).

The body of the article starts with a paragraph that French authorities joined by the bond of marriage Etienne Cardiles, who is employed at the French Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the murdered police officer Xavier Jugelé. The paragraph confirms that French politicians were involved in the marriage ceremony – former president of France and mayor of Paris as attendees and the newly elected president of France Emmanuel Macron who during his presidential inauguration granted permission for the posthumous marriage of Xavier Jugelé. The article then informs readers that Jugelé was murdered by Islamists during the Champs-Élysées terrorist attack and, quoting the French newspaper *Le Parisien*, explains that the only thing Etienne Cardiles gains from this marriage is his spouse's surname. The text also includes a photo featuring Xavier's partner attending his funeral with a caption 'Etienne Cardiles after his boyfriend's death', and a closing remark informing readers that posthumous marriages

were introduced in France in 1803 and the first French gay marriage took place exactly four years before the described one – on 30 May 2013.

Image 2.4.9. A screengrab of the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* publication on the posthumous marriage of Jugelé and Cardiles

Source: <https://www.kp.ru/online/news/2763543/> (1.06.2017)

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Russian newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*. The main headline reads: "Сожитель убитого террористами полицейского из Парижа вступил с ним в посмертный брак" (Partner of a policeman killed by terrorists in Paris entered into a posthumous marriage with him). The article text states: "На церемонии бракосочетания присутствовали экс-президент Франции и мэр Парижа" (At the wedding ceremony, the former president of France and the mayor of Paris were present). Below the headline is a photograph of a man in a suit, identified as the partner of the deceased policeman. To the right of the article is a large advertisement for "OUR UNIQUE MODULAR GDL" with the text "SET FOR SUCCESS" and "APPLY NOW". Further right is another advertisement for "СПЕЦОПЕРАЦИЯ КРЫМ-2014" (Special Operation Crimea-2014) featuring a soldier and a book cover.

The 1 June news bites by *Nastoiashchee Vremia* and *svoboda.org* in the outlets' respective publications 'All you need to know on the early morning of 1 June' duplicate each other. Hyperlinked to the original publication by the *BBC Russian Service*, the related paragraphs inform readers that the partner of the French policeman killed in the Champs-Élysées terrorist attack registered a posthumous marriage with him, the ceremony of which was attended by the former French president and the mayor of Paris. The news bite also mentions that in France posthumous marriages are allowed if it can be proved that the partners demonstrated an intention to marry while they were alive.

The observations listed above demonstrate that similarly to the coverage of Xavier Jugelé's funeral, the strategies of covering the posthumous marriage between the policeman and his partner depend on the individual outlet's agenda rather than on the censoring legislation, the state-imposed heteronormative discourse, or the outlet's political stance. Thus, the oppositional and liberal *svoboda.org* and *Nastoiashchee Vremia* which frequently include LGBTQ-related topics into their coverage, only mention the event, including it as a small news bite into the daily digest. Within their agenda, a ceremony of same-sex marriage is not seen as sensational or extraordinary but is equalled to other domestic and global news, and therefore does not require a separate publication.

On the contrary, the outlets which normally pay little or no attention to LGBTQ issues – *AiF* and *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* – devoted detailed publications to the ceremony of same-sex marriage. The entertainment portal *life.ru* which tends to tackle LGBTQ-related themes in a sensationalist or critical manner also devoted a detailed article to the ceremony, providing extra information on the phenomenon and conditions of posthumous marriage. For these three outlets, it is the juxtaposition of two discourses – power and 'othering' of the Arab Islamist terrorist – that makes a positive portrayal of a same-sex couple and a same-sex marriage possible. Portraying Xavier Jugelé and Etienne Cardilles against the background

references to the terrorist attack creates a positive image of the victim and his bereaved partner, whereas the deep involvement of high-rank politicians who permit the marriage due to exceptional circumstances legitimises the same-sex relationship. This creates a complex mediation of same-sex marriage: on the one hand, the related publications contain such references to the traditional family concepts as 'husband', 'bonds of marriage', an image of wedding rings; on the other hand, these publications emphasize that this kind of marriage is not typical, nor traditional, - although it is ambiguous from the text whether it is its posthumous character or whether it is the same-sex relationship that makes the marriage 'non-traditional'.

The analysis of the media case of the murder of gay French policeman Xavier Jugelé during the terrorist attack on the Champs-Élysées on 20 April 2017 demonstrates how the use of intersectional othering in the context of transnational media events allows for positive portrayals of non-heteronormative sexuality and same-sex marriage within the state-sustained discourse on heteronormativity. When a homosexual individual is mediated as a representative of the power of a European state and as a victim who dies at the hands of a subject othered on the grounds of ethnicity and religion, the gay man by default gains a positive portrayal despite his non-heteronormative sexual identity. Opposed to the Islamist terrorist with a criminal record, connections to the IS, and questionable moral character, the gay police officer killed in the line of duty is mediated as a respected hero by all the news outlets engaged in the coverage of the case. The status of a hero shifts the discursive weight from the policeman's homosexual identity, which is mediated as a personal detail rather than the discourse-constructing feature. The heroic status of the media case subject pushes the discourse even further, leading to mediations of a 'non-traditional' marriage through 'traditional' language and imagery.

The Xavier Jugelé media case also supports the findings presented in the analysis of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ purge media case. The case of the Champs-Élysées attack and the murder of the gay policeman proves that Russian national media is also transnational media, included in the global media agenda and global media discourses on the 'war on terror' and marriage equality. The findings of the case demonstrate that the outlet's take on media events related to those discourses is defined not by the political stance of the outlet and its attitude to the Kremlin policies, but rather to the outlet's agenda.

The fact that the coverage of this media event extended beyond the actual attack to the policeman's funeral and included his partner's speech and their posthumous marriage proves that there is no strategy of deliberately avoiding LGBTQ-related topics among the monitored media outlets; on the contrary, when such topics are part of a transnational media event they also become of the Russian media discourse, and the mediation of these topics is not always done through the prism of the 'traditional value' discourse where the idea of a same-sex married couple is inconceivable. The findings made while investigating the media case of the murder of Xavier Jugelé allow me to deepen the analysis Russian news media discourses on the intersection of sexuality, religion and ethnicity in the context of domestic and transnational events linked to the discourses on 'war on terror'.

2.5 Conclusion

Apart from the evidence of a consistent, prolific and constantly evolving discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities in contemporary Russian media, the analysis of the media cases presented in this chapter revealed the mechanisms driving those discourses and outlined a set of communicative strategies applied by news media outlets when covering themes related to NHM and LGBTQ.

As I demonstrated through a critical discourse analysis of media data obtained through minute and real-time recording of the development of the two media events, Russian news media outlets are actively engaged in the coverage of NHM-related topics. As a response to the restrictive 'traditional sexuality' legislation which was imposed on the media by the Russian political elites to censor portrayals of non-heteronormative sexuality, Russian media outlets create a consistent discourse on NHM, the nature and frequency of which does not reflect the top-down discourses of censorship but are defined by the outlets' agenda. The proved existence of bottom-up discourses on marginalised topics of non-heteronormativity which are initiated, developed and directed by media themselves rather than ruled by the Kremlin is a significant contribution to the current scholarship on Russian media, which tends to focus primarily on the top-down discourses of freedom of press infringement and state-imposed censorship. With Russian media being fully included in western media trends (and, as I demonstrate in Chapter 3 of the thesis, with the growing influence of social media,⁵⁶ media prosumerism, amateur journalism and further digitalisation of the media industry), the findings of this chapter problematise the existing? approach to the Russian media sphere as a space fully dependent on the political agendas of the elites rather than the mechanisms and the operational needs of the media industry.

Another important finding made in this chapter of the thesis concerns the intersection of the categories of sexuality, religion and ethnicity in the context of media coverage on non-heteronormative masculinities. When mediated in the context of a religious 'other' (domestic Russian or global Islam) and in the framework of the 'war on terror' (the global terrorist threat or the ambiguous history of the Chechen war and inner terrorist threats), the 'otherness' of the non-heteronormative masculine subject is discursively renegotiated. Mediated through the discursive prism of victimhood, the non-heteronormative masculine subjects are portrayed from the perspectives of compassion and empathy, which in its turn does not exclude but rather invites positive and neutral portrayals. This intersection of vectors of othering also leads to the exclusion of the Chechen men from discourses on Islam: throughout the observed media coverage, the victims of the anti-gay purge in Chechnya tend to be named as and referred to as representatives of the LGBTQ community (gays, homosexuals, men of non-traditional sexual orientation) and very rarely or never as Muslims. Thus, the western concept of sexuality is used to construct the RF nation as a European cultural space, while the local contexts decolonise that mainstream discourse and create conflicting agendas.

The analysis of communicative strategies used for the creation of the portrayals of non-heteronormative men across the investigated media outlets revealed another important finding which complicates existing perceptions of the Russian media landscape. The fact that the critical discourse analysis of both the media cases revealed no consistency between the

⁵⁶ See, for example, an analysis of an online technology-enhanced type of a political figure at the example of Ramzan Kadyrov's use of social media for promotion of his autocratic populist regime (Rodina and Dligach 2019).

outlet's stance on the Kremlin's policies and the choice of communicative strategies for mediating non-heteronormative masculinities demonstrates the urge for a new perspective on classifying Russian news media outlets. The outlet's role in initiating or shaping a media discourse rather than the outlet's place on the spectrum of anti-Kremlin opposition and pro-Kremlin supports seems a more effective and productive foundation for such a classification. In this respect, contemporary Russian media outlets can be classified into three groups:

- Discourse Triggers (discourse setters): the outlets which initiate the discourse and are the first to introduce LGBTQ-friendly language into their content (generally but perhaps not exclusively the outlets which position themselves as liberal and which have a specific audience sharing their political stance, e.g. *meduza.io*, *Novaya Gazeta*);
- Discourse Developers: the popular mainstream outlets which join the initiated discourses at a later stage and facilitate their spreading and evolution by disseminating information to a wider audience (the outlets which do not position themselves as liberal and the audience of which is, therefore, more diverse and numerous, e.g. *Kommersant*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*);
- Discourse Spinners or Followers: the tabloid-like outlets which tend to consistently tackle LGBTQ-related topics in a sensational manner, and which only follow up discourses on LGBTQ rights once they enter the coverage by the popular mainstream outlets (e.g. *life.ru*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*).

Such an approach to classification of Russian media outlets based on their role and position in shaping up and developing a certain discourse reflects the fact that Russian media operate not only along the top-down discursive dimension of complying with restrictive policies imposed by the Kremlin, but they also work in the bottom-up direction of initiating and promoting discourses which can challenge or circumvent the restrictions imposed from above.

In the next chapter of the thesis, through a critical discourse analysis of communication of non-heteronormative masculinities in the context of the global anti-harassment movement, I test and verify the findings outlined above and further explore the mechanisms of initiating and developing discourses on NHM applied by Russian online news and entertainment media.

Chapter 3

Communication of non-heteronormative masculinities in the context of the global anti-harassment movement

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I demonstrated that Russian media are actively engaged in the global media discourses, including discourses on LGBTQ issues and NHM. With the analysis of the media case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign in the previous chapter, I proved that LGBTQ-related topics are consistently tackled and covered by the selected Russian media outlets in accordance with the global and domestic media trends, regardless of the outlet's political stance and attitude to the Kremlin. Through the analysis of the media case of the murder of French gay police officer Xavier Jugelé I showed that Russian media are fully included into the transnational media discourses and actively respond to global news events, republishing and sharing content from western news and social media. The analysis of the portrayals of non-heteronormative masculinities in the context of these two media cases demonstrated how the categories of (homo)sexuality, ethnicity and religious beliefs intersect when NHM are mediated within the global media discourses on islamophobia and 'war on terror'. It also revealed that, in the same way as contemporary Russian culture is included into a competitive global environment where trends are defined by consumer choices and cultural producers' influences (Hudspith and Strukov 2018), Russian news media are working as an integral part of transnational media discourses, responding not only to domestic media trends and preferences of Russian media consumers, but also to media trends coming from the West.⁵⁷ In the following chapter, I take this argument further and enquire whether, responding to the emerging media discourses on the #MeToo movement, Russian media initiate, construct and sustain discourses on sexual harassment in the workplace, including harassment against men committed by men.

By approaching NHM in the context of the global hashtag campaign against sexual harassment, I introduce into this study another vector of analysis of Russian media's inclusion into western developments, i.e. the impact of the digital transformations and of the growing influence of participatory media on the work of the media industry in general. Nowadays, with citizen journalists who generate amateur media-content on social media being considered a reliable and trustworthy source of information (Bewabi and Bossio 2014) and with two thirds of media consumers accessing news via algorithm-driven distribution platforms such as social media and news aggregators (Martens et al. 2018), media work is developing towards a closer interaction with media audiences (Malmelin and Villi 2017) and towards higher reliance on social media as a source of news stories.

One of the sources of news stories for media coverage is debates, confrontations and heated discussions taking place on Twitter, Facebook or any other social networking platform.⁵⁸ Another is confessional social media posts by celebrities and common social media

⁵⁷ In this research I approach Russian federal news media and television as fully included in the western media agendas and landscapes rather than 'lagging behind', and I with the analysis of media discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities I demonstrate how western and domestic trends intersect in complex and complicate media discourses.

⁵⁸ See, for example, 'China outraged after Brazil minister suggests Covid-19 is part of 'plan for world domination'. Beijing demands explanation after 'highly racist' tweet by Abraham Weintraub suggests it is part of a geopolitical plan', by *The Guardian*, available from

users. Confessions belong to discourses of self-writing (Foucault 1983: 3-23) and can come in the format of verbally expressed texts, selfies or vlogs (Hall 2016), the content of which can range from an unhappy employee's complaint (Krishnaa et al. 2015: 404-410) to a coming-out narrative. It is a powerful strategy of 'me-centred communication' that, in the context of contemporary DIY media cultures, allows individuals not only to express their intimate thoughts or experiences but also to socialise with others (Talvitie-Lamberg 2014). For that reason, social media confessions become an empowering tool of online activist campaigns conducted by discriminated social groups. Of the online campaign organised by women's rights activist groups, the *#MeToo* movement has arguably been the most influential one over the recent years.

In the current chapter, I analyse how media portrayals of non-heteronormative men are constructed within the framework of hashtag feminist campaigns and within the public discourses on sexual harassment. I demonstrate how the co-existence of two major media discourses (discourses on LGBTQ rights and feminism) prompts the emergence of complex portrayals of NHM. I demonstrate how the intersection of the discursive categories of non-heteronormative sexuality and sexual harassment impacts the media portrayals of NHM. By doing so I address the issue that has so far been overlooked in the scholarship on Russian media and LGBTQ issues. As part of the analysis presented further in the chapter, I define the discursive strategies applied by the selected Russian media outlets for communication of NHM in the context of sexual harassment debates. I also analyse how new emerging media discourses on sexual harassment in Russia and the global *#MeToo* movement enable the appearance of positive media portrayals of non-heteronormative male victims of homosexual harassment.

Building on the findings presented in Chapter Two, I further investigate the verbal strategies of naming and reference regarding the non-heterosexual orientation of mediated masculine subjects. Having identified in the previous chapter what discursive strategies of nomination and reference are employed by the selected media outlets when introducing the topic of NHM, I look at how these strategies evolve when the media outlets cover confessional personal narratives of male victims of sexual harassment. I start with outlining the Russian news media outlets' coverage of and reporting on the development of the *#MeToo* campaign. After that, I evaluate to what extent the Russian media response to *#MeToo* included narratives of men as victims of sexual harassment. I finish the chapter with a Critical Discourse Analysis of the mediated confessional narratives of male victims of same-sex sexual harassment.

With the previous chapter focusing on the mediation of various forms of physical violence against non-heteronormative men (unlawful detainment, torture, beatings, abductions and killings), the current chapter focuses on the specific variation of physical and psychological violence expressed through 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that makes the person 'feel intimidated, degraded, humiliated or offended'.⁵⁹ Sexual harassment involves power relations, where the perpetrator is an individual in a position of power and the victim is an individual who is in some way subjected to or dependant on that power. The analysis of the mediation of sexual harassment where both the perpetrator and the victim are men draws

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/07/china-outraged-after-brazil-minister-suggests-covid-19-is-part-of-plan-for-world-domination>, accessed 20/04/2020

⁵⁹ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace>, accessed 20/04/2020

on the scholarship on transnational digital (hashtag) feminism. This analysis demonstrates how the intersection of categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality with those of gender and sex makes marginalised sexual identities part of the new developing discourses.

The analysis is based on the media data collected in March – April 2018 during a two-month day-by-day monitoring of the selected outlets. The selection included the ten media outlets which had been monitored in 2017: daily newspapers *Novaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*; tabloids *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty*; online news and entertainment portals *meduza.io* and *life.ru*; an internet TV channel *Dozhd'* and an internet radio station *svoboda.org*. The monitoring of the same outlets in two consecutive years aimed at verifying the findings obtained through the analysis of the 2017 media cases. It also allowed comparing the data and findings obtained in 2017 and 2018 and defining whether discourses on NHM had evolved, and if they had, to what extent and in what way. In addition to the ten outlets used in the 2017 media case analysis, in the March – April 2018 monitoring I also included the LGBTQ-catered news and entertainment portal *parniplus.com*. The decision to add the outlet produced by LGBTQ people for LGBTQ audiences was based on the fact that throughout 2017 and early 2018 I observed a growing diversity of media content produced by *parniplus.com*. Having originally focused on the topics related to health and lifestyles of HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM), by 2018 this outlet had started to publish materials catering for all identities within the LGBTQ spectrum, regardless of their HIV status. *Parniplus.com* had also diversified its content by consistently publishing articles on LGBTQ culture and lifestyles, essays on socio-political aspects of LGBTQ rights, as well as editorials and news reports covering LGBTQ-related events taking place in and outside of Russia.

The structure and process of media monitoring in March-April 2018 was similar to the monitoring completed in the previous year. 1 March 2018 was chosen as the starting point of the process – roughly a year after the start of the process in 2017. Throughout March 2018, the comparative across media sampling included the same media outlets that were used in 27.03.2017-27.04.2017 (with the exclusion of the TV channel *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, whose news coverage had proved to be similar to that of the internet radio *svoboda.org*, the two outlets having the same producers and owners): newspapers *Novaya Gazeta*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Kommersant*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*; the TV channel *Dozhd'*; the Internet radio *svoboda.org*; the news and entertainment portals *meduza.io* and *life.ru*. The first stage of sampling across the full list of outlets that took place in March 2018 also included an internet resource created by LGBTQ communities for LGBTQ audiences (*parniplus.com*) and one of the largest social media communities for Russian-speaking LGBTQ people (the Facebook group 'LGBT Discussion Board'). For the second stage of media sampling in 2018 I selected four individual outlets: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *meduza.io* and *parniplus.com*, which I monitored for another month from 1 April to 30 April 2018.

The monitoring consisted in reading the homepages and the news sections of the news media websites for several hours daily throughout the month. Other sections of the outlets' websites were also checked in case there were hyperlinks from the home page and news sections to LGBTQ-related materials published in those sections (e.g. 'Stories' in *meduzai.io* or 'dossiers'). The media content was captured in the form of screengrabs and was used for the subsequent close reading and discourse analysis. By the end of the first stage of media data sampling, the coverage of the sexual harassment accusations against State Duma deputy Leonid Slutsky (further referred to as 'Slutsky-gate') had grown into the most significant sexuality-related media case of the month. Firstly, the case received a high volume

of prolific and consistent media coverage: between 1 and 31 March 2018 I retrieved a total of 173 publications on the case across the selected outlets. Secondly, the media case evolved into a boycott against Slutsky and the State Duma on the part of a number of media outlets. That example of media professionals self-organising around sexual harassment issues marked the 'Slutsky-gate' case as pertinent to my enquiry into contemporary Russian discourses on sex, gender and sexuality. Thirdly and most importantly, the 'Slutsky-gate' media case led to the inclusion of narratives of male victims of homosexual harassment, an unprecedented media event.

Another factor which added to the importance of the 'Slutsky-gate' media case was the fact that the scandal was developing throughout the monitored month against the background of the final stages of the 2018 presidential campaign. The case started with the accusations of sexual harassment filed against Slutsky by several Russian female journalists. Under the pressure from the media and public, the State Duma Ethics Committee was called for an investigation into the accusations. When the Committee took the side of the State Duma member rather than the side of the victims and refused to take disciplinary measures Slutsky, over 30 media outlets of different types and political stance declared a boycott of Slutsky in particular and the State Duma in general, refusing to provide news coverage on any events related to them.

The fact that such an unprecedented media backlash against the State Duma was caused by events related to gender-based violence makes the 'Slutsky-gate' media case highly important for the analysis of the current media discourse on sex, gender and sexuality in Russia. The media boycott of the State Duma and the unprecedented level of media coverage on the issues of sexual harassment led to the mediation of coming-out stories of male victims of same-sex harassment. The issue of homosexual harassment performed by people in power had never been raised in Russian media before Slutsky-gate, which makes this case crucial for the current research into communication of NHM.

Through the analysis of the homosexual harassment media case I address several research questions and achieve several research objectives posed in the introduction of the thesis. I identify the ways in which the contemporary Russian media discourse modifies socio-political discourses on sex, gender, and sexualities. I also investigate whether different types of media (e.g. newspapers, internet news and entertainment portals, internet TV channels and radio stations) use similar or different discursive strategies of communicating LGBTQ identities. By addressing these research questions in the current chapter, I evaluate and classify the discursive strategies of communication of NHM applied in different types of media outlets. I also establish the role of media discourse on alternative sexualities within the overall contemporary Russian discourse on sex and sexuality.

With the Critical Discourse Analysis of the media data related to the case of 'Slutsky-gate' and same-sex male harassment, I deepen and expand my investigation into discursive strategies of communicating NHM by moving from the focus on naming and reference strategies which were explored in Chapter Two to the in-depth analysis of narratives of male victims of same-sex harassment (e.g. the use of direct or reported speech, accompanied by a comment from the outlet or presented as an uncommented quote); representation of their action (behavioural, mental, verbal); the strategies of evidencing or omission used when referring to their sexuality and experience of harassment; as well as the presence or deletion of agency with regard to homosexual harassment narratives (Hansen and Machin 2019: 132-147). Contextualising this analysis within the global anti-harassment campaign which from its start was framed as coming-out narratives of sexual harassment victims (both female and

male, heterosexual and non-heterosexual) allows me to identify to what extent the strategies applied by media outlets with regard to same-sex male harassment are related specifically to communication of non-heteronormativity of the perpetrator and the victim and to what extent they are related to the overall, general strategies applied by the outlets when representing sexual harassment victims, regardless of their gender and sexuality, in line or in contrast with the media trends around the global hashtag feminist campaign.

3.2 Hashtag activism and global discourses on sex, gender, and sexuality

From October 2017 and throughout the year of 2018, the theme of sexual harassment, in particular sexual harassment in the workplace, dominated global media discourses. This media trend reflected the viral popularity of two anti-harassment hashtag movements - *#MeToo* and *#TimesUp*. The *#MeToo* movement was launched in October 2017 when actress Alysa Milano started the hashtag campaign aimed at drawing attention to the accusations of sexual harassment, rape and assault committed by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein against her and other Hollywood actresses (Lukose 2018: 35). Milano encouraged other victims of sexual harassment and abuse to share their experiences on social media using the hashtag '*metoo*'. This campaign rapidly grew into a global phenomenon and was soon followed by the *#TimesUp* hashtag campaign in January 2018. The *#TimesUp* movement was started by Hollywood celebrities to call for action aiming to stop harassment of people engaged in entertainment industry. Although originally focused on the US and specifically on the entertainment industry, the *#MeToo* movement gained momentum around the globe, receiving unprecedented media coverage.

It was not the first time when women's rights supporters spoke out against the widespread problem of sexual abuse and harassment against women (Zarkov and Davis 2018),⁶⁰ but it was for the first time that institutions acted upon the sexual abuse and sexual harassment accusations, with perpetrators being named, shamed and in some cases fired (Gentile 2018). Media discussions of the *#MeToo* movement introduced into public discourses a debate on the differences between consent and consent under duress (Goldner 2018); a discussion of misogyny permeating western societies – a topic that was particularly significant in the context of Donald Trump's election to the US presidency (Pellegrini 2018, Rodino-Colocino 2018). The global coverage and success of the *#MeToo* campaign breathed new life into the feminist movement and women's rights activism (Clair et al. 2019). Unsurprisingly, this campaign also drew criticism: the supporters of the campaign were accused of opposing and alienating men and women to each other and of deepening the gaps between the two genders (Kunst et al. 2018). The inclusion of men into the *#MeToo* movement and the emergence of narratives of male victims of homosexual harassment in the context of western discourses on LGBTQ-rights and normalisation of LGBTQ people problematised the binary construction of gender in contemporary media discourses.

The controversy around the *#MeToo* movement is not a unique characteristic of this campaign but rather inherent to hashtag activism as a phenomenon. On the one hand, hashtag activism – a form of activism when social media users share a large number of posts

⁶⁰ The very hashtag *#metoo* was for the first time used in 2006 by Tarana Burke, a US-based gender equality and women's rights activist and a woman of colour; see, for example, *#MeToo* founder Tarana Burke: 'You have to use your privilege to serve other people', by *The Guardian*, 15 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/15/me-too-founder-tarana-burke-women-sexual-assault>, accessed 1/07/2019

under a common hashtag promoting a social or political agenda (Yang 2016) – offers obvious benefits for activists due to the opportunity to reach out to wide audiences, to make the social campaign viral, and to raise public awareness (on a global or domestic scale) of a certain social or political issue. Examples of successful notable hashtag campaigns include such causes as protection of ethnic minorities against police violence (*#BlackLivesMatter*, Yang 2016), transgender and Black female victims of police and non-police violence (*#SayHerName*, Brown et al. 2017), grassroots movements for indigenous sovereignty (*#IdleNoMore*, Moscato 2016), movements against institutional racism (*#RhodesMustFall*, Daniels 2016), campaigns against gender-based violence (*#WhyStayed*, Clark 2016). The success of these powerful campaigns has allowed digital optimists to speak about a new civil rights movement (Jackson 2016) in network societies (van Dijk 2006). However, this form of activism, due to the ambiguity of social media as an activist tool, has also drawn criticism and scepticism.

Critics of hashtag activism state that hashtag activist campaigns are often led by social elites enjoying various privileges and not by those whose agendas these campaigns aim to promote. They also express doubts whether it can lead to real socio-political change (Dewey 2014). Hashtag activism has also been branded by its opponents as a form of slacktivism – an online form of self-aggrandising, politically ineffective activism (Cabrera et al. 2017). The *#MeToo* movement has brought about similar debates, with the proponents of the campaign celebrating its potential in the battle against sexual harassment and with its opponents expressing discontent at the appropriation of the hashtag by privileged celebrities.

Despite the criticism, the *#MeToo* campaign managed to establish public discourses on sexual harassment as an intersection of sex and power (Gill and Orgad 2018). It has demonstrated how in contemporary mediated societies driven by social media not only politicians become celebrities but also celebrities become politicians (Larabee 2018), and it also contributed to decolonising feminism as a movement (Lukose 2018). The *#MeToo* campaign evolved into a movement which rejected imperialist and colonial perspectives and included women of non-western backgrounds into discourses around sexual harassment.

Moving beyond the borders of the West, the campaign spread to the societies that tend to be defined as non-Western (Hedge 2011, Browne et al. 2017). Since the start of the hashtag campaign there has appeared extensive scholarship and media debate on the influence of the *#MeToo* movement in various countries and regions of the world outside of the Global North and Global West paradigm: e.g. Sudan (Parchizadeh 2019), India (Yaqoob 2019), Brazil and Argentina (Lacombe 2019), Japan and South Korea (Larsen 2018, Hasunuma and Ki-young 2019). The Russian context and Russian responses to the anti-harassment hashtag campaign have also been drawn into the focus of, albeit scarce, scholarship. For example, some researchers focused on the media framing of sexual harassment against journalists as a conflict between the media and the government, and on the media boycott around the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case (e.g. Kasianenko 2019). Others approached the topic of harassment as a ‘cultural dialogue’, comparing discourses in Russia and the West, namely the USA and Europe (e.g. Vardanian and Zholudeva 2018). In terms of discourses on masculinity in the context of the *#MeToo* movement, the focus of the scholarship tends to be even more politicised: for example, researchers look at the mediation of presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin in the context of debates on toxic masculinity (Wiedlack 2020).

Although the *#MeToo* movement expanded from the issues of women’s right to the problem of objectification of men and same-sex harassment (e.g., among others, Hollywood actor Kevin Spacey was accused of a sexual harassment against a male minor at the start of

his career⁶¹), sexual harassment in the context of studies on NHM is still an under-researched topic, in particular regarding the Russian context. There have appeared studies of gender-based violence in Russia, including violence against non-heteronormative women (e.g. Muravyeva 2018), and on court cases related to anti-LGBTQ hate crimes in Russia (e.g. Kondakov 2017 and 2019). However, outside of political and legal discourses the problem of sexual harassment against or within the LGBTQ communities has not been in the focus of rigorous academic enquiry. In the current chapter, for the first time in the field of Russian media and LGBTQ studies, I explore the topic of same-sex harassment in contemporary media discourses. Departing from scholarship on legal and human rights perspectives of violence against LGBTQ individuals, in this study I focus on the portrayals of the male victims of homosexual harassment and the communicative strategies applied by media outlets when creating those portrayals.

3.3. Russian (digital) feminism and the ‘Slutsky-gate’: the local appropriation of global discourses on sexual harassment

Throughout the 2010s, in the context of hypermediated societies (Nelson 1965, Cotton and Oliver 1997), feminism has become not only a socio-political movement but also a transnational media phenomenon, and performative feminist protest groups such as *Pussy Riot* and *Femen* drew global media attention to Russia and Ukraine respectively as a locus of transgression and battle for gender equality (Betlemidze 2015; Weij et al. 2015). The phenomenon of *Pussy Riot* as a global meme, post-broadcast media (Strukov 2013) and a national media event (Hutchings and Tolz 2015: 194-220) demonstrated that feminism as a social movement had evolved into a mediated and mediating tool in a hypermediated society (Ratilainen et al. 2018). Working on the level of speech acts and everyday politics, contemporary Russian feminists are relying more and more on digital and social media for promoting their agenda (Perheentupa 2018), operating largely as cyberfeminism and hashtag feminism – ‘a form of feminist activism that appropriates Twitter’s metadata tags for organising posts and public-by-default nature to draw visibility to a particular cause or experience’ (Clark-Parsons 2019: 475-476).

One example of Russian hashtag feminist activism is the 2016 campaign *#IamNotafraidToTell* (*JaNeboiusSkazat’*) that was launched by the Ukrainian human rights and feminist activist Anastasiia Mel’nichenko and that quickly went viral on the Russophone Facebook and on the Russian social networking site VKontakte (Ratilainen et al. 2019: 3). The campaign was aimed against the patriarchal rape culture, sexual harassment and domestic violence, and it consisted in women sharing their experiences of being objectified, harassed, abused and raped. The campaign caused a large-scale backlash: social media users criticised the campaign participants for sharing their intimate stories with a wide public audience. Regardless of the criticism *#IamNotafraidToTell* contributed to raising public awareness of the problems of sexual harassment and abuse, and it prompted in social and mainstream media productive discussions on domestic violence and consent (Ratilainen et al. 2019). There was a rise in the number of victims of harassment and abuse turning to psychologists for help, which led Russia’s Commissioner for Human Rights Tatiana Moskalkova to suggest that a helpline for victims of abuse be created for the authorities to assess the scale of the

⁶¹ See, for example: Actor Anthony Rapp: Kevin Spacey Made A Sexual Advance Toward Me When I Was 14; October 30, 2017, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/adambvary/anthony-rapp-kevin-spacey-made-sexual-advance-when-i-was-14#.eoDnqn8nB>, accessed 1/07/2019

problem.⁶² Due its transformational effect on the discourses around harassment and violence against women, the hashtag campaign was praised by most celebrity feminists and LBT (lesbian, bisexual and transgender women) rights supporters.

The reliance of Russian feminists on digital and social media also means, however, that feminist activists are easy targets for cyberbullying. One example of an anti-feminist backlash taking the form of cyberbullying is the so-called ‘Lushgate’ case that evolved in March 2019 around the prominent Russian feminist Bella Rapoport. On 19 March, in her Instagram blog Bella Rapoport shared her feelings about the correspondence with the social media representatives of the Russian branch of the global cosmetics brand *Lush*. The activist offered to endorse *Lush* cosmetic products in her Instagram stories in return for a free sample of the brand’s goods. Her offer was refused by the *Lush* social media representative in what seemed to Bella a harsh and impolite manner. Rapoport expressed her disappointment with the brand that claims to be pro-feminist but fails to show enough support to activists. Rapoport’s emotional post made her a subject of trolling and hate mail on the part of users of Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, and the cyberbullying was further promoted by multiple online and mainstream media outlets (including a news programme on a mainstream TV channel). Rapoport was primarily criticised and mocked for reacting so emotionally to the rejection by the brand: the genuine emotions she shared in her personal blog were interpreted as a transgression of boundaries by an overdemanding self-absorbed feminist. Rapoport was supported by many media celebrities who tend to participate in debates and discussions around feminism and women’s rights as part of their celebrity glamour politics, such as Tina Kandelaki, a pro-Kremlin TV presenter, and Kseniia Sobchak, an oppositional celebrity politician and ‘one of the most notorious figures of Russian glamour’ (Goscilo and Strukov 2011: 10).

The issue of cyberbullying extends beyond a specific form of symbolic misogynist violence (Vera-Gray 2017). As pointed out by scholars exploring the ‘affective turn’ in theorisation of conflicts and biopolitics (Clough and Halley 2007; Puar 2007), in the ‘affective economies’ where feelings, technologies and politics are brought together, all media texts acquire ‘emotionality’ (Ahmed 2004), and cases of verbal aggressions and expressions of hatred or contempt have become an integral part of online communications (Karatzogianni and Kuntsman 2012). The capacities of media texts to be emotive and performative (Kuntsman 2012: 6) is precisely why they are used as an effective tool in discourses on social struggle (Cvetkovich 2003, Gould 2009) and on the intersection of the political and the private (Berlant 1997): ‘the location of “politics”’ (Kuntsman 2012: 7) in the media cases of both cyberbullying and hashtag campaigns is shifted to the private and emotional spheres.

The examples of the *#IamNotAfraidToTell* campaign and ‘Lushgate’ are only two of the numerous cases where female activists have faced a backlash of complex societal responses to their transgressive emotional expression and gendered behaviour. However, despite the risks of becoming victims of trolling and bullying, more and more female activists engage in digital activism, creating digital safe spaces and ‘emotional communities’ (Rosenwein 2006), promoting their agenda in social and digital media. The two examples demonstrate that the Russian feminist movement has embraced and appropriated the agenda of the third wave feminism, especially in what concerns the use of self-mediation tools, the reliance on digital media, and approaching the battle against sexual harassment

⁶² See, for example, ‘Still #afraidtospeak: Why Russian victims of sexual harassment are silent’ (*Vse eshche #boius’skizat’: pochemu v Rossii molchat o seksual’nykh domogatel’stvakh*), available from <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/29004777.html>, accessed 29/07/2019

and abuse as part of the ongoing fight for sexual liberation (Jouët 2018). It is the inclusion of the Russian feminist movement into the global feminist agenda that resulted in the *#IamNotafraidToTell* campaign going viral, which in its turn prepared the ground for the visibility of the *#MeToo* movement in Russian media.

Russian media responded to the spread of the *#MeToo* movement with a prolific and consistent coverage of the hashtag campaign, relying on publications by western media resources. The coverage included accounts of sexual harassment scandals and narratives of sexual harassment victims, both women and men. In the coverage of the news related to *#MeToo* Russian media outlets were as almost fast as their western counterparts and showed as much interest in same-sex harassment stories as in the ones which involved heteronormative relations between the perpetrator and the victim. For example, on 31 October 2017, in an interview to a media outlet *Radar Online* the US film-maker Tony Montana claimed he was 'forcefully' groped by actor Kevin Spacey in a Los Angeles bar in 2003. Following this news, on 1 November 2017,⁶³ *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* published a news bite about the new confession – at the same speed as that at which the *BBC* responded to the news.⁶⁴ Not only did *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* respond to the news speedily, but it also tackled the topic of Spacey's homosexuality (*gomoseksual'nost'*). The article highlights that Spacey's coming-out (*'kamin-aut'*) as a gay man took place after he had been accused of sexual harassment by actor Anthony Rapp:

Recently Spacey confessed to his homosexuality, but this was an awkward confession, as noted the observers, since the coming-out happened after the 'Startrack' actor Anthony Rapp accused Kevin in harassment which took place thirty years before (*nakanune Speisi priznal'sia v svoei gomoseksual'nosti, no sdela eto kraine neudachno, kak otmechaiut nabludateli - kamin-aut posledoval lish' posle togo, kak aktior iz 'Startreka' Antoni Repp obvinil Kevina v domogatel'stvakh, imevshikh mesto bolee tridtsati let nazad*).

Novaya Gazeta also reported on the news on 1 November 2017, quoting news articles from the *Associated Press*, *Metro* and the *Sun*⁶⁵ and emphasising that the total number of victims of sexual harassment on the part of Kevin Spacey had reached four.

These are only two examples of Russian media interest in covering *#MeToo*-related news. The overall coverage of the campaign in Russian media outlets was extensive, which allows me to reiterate the point I made above by saying that Russian media are fully included in global contexts and exchanges regardless of the state-imposed discourses. In responding to and sustaining global media trends Russian outlets work to meet the expectations of their audiences. Russian media audiences' interest in the topics of sex, sexuality and inter-gender relations, as well as in the culture of glamour, led to the expansion of the global celebrity-driven anti-harassment movement in Russian media discourses.

⁶³ Source: Director of 'Overnight' accuses Kevin Spacey of sexual harassment (*Rezhissior fil'ma 'Vsiu noch' obvinil Kevina Speisi v domogatel'stvakh'*), by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 1 November 2017, available from <https://rg.ru/2017/11/01/rezhisser-filma-vsiu-noch-obvinil-kevina-speisi-v-domogatelstvakh.html>, accessed 1/07/2019

⁶⁴ Source: 'Kevin Spacey: More allegations of sexual harassment surface', by *BBC*, 1 November 2017, available from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-41829484>, accessed 1/07/2019

⁶⁵ Four more people accusing actor Kevin Spacey of harassment, (*Aktiora Kevina Speisi obvinili v domogatel'stvakh eshche chetyre cheloveka*), by *Novaya Gazeta*, 1 November 2017, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/11/01/136633-aktera-kevina-speisi-obvinili-v-domogatelstvakh-eshe-chetyre-cheloveka>, accessed 1/07/2019

By the starting point of the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case, anti-harassment media campaigns had become an integral part of Russian public discourses to the point that TV channel *NTV* announced the word ‘*kharasment*’ (borrowed from the Anglophone term ‘harassment’) the word of the year. The word had indeed become popular: when correspondents of the channel *Nastoiashchee Vremia* conducted a street survey asking passers-by what ‘*kharasment*’ means most interviewees gave correct answers and responded that ‘*kharasment*’ is an intrusion of personal space and violation of personal borders.⁶⁶ Public debates around the topic of sexual harassment entailed not only references to Hollywood celebrities cases, but also discussions about the fact that current Russian legislation does not define harassment as criminal conduct. Article 133 on the Criminal Code, which covers conduct that could be interpreted as harassment, only operates the terms of ‘forcing’ or ‘compulsion’ (*ponuzhdenie*) and outlines fines and criminal penalties for forcing an individual, through blackmailing, threatening or the use of the individual’s dependency on the perpetrator, to perform acts of sexual nature against their will.⁶⁷ In other words, it is through the emergence and evolution of media discourses on sexual harassment that social awareness of the issue grew and socio-political discourses on sexual harassment were activated.

3.4 Public discourses on sexual harassment as grounds for media consolidation and resistance

The ‘Slutsky-gate’ media case started on 22 February 2018, in the talk-show ‘Hard Day’s Night’ (*Vecher trudnogo dnia*) broadcast by the internet channel *Dozhd*. On the show, journalist Elizaveta Antonova was interviewing Head of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.⁶⁸ During the interview, the journalist told Zhirinovskiy that she had received information on complaints filed against a member of the LDPR faction in the Duma on the grounds of sexual harassment. Elizaveta asked the politician to investigate the matter and to resolve the situation by taking relevant measures.

It is important to look closer at the excerpt of the programme where the LDPR leader promises to deal with the sexual harassment accusations as that excerpt contains the primary trends which would later dominate the media discourse on the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case:

“Elizaveta: The most discussed topic in the world now is harassment (*kharasment*).

Zhirinovskiy: Domogatel’stva, in the Russian language we say ‘domogatel’stva’, yes (po-russki domogatel’stva).

Elizaveta: There is a Duma member in your faction [...] who is constantly harassing young female journalists. It has not happened to me, but the whole Duma knows about it. I am talking about Leonid Slutsky.

⁶⁶ Source: ‘Still #afraidtospeak: Why Russian victims of sexual harassment are silent’ (*Vse eshche #boius’skazat’: pochemu v Rossii molchat o seksual’nykh domogatel’stvakh*), by *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/29004777.html>, accessed 29/07/2019

⁶⁷ Source: consultant.ru, available from http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_10699/36b8d6e17178078517ac8d8f127ce4c40d162d4e/, accessed 30/04/2020

⁶⁸ Source: “I will have a word with him”: Zhirinovskiy – on female journalists complaining about sexual harassment on the part of State Duma deputy Slutsky (*“Ia pobeseduui s nim”: Zhirinovskiy – o zhalobakh na domogatel’stva k zhurnalistkam so storony deputata Slutskogo*), by *Dozhd*, 22 February 2018, <https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/harddaysnight/domogatelstva-458193/>, accessed 22/02/2018

Zhirinovskiy: I will have a word with him. Perhaps that is how he tries to attract a journalist's attention (*Mozhet byt', on khochet u zhurnalista vyzvat' interes k sebe*).

(A male presenter in the studio): By grabbing him by the buttocks (*trogaia ego za piatuiu tochku?*)?"

It is remarkable how the possibility of a sexual harassment act against a male journalist (which will enter the media discourse at a later stage) is introduced at the very start of the case through the ambiguity of the Russian word '*zhurnalist*'. When Zhirinovskiy expresses a supposition that all Slutsky might have been trying to achieve is to entice an interest in the journalist who was interviewing him, he uses the masculine gender form of the noun – '*zhurnalist*' rather than the feminine gender form '*zhurnalistka*'. The TV presenter responds using the masculine gender pronoun as well: the question is worded as 'by grabbing him (*ego*) by the buttocks', not 'grabbing her (*ei*)'. Although, according to Russian grammar rules, masculine gender forms of words denoting professions can be used when referring both to men and women, it sometimes creates semantic ambiguity: it is not always clear from the context whether the subject of the talk is male or female.

The grammar mistake made by Zhirinovskiy and repeated by the TV presenter does not only pre-empt the narrative of same-sex sexual harassment involving the LDPR leader and a male journalist but also demonstrates the significance of the Russian feminist debates about invisibility of professional women in public discourses. Over the last decade, discussions on the importance of introducing 'feminitives' (*feminitivy*, feminine gender counterparts of all lexical terms denoting professional occupations, usually formed with the suffix 'k' and feminine gender ending 'a', e.g. '*doktor – doktorka*') have been growing in Russian feminist activist discourses (Guzaerova et al. 2018). So has been the backlash against the expanding use of feminitives, especially from older generations (e.g. generations of Zhirinovskiy's peers), who tend to perceive the use of the suffix 'k' in words like '*zhurnalistka*' as derogatory to women, due to the fact that this suffix is not only a reference to the feminine gender of the person but can also have a diminutive or dismissive meaning.

The *Dozhd'* interview with Zhirinovskiy starts with acknowledging the importance of the issue of harassment, which is referred to as a 'trending' topic. The discussion also positions the discourse within the field of political state power, the role of the media as a 'fourth power', and the informality of Russian official culture: the party leader Zhirinovskiy promises to 'have a word' with the perpetrator and to regulate the discourse in this way. The final remark about 'buttock-grabbing' places the discussion in the context of sexualising the concept of: i.e. what sort of grabbing is not allowed, the grabbing of what body parts in particular constitutes a harassment act.

These discursive trends were observed during the March 2018 monitoring of the selected eleven media outlets, all of which covered the case. The monitored outlets included the following:

- the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*;
- the news and entertainment portal *meduza.io*;
- the internet TV channel *Dozhd'*;
- the internet radio *svoboda.org*;
- the newspaper *Kommersant*;

- the newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*;
- the tabloid *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*;
- the tabloid *Argumenty i Fakty*;
- the news and entertainment portal *life.ru*;
- one of the largest Facebook communities for Russian speaking LGBTQ individuals 'LGBT Discussion Board' (*LGBT diskussionnaia ploshchadka*);
- the internet portal *parniplus.com* created by LGBTQ-rights activists for LGBTQ audiences.

On 27 February 2018, various observed media outlets reported on RTVI journalist Ekaterina Kotrikadze's confession that she had become a victim of sexual harassment on the part of State Duma MP Leonid Slutsky seven years before.⁶⁹ A few days later, on 1 March 2018, *Dozhd'* producer Daria Zhuk came forward with a similar confession: she revealed that Leonid Slutsky had made inappropriate advances when he was invited to an interview. This was followed by the confession of Farida Rustamova, journalist at the *Russian BBC Service*, made on 6 March 2018. The narratives of the three female journalists were supported by confessions of other journalists who shared stories of harassment taking place at the State Duma.⁷⁰

Throughout the monitoring of the eleven selected media outlets in March 2018, I observed consistent coverage of the Slutsky case by all the outlets throughout the whole month (see figure 3.4.1 below). Several peaks of the media discourse were identified during the monitoring.

During the first day of the media monitoring, on 1 March 2018, the case-related publications covered the news about *Dozhd'* producer Daria Zhuk filing a complaint to the State Duma Ethics Committee against Leonid Slutsky on the grounds of sexual harassment. The news about Zhuk's complaint was covered by eight of the eleven outlets (with the exception of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *life.ru* and *parniplus.com*), with slight differences in the coverage. *Novaya Gazeta*, *meduza.io*, *Dozhd'*, *svoboda.org*, and *Kommersant* published factual reports on the complaints against Slutsky,⁷¹ whereas the tabloids *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty* published articles offering an interpretation of the event. *KP* mentioned that the State Duma member disproved the accusations, and the title of the *AiF* publication quoted Slutsky's comment on the case (the politician declared that he would not be made the Russian Harvey Weinstein). None of these outlets applied an anti-genderist, anti-feminist or anti-*#MeToo* rhetoric, but rather approached those first publications in the

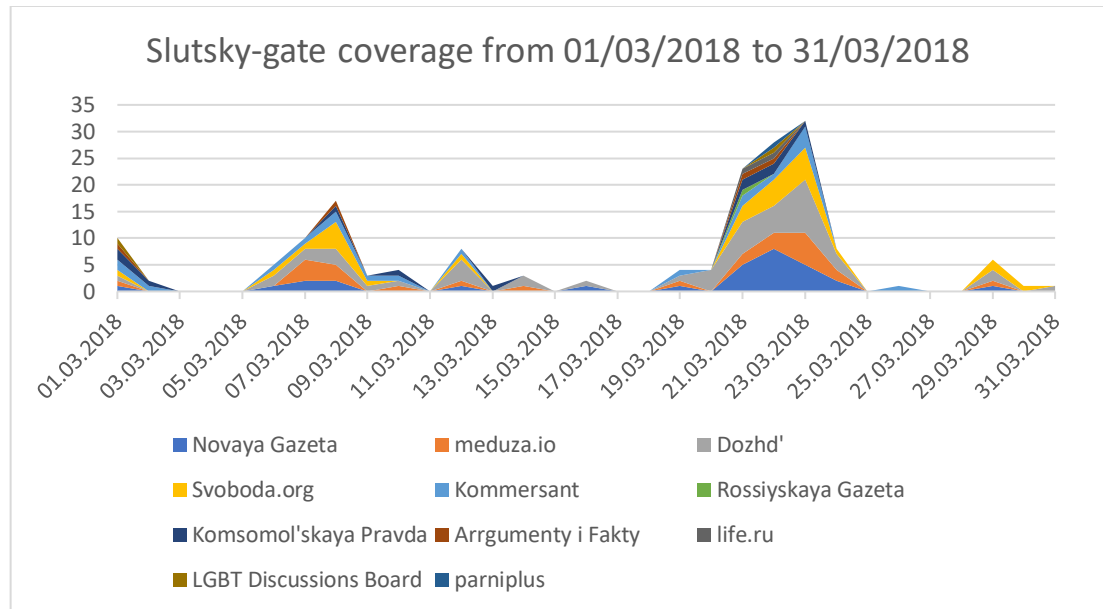
⁶⁹ RTVI Journalist Ekaterina Kotrikadze tells about sexual harassment on the part of deputy Leonid Slutsky (*Zhurnalistska RTVI Ekaterina Kotrikadze rasskazala o domogatel'stvakh so storony deputata Leonida Slutskogo*), by *meduza.io*, 27 February 2018, <https://meduza.io/news/2018/02/27/zamglavreda-rtvi-ekaterina-kotrikadze-rasskazala-o-domogatelstvakh-so-storony-deputata-leonida-slutskogo>, accessed 1/03/2018

⁷⁰ See for example, 'Former *Kommersant* journalist tells she was harassed by State Duma deputies in 2006' (*Byvshaya zhurnalistska Kommersanta rasskazala o domogatel'stvakh deputatov Gosdumy v 2006 godu*), by *Dozhd'*, 5 March 2018, https://tvrain.ru/news/byvshaja_zhurnalistska_kommersanta-458929/, accessed 1/07/2019

⁷¹ See for example, 'Complaint filed to Ethics Committee of State Duma regarding Deputy Slutsky's sexual harassment' (*V komissiiu po etike Gosdumy napravlena pervaya zhaloba na domogatel'stva deputat Slutskogo*), by *Kommersant*, 1 March 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3561249>, accessed 1/03/2018

framework of the truth and lies, fact checking, and the existence or absence of grounds for a formal investigation. On the wall of the social media community *LGBT Discussion Board*, prominent LGBTQ-rights activist and *RT* journalist Igor' Iasin published a statement explaining the position of Trade Union of Journalists with regard to the accusations against Slutsky.

Figure 3.4.1. A graph demonstrating peaks of media coverage of the Slutsky case in March 2018



Between 2 and 5 March 2018, only two outlets continued covering the case. *Kommersant* published a follow-up article discussing the issue of ethics in the State Duma and the behaviour of State Duma politicians in general. The *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* publication reported that the State Duma speaker Volodin confirmed he would take control of the investigation into the sexual harassment case. The next important point in the discourse on the case took place on 8 March 2018, the International Women's Day, an important public holiday in Russia. Two events related to the case were covered in the publications on that day: Slutsky's apology and the individual protest pickets outside of the State Duma demanding Slutsky's resignation. Seven of the eight outlets which started following the discourse from 1 March published articles on these two events, with the exception of *meduza.io*.⁷²

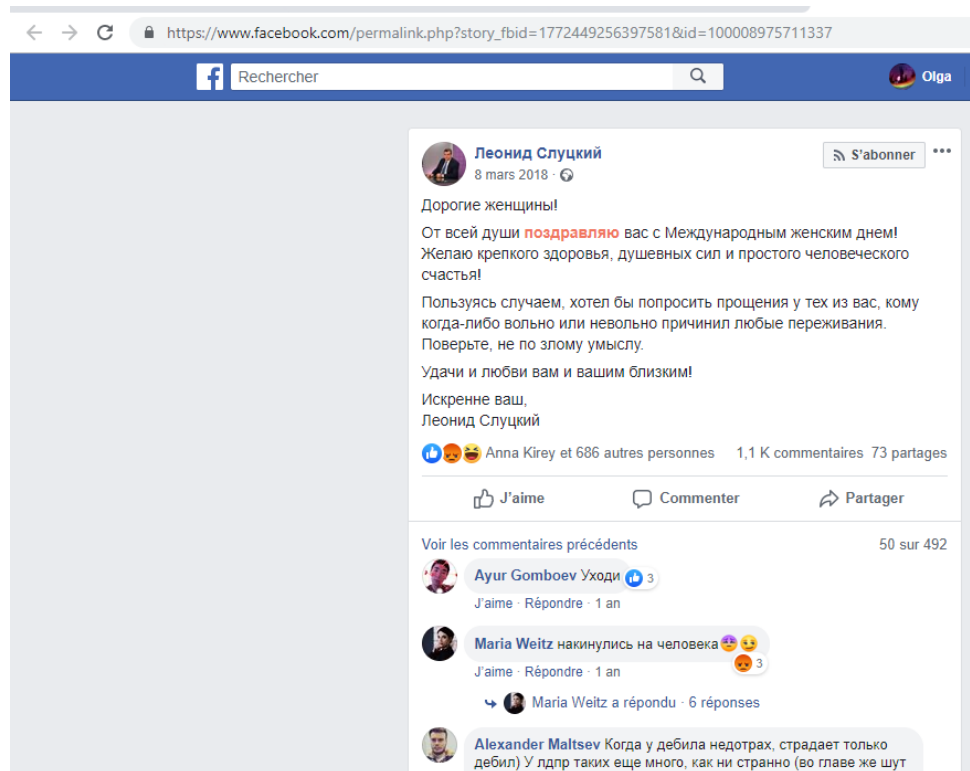
⁷² Considering how deeply involved *meduza.io* usually is in the coverage of any issues related to discourses on sex, gender and sexuality, its obvious lack of attention to the current media case (compared to the other monitored outlets) was striking. The sexual harassment scandal which evolved later in the same year around the *meduza's* chief editor Ivan Kolpakov might serve as an explanation to this lack of attention. On 20th October 2018, at an internal celebration, Kolpakov, being intoxicated, groped inappropriately a *meduza* employee's wife. The incident was discussed at the outlet's editorial meeting and was soon debated in the media. The media scandal burst when it became known that the employee quit the outlet while Kolpakov remained employed by *meduza.io*. The outlet was severely criticised and mocked for its hypocrisy as in March 2018 it joined the media boycott of the State Duma and the demands of Slutsky's resignation. The inconsistent coverage of the Slutsky-gate and the subsequent same-sex harassment coming-outs, as well as its own sexual harassment scandal perhaps signal to the ambiguous position of the outlet and its editorial board towards the topic of sexual harassment in general. ('A harassment scandal at Meduza', November 8, 2018, Source: <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2018/11/08/a-harassment-scandal-at-meduza>, accessed 17/09/2019).

On 8 March 2018, in his personal Facebook account, Leonid Slutsky published a post in which he wished all women a happy International Women’s Day and made an apology to those women whom he had inadvertently upset (see image 3.4.2). The apologetic post was criticised as hypocritical,⁷³ and spontaneous individual protests took place outside of the State Duma with calls for Slutsky to resign. Seven of the monitored outlets published a reference to the apology, with five outlets (*Novaya Gazeta*, *meduza.io*, *Kommersant*, *Dozhd’*, *svoboda.org*) also publishing an update on the pickets. The overall tone of Slutsky’s Facebook post was quite light-hearted, and although it did contain words of apology, it was clear from the post that Slutsky did not admit that he had committed acts of sexual harassment against female journalists: the deputy asked for forgiveness from the women whom he had knowingly or inadvertently caused distress (*komu kogda-libo vol’no ili nevol’no prichinil perezhivaniia*).

Image 3.4.2. A screengrab of Leonid Slutsky’s Facebook post with an apology for inappropriate behaviour towards women.

Source:

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1772449256397581&id=100008975711337, accessed 8/03/2020



The protest pickets were supported by human rights and feminist activists. The international human rights organisation ‘*Amnesty International*’ was joined by independent activists, journalists, representative grassroots movements ‘*Sotsial’naia Al’ternativa*’ and ‘*No To Violence*’ (*Nasiliiu.net*). Presidential candidate Ksenia Sobchak took part in the protest too, attracting even more publicity to the pickets due to her celebrity

⁷³ See for example “Shameful apology”: Slutsky apologises, he is expected to resign’ (“*Pozornye isvineniia*”: *Slutsky prosit proshcheniia, ot nego trebuiut otstavki*), by *svoboda.org*, 9 March 2018, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29088293.html>, accessed 9/03/2018

status. Sobchak had arrived at the spot before the announced pickets started and posed with the placard saying 'Duma MPs, we don't want you' (*'Deputaty, my vas ne khotim!'*).⁷⁴

By joining the protest, Ksenia Sobchak reinforced her public image as a pro-feminist politician. Sobchak's act can be interpreted as an example of glamour politics, when a privileged visible media persona appropriates civil rights discourse for the purpose of their own publicity. This likens Sobchak's act to the situation when white upper-class Hollywood stars appropriated the hashtag #*metoo* which was introduced in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke - a Black woman from a non-privileged background (Bhattacharyya 2018; Onwuachi-Willig 2018).

It is worth mentioning, that such a use of the trending media theme and a 'hype' media topic for boosting own social capital is a strategy often applied by Sobchak in her media and political activity. Thus, on 20 April 2017, she released a video appeal to President Putin in which she asked him to protect gays in Chechnya. The appeal, however, was framed in sexualised and derogatory terms: Sobchak worded it as 'giving people the right to use their bum the way they want' (*daite parvo rasporiazhat'sia sobstvennoi zhopoi*).⁷⁵ Having promoted her image as a liberal oppositional celebrity politician since her participation in mass protests of 2012, Sobchak used the situation with the anti-LGBTQ campaigns in Chechnya to reiterate her liberal views (and thus to win new supporters among pro-gay and liberal citizens). In the 2018 presidential elections, she branded herself as a 'Candidate against everyone' (*Kandidat protiv vsekh*), and she used the sexual harassment accusations against the party led by a political rival to promote her oppositional agenda and to reinforce her public image as a feminist and women's rights supporter (Voronova and Edenborg 2018). The example of Sobchak's appropriation of the sexual harassment discourse for her benefit demonstrates how in a neoliberal society like contemporary Russia it is not state-imposed values but rather personal or institutional (e.g. the media) gains that become a decisive factor which defines the individual's or institution's participation in a discourse.

It is important to underline that the overall development of the 'Slutsky-gate' case against the background of the final stage of the 2018 presidential campaign (with the presidential elections taking place on 18 March 2018) framed this case from the very start as a confrontation between the media and oppositional politicians on one side and the ruling conservative political elites on the other, with Zhirinovskiy, who has been a major figure in Russian politics since 1990, and Slutskiy being mediated as part of the conservative elites.⁷⁶

Although LDPR is sometimes referred to as a muppet party serving to maintain the political status quo by creating an illusion of political opposition to the ruling '*Edinaya Rossiya*' party (United Russia) (Wilson 2010; Moses 2017; Katzenstein & Weygandt 2017), nevertheless Zhirinovskiy has enjoyed consistent popularity and high media publicity. He has taken part in all the presidential elections that have taken place since 1990 and he is notorious for his radical views and provocative actions and statements. For example, he has been

⁷⁴ Source: 'Pickets taking place outside State Duma against Deputy Slutskiy who is accused of sexual harassment' (*'U zdaniia Gosdumy proshli pikety protiv obvinionnogo v domogatel'stvakh deputata Slutskogo*), by *Dozhd'*, 8 March 2018, <https://tvrain.ru/news/pikety-459136/>, accessed 8/03/2018

⁷⁵ Source: "'Give people the right to use their own bum the way they want". Ksenia Sobchak's third appeal to President Putin', by *Dozhd'*, published on 20/04/2017, available at https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/bremja_novostej/dayte_ludyam_rasporyashatsya_svoey_zhopoi-433065/, accessed 20/04/2017

⁷⁶ See Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's webpage on the official website of the State Duma: <http://duma.gov.ru/duma/persons/99100142/>, accessed 29/07/2019

involved in a number of media scandals involving him throwing water or juice at an opponent during a heated debate, or the same being done to him by an opponent (as it happened on 28 February 2018 during a debate between Ksenia Sobchak and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, when Zhirinovskiy verbally abused Sobchak and she threw water at him⁷⁷). Zhirinovskiy is also known for sex scandals: e.g., in 1999, he published a book under the title 'The ABC of Sex' (*Azbuka seksa*) (Baer 2009: 39), and throughout his career there have been consistent rumours and numerous photos and testimonies leaked into the press about Zhirinovskiy's love for the company of very young males during his visits to private and corporate saunas (Essig 1999: 150-151).

LDPR deputy Leonid Slutsky⁷⁸ has been one of the most prominent party members known for having held a series of important positions in various political and economic structures and also notorious for having been involved in various bribery and corruption scandals.⁷⁹ Two of Slutsky's corruption scandals (around an undeclared Bentley and an undeclared lease on a large piece of land) were disclosed by prominent oppositional politician Alexei Navalny, who was not admitted to the presidential elections in 2018. On 8 March 2018, the YouTube channel of the organisation 'Anti-Corruption Foundation' (*Fond bor'by s korruptsiei*) led by Navalny released a video in which the leader of the opposition commented on Slutsky's apologies published on the same day. The rest of the video was devoted to disclosing Slutsky's involvement in corruption schemes, as well as his 'pathological' reckless driving.⁸⁰ In the video, Navalny shamed Slutsky and called for his resignation, at the same time praising the female journalists who confronted him for their courage. The visual image supporting those words of the oppositional leader includes portraits of the three female journalists who filed complaints to the State Duma Ethics Committee, which, on the one hand, makes Navalny's expression of support and appraisal more personalised and genuine, but on the other hand, symbolises the patriarchal appropriation of the anti-harassment discourse by a right-inclining male politician for the purposes of promoting his own political agenda (see image 3.4.3).

The involvement of the leader of Russian oppositional forces into the discourse on 'Slutsky-gate' further politicised this discourse along the axis of 'pro-Kremlin vs anti-Kremlin agents'. As I demonstrate in section 3.4 of the current chapter, with this politicised and binary context, the emergence of homosexual harassment allegations after the announcement of the media boycott of the State Duma queered the politicised discourse, i.e. non-heteronormative individuals used the evolving case to promote the LGBTQ agenda. The act of the only female presidential candidate joining and thus 'glamourising' the anti-harassment pickets and the act of the anti-Kremlin protest leader including sexual harassment issue into his ongoing anti-corruption campaign illustrate how the anti-sexual harassment campaign started by media professionals was not only supported and joined by civil rights activists but

⁷⁷ Sobchak throws water as Russian presidential debate descends to bickering, by Euronews, 1 March 2018, <https://www.euronews.com/2018/03/01/sobchak-throws-water-as-russian-presidential-debate-descends-to-bickering>, accessed 29/07/2019

⁷⁸ See Leonid Slutsky's webpage on the official website of the State Duma: <http://duma.gov.ru/duma/persons/99100776/>, accessed 29/07/2019

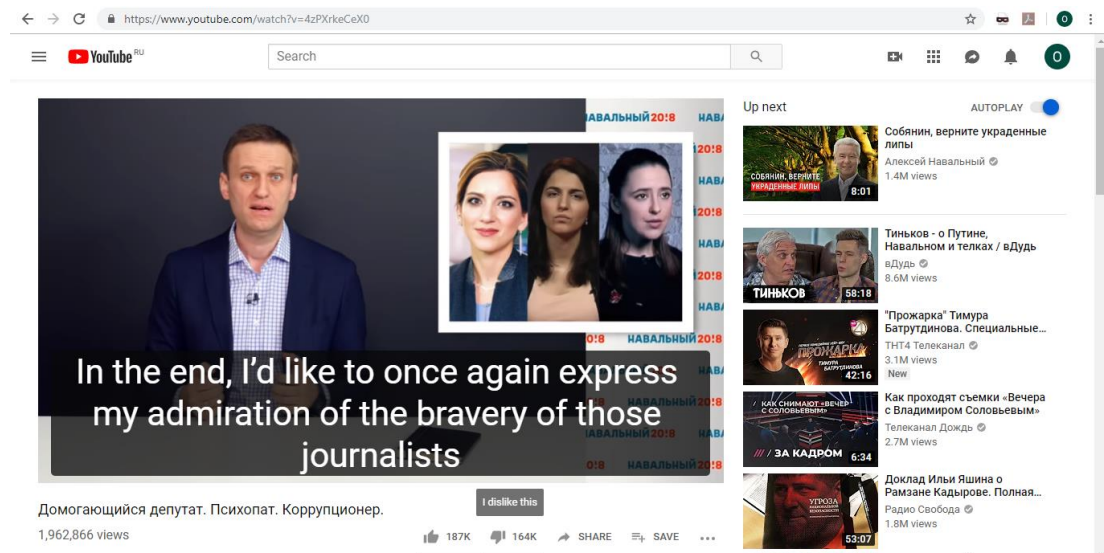
⁷⁹ See for example, 'What deputy Slutsky is known for' (*Chem izvesten deputat Slutskiy*), by *Kommersant*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3579566>, accessed 21/03/2018; or 'Deputy Slutsky. Dossier.' (*Deputat Slutskiy. Dos'e*), by *AiF*, 7 March 2018, http://www.aif.ru/politics/russia/deputat_leonid_sluckiy_dose, accessed 7/03/2018

⁸⁰ Source: 'Deputy that harasses. Psychopath. Corrupted official' (*Domogaiushchiisa deputat. Psikhopat. Korruptsioner*), 8 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zPXrkeCeX0>, accessed 29/07/2019

was also appropriated and used by different oppositional political forces⁸¹ to promote their own agenda.

Image 3.4.3. A screengrab of Alexei Navalny's video 'Deputy that harasses. Psychopath. Corrupted official'.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zPXrkeCeX0>, accessed 29/07/2019



The evolution of the 'Slutsky-gate' media case into a case on same-sex harassment demonstrates that when the media discourse is unfolding against a political tension the appearance of sympathetic narratives on non-heteronormative masculinities become highly likely. This reiterates the findings made in the Chapter Two of this thesis: despite the existence of the legislation banning positive portrayals of LGBTQ individuals in the media, positive or sympathetic portrayals are allowed and accepted in certain circumstances. Another feature that likens the cases analysed in the previous and the current chapters is that in both the discourse of 'war on terror' and the discourse on sexual harassment it is the private actions of the individual that define the institution's attitudes to and perceptions of him. The positive portrayals of non-heteronormative Chechen men, the gay policeman and the male victims of sexual harassment reflect the media outlets' support of those non-heteronormative subjects as victims of a far greater evil than 'non-traditional sexuality'. To reiterate the point made earlier in this section, the redirection of media discourses on NHM towards discourses on victimhood leads to the legitimization of compassionate and empathetic stance on mediated NHM subjects.

Despite the participation of oppositional forces, the anti-harassment campaign cannot be branded as solely oppositional. It was also appropriated by political forces on the pro-Kremlin side, e.g. the State Duma, the LDPR politicians, pro-Kremlin media, who used it as an opportunity to reinforce their political grounds. Thus, following Slutsky's apology on the International Women's Day, on 8-10 March several of the monitored media outlets (*meduza.io*, *Dozhd'*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *life.ru*) published an interview on Slutsky and harassment with Maria Zakharova, Director of the Information and Press Department of the

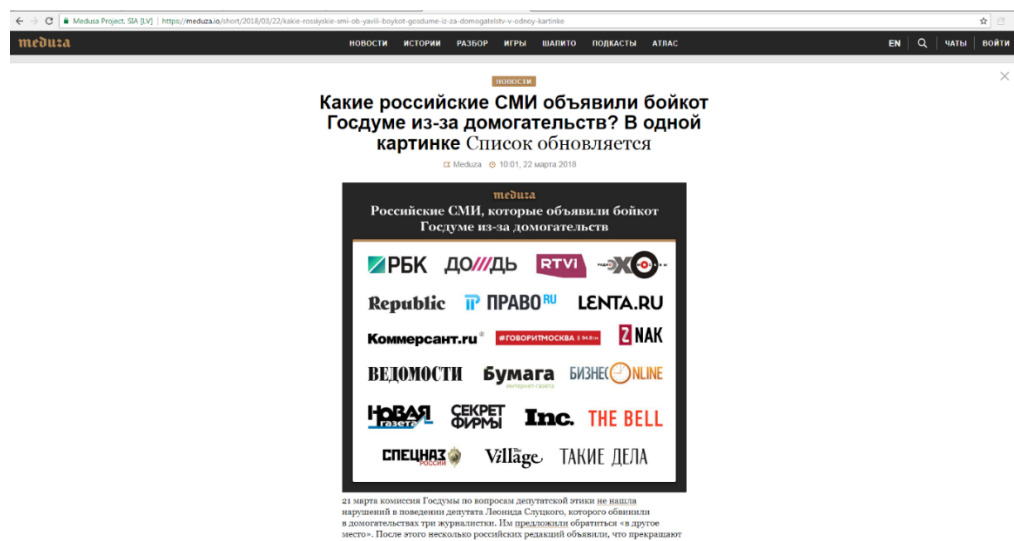
⁸¹ During the presidential election campaign, Alexei Navalny and Ksenia Sobchak did not only appear to pursue different agendas but also happened to get involved in altercations and arguments.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.⁸² Zakharova condemned Slutsky's attitude to the whole situation around the accusations against him and shared her experience of witnessing Slutsky's inappropriate behaviour during a social event. The inclusion of the female politician who plays the role of the official international representative of the Kremlin into the discourse on 'Slutsky-gate' takes the harassment case beyond the anti-Kremlin oppositional discourse and makes it part of the national discourse on sex, sexuality, politics and gender, where privileged women and men have the full opportunity to express their views on problematic agendas and to use those agendas to their own advantage.

The highest and most important peak of the media case on Slutsky and sexual harassment in the State Duma took place on 21 March 2018 when the Ethics Committee of the State Duma held a hearing on the case. The hearing resulted in the Ethics Committee supporting Slutsky and discarding the evidence provided by the female journalists in support of their complaints as insufficient.⁸³ The resolution of the State Duma Ethics Committee led to a boycott of the State Duma by several major Russian media outlets. On 22 March the list of the media outlets boycotting Slutsky and the State Duma included *RBC, Dozhd', RTVi, Echo Moskvy, Republic, Pravo.ru, Lenta.ru, Kommersant, Govorit Moskva, Znak, Vedomosti, Bumaga, Biznes Onlain, Novaya Gazeta, Sekret Firmy, Inc., The Bell, Spetsnaz, The Village, Takie Dela, Colta, Novye Izvestiia, Wonderzine, Delovoy Kvartal, Mediazona, MBH Media, Keytown, Chita.ru, Forbes, Playboy, Novosti Kupchino, Snob, TVK, Dp.ru, Vyksa.rf, BFM.ru, The Caucasus Post, Mediazona, Medialeaks, Mel.fm, Telegram-channel Mash* and others, including Russian social networking site *Odnoklassniki.ru* (see image 3.4.4).

Image 3.4.4. A screengrab of the *meduza.io* publication demonstrating the list of media outlets boycotting the State Duma

Source: <https://meduza.io/short/2018/03/22/kakie-rossiyskie-smi-ob-yavili-boykot-gosdume-iz-za-domogatelstv-v-odnoy-kartinke>, accessed 22/03/2018



⁸² See for example 'Zakharova shared her experience of responding to inappropriate remarks' (*Zakharova rasskazala, kak otvechala na nepodobaiushchie repliki v svoi adres*), by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 8 March 2018, <https://rg.ru/2018/03/08/zaharova-rasskazala-kak-otvechala-na-nepodobaiushchie-repliki-v-svoj-adres.html>, accessed 8 March 2018

⁸³ Source: 'Slutsky protected from harassment. The State Duma Ethics Committee found deputy Slutsky innocent' (*Slutskogo ogradili ot domogatel'stv. Kommissiia GD po etike opravdala deputata Slutskogo*), by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 21 March 2018, <https://rg.ru/2018/03/21/komissii-gd-po-etike-opravdala-deputata-slutskogo.html>, accessed 21/03/2018

The boycott was started not by an openly pro-feminist or an openly anti-Kremlin media outlet but by a neutral outlet *RBC* whose target audience is businesspeople. The range of media outlets which supported the boycott was wide and diverse: liberally biased (e.g. *Echo Moskvy*), neutral (*Kommersant*) and pro-Kremlin outlets (e.g. the international Russophone TV channel *RTVi* banned on the territory of Ukraine); major national mainstream media outlets (e.g. *Vedomosti*) and minor local ones (*Novosti Kupchino*, *Vyksa.rf*); internet portals catering for young progressive audiences (*Takie Dela*, *Wonderzine*) and social networking sites (*Odnoklassniki.ru*). Such a wide range of media supporting the boycott proves that ‘Slutsky-gate’ became part of the wide national discourse on sexual harassment.

The case of ‘Slutsky-gate’ and the boycott of the State Duma as a response to the violations of the rights of Russian journalists was not the first and only example of Russian media consolidation and resistance after the introduction of the 2013 law. In 2017, the joint actions of human rights activists, LGBTQ rights activists and the ‘Trade Union of Journalists’ (*Profsoiuz zhurnalistov*), a professional organisation rooted in the Soviet ideology and journalistic practice and ethics, prevented the deportation of Ali Feruz, queer migrant and *Novaya Gazeta* journalist, to Uzbekistan where he would have faced the risk of arrest, torture and most probably death (Feruz was instead able to leave Russia for Germany, where he is now residing). In 2019, when *meduza.io* journalist Ivan Golunov was arrested on fabricated charges of possession and intent to sell class A drugs, the ‘Trade Union of Journalists’ held individual pickets and initiated protests and petitions in support of Golunov, who was later released as the charges against him had been dropped. However, the 2018 boycott of the State Duma was the first and so far unprecedented example of joint actions of media professionals on the grounds of gender-based violence and in support of the feminist agenda, unpopular in the neoconservative traditionalist discourses.

Sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence became a new criterion, a new watershed that divided Russian media outlets into two groups: the pro-feminist outlets which condemned the justification of sexual harassment of female journalists and anti-feminist ones which did not consider that an important issue.⁸⁴ This fact proves the ineffectiveness of approaching Russian media solely within the binary dichotomy of pro- vs anti-Kremlin. It also problematises discussions on the mediation of NHM in Russia as it shows that discourses on NHM are part of broad and heated public debates on sex, gender, sexuality and power that are initiated and facilitated by the media. Some media outlets resorted to boycotting as a way of showing that there is a limit to the liberties of the powerful elites and those limits start where a person’s individual boundaries begin (including bodily boundaries), while the silence of other outlets conformed with the sexist culture imposed by the post-Soviet ethics of the ruling elites.

The ‘Slutsky-gate’ case was interpreted and presented as a turning point in Russian journalism by media outlets themselves: it was branded as ‘Slutsky-gate’⁸⁵ and *#SMItoo*⁸⁶, the

⁸⁴ See for example ‘Leonid’s day (*Leonidov den*’; an allusion to ‘Yuri’s day’ – in Tsarist Russia, the day when Russian serfs could leave their master for a new one). Independent media boycott Duma because of sexual harassment), by *Novaya Gazeta*, 22 March 2018, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/03/22/75900-leonidov-den>, accessed 22/03/2018

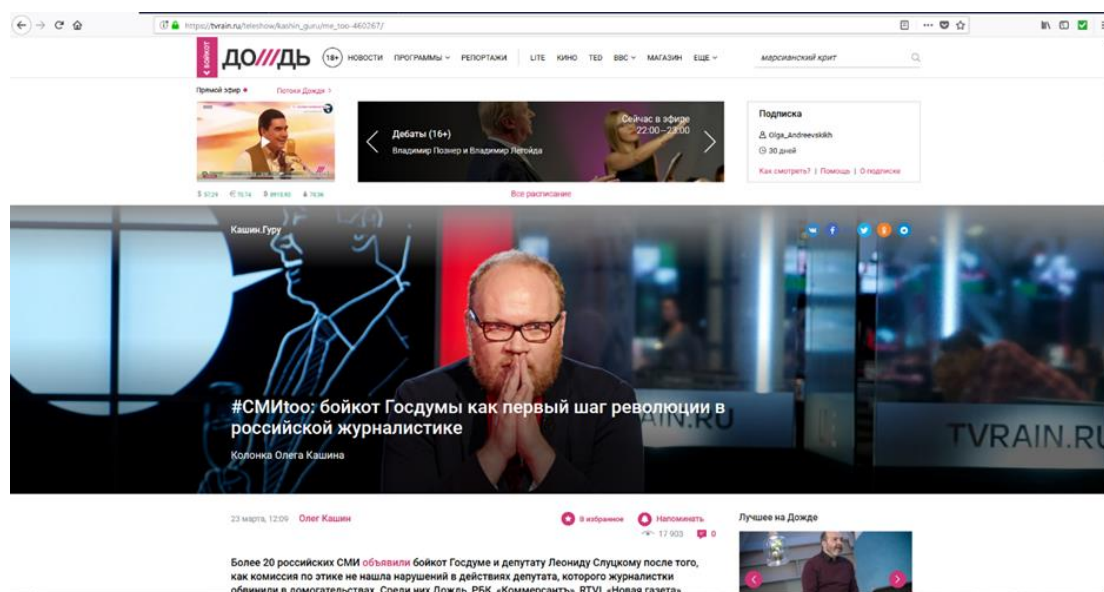
⁸⁵ Source: ‘Why is ‘Slutsky-gate’ useful?’ (*Chem polezen Slutsky-geit?*), by *Kommersant*, 26 March 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3584996>, accessed 26/03/2018

⁸⁶ Source: ‘#SMItoo: boycott of State Duma as the first step of the revolution in Russian journalism’ (*#SMItoo: boikot Gosdumy kak pervyi shag revoliutsii v rossiiskoi zhurnalistike*), by *Dozhd*, 23 March 2018 https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/kashin_guru/me_too-460267/, accessed 23/03/2018

latter being a pun – the Russian abbreviation for ‘means of mass information’ (*sredstva massovoi informatsii* – SMI) and the sexual harassment hashtag #MeToo (see image 3.4.5). By analysing ‘Slutsky-gate’ from the point of view of same-sex harassment narratives I demonstrate that contemporary Russian media discourses on NHM evolve not only as part of discourses on LGBTQ rights and LGBTQ activist movements but also as part of the wider overall public discourses on sex, sexuality and gender.

Image 3.4.5. A screengrab of Oleg Kashin’s programme ‘#SMItoo: boycott of State Duma as the first step of the revolution in Russian journalism’ (*#SMItoo: boikot Gosdumy kak pervyy shag revoliutsii v rossiiskoi zhurnalistike*)

Source: https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/kashin_guru/me_too-460267/, accessed 23/03/2018



The ‘Slutsky-gate’ case shows how for the first time since the debate around the ‘anti-gay-propaganda’ law the issues of sex, gender and sexuality became a watershed for Russian media: in 2013 the division was based on whether the outlet supported or opposed the ‘traditional sexuality’ legislation. Unlike in 2013, however, when the discourse was imposed from above (the Duma proposed the new law and the media responded to that), in 2018 the discourse was initiated and driven in a bottom-up way, with the media starting the discussion in response to the global media trend and with the political elites responding to that. The analysis of the development of the media coverage of the sexual harassment case reveals the significance of the issues of sex, sexuality and gender for all monitored media outlets: although with different number of publications on the case, all the monitored outlets tackle the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case, none ignores the topic. The two peaks of the media coverage of the case – on 8 March and on 21-23 March – coincide with the involvement of political elites in the discourse (Slutsky’s statement on Facebook and the investigation into the sexual harassment accusations by the State Duma Ethics Committee). This is consistent with the findings made in the previous chapter: the inclusion of the government officials into discourses on sex, sexuality and gender increases the number and the range of media outlets involved in the coverage of the case. In its turn, the increase in the media coverage prompts the appearance of a variety of portrayals of non-heteronormative men, i.e. the appearance of positive and sympathetic images of NHM. In the next sections of the chapter I investigate

the discursive strategies applied by the monitored media when creating portrayals of victims of same-sex sexual harassment.

3.5 Media discourses on confessional coming-out narratives of male victims of homosexual harassment

The theme of same-sex harassment performed by government officials was introduced into the media case on the Slutsky-gate on 22 March 2018 when Renat Davletgil'deev, a journalist working for the oppositional internet TV channel *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, published the following confession on his personal Facebook page (see image 3.5.1):

Guys, listen, I am sure that even in my newsfeed, among my friends and followers there are those who were sexually harassed by people in power (*kogo domogalis' liudi, oblichennye vlast'iu*). By State Duma deputies, by judges for whom you worked as assistants after apprenticeship programmes, by deputy head level employees of a couple of ministries. Why don't you come forward with your stories somehow too? Yes, Leonid Slutsky is a totally heterosexual person. But it is boys whom dozens of State Duma deputies prefer to take to special saunas.

I have never concealed the story about how, following the beauty pageant 'Miss Rossiya' organised by Rustam Tariko in Gostiny Dvor, Zhirinovskiy's assistants tried to forcefully drag me out of the building in order to take me with him to the LDPR corporate sauna, and Zhirinovskiy himself, while giving me a short interview, was grabbing me by my buttocks in such a way that my hands were shaking and I could hardly hold the voice recorder (*lapal za zhopu tak, chto ruki triaslis' s diktofonom*). Yes, I was so young, my knees went wobbly at the thought that I am standing in front of a State Duma deputy, a minister and so on, it seemed I had to treat them with awe. Besides, for some reason, before the coming-out (*as a gay man) it seemed that it was my fault when someone's hand was getting into my pants, and that even a hint to my own homosexuality had to be hidden from everyone at any cost. Even when that hint was someone's harassment against me (*dazhe iesli etot namiok byl chuzhim harassmentom*). No matter if it was on a crowded tube train or in the Parliament building.

My story is nothing in comparison to what took place in the LDPR. And this joke about the scandal around Slutsky being necessary to prove that there is at least one straight deputy in the party is very close to reality. And I am not even starting on the criteria for selecting assistants for Volodin (*the State Duma chief speaker) or for the employees of the Gazprom executive board.

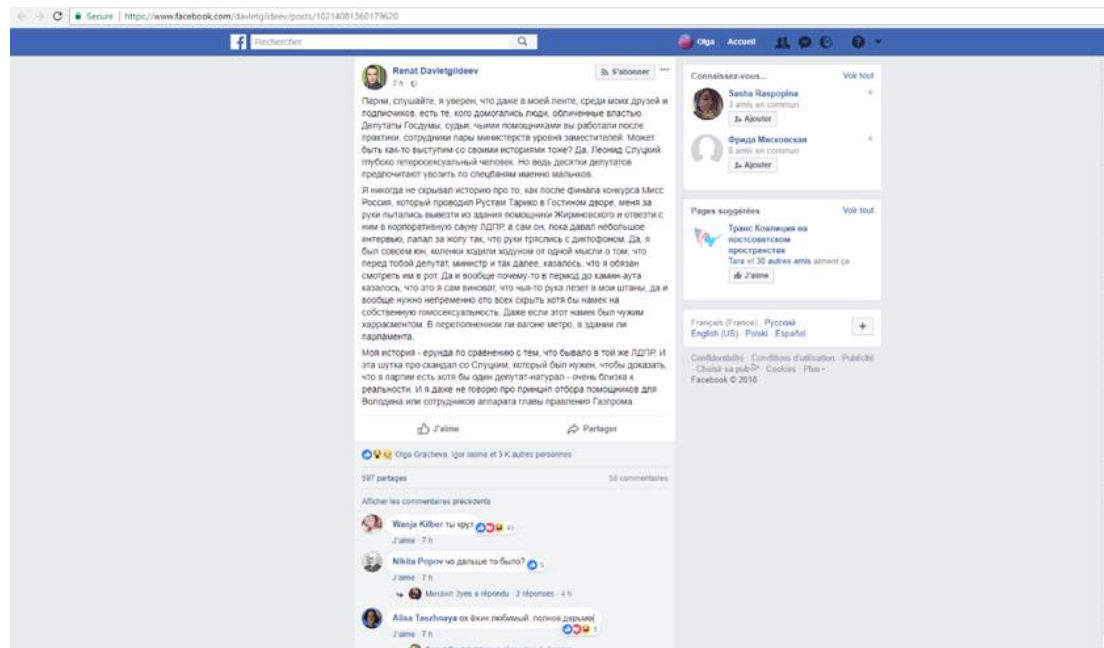
The post presents a combination of coming-out and outing⁸⁷ narratives. While making a coming-out as a victim of sexual harassment, the journalist reconstructs the events prior to his public coming-out as a homosexual man, thus constructing his own sexuality in the perspective of the past – i.e. of the post-1993 and pre-2013 past, when homosexuality was not persecuted in any formal way. By disclosing the name of the politician who assaulted him, the journalist outs the LDPR leader as a non-heterosexual person. By alluding that stories like that are very common and there are other men among the journalist's Facebook friends and

⁸⁷ 'An occasion when it is made public that a famous person is gay when he or she wanted to keep this information private'. Source: Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/outing>

followers who are victims of sexual assault committed by high-rank politicians such as the State Duma chief speaker, Davletgil'deev uses a queer strategy of outing of not only the Facebook users but also of those in power.

Image 3.5.1. Screenshot of Davletgil'deev's Facebook post in which he told about his experience of sexual harassment

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/davletgildeev/posts/10214081360179620> (accessed 22/03/2018, the post has since been removed)



The Facebook post collected over 3,000 likes and was reposted over 500 times within several hours. It was also immediately quoted and covered in mainstream digital media, including seven of the eleven monitored outlets. The coverage of Davletgil'deev's confession included mixed interpretations of the event: while some of the outlets presented the journalist's coming-out as genuine and appeared to back his narrative, others referred to the narrative from the point of view of the official comments on the accusations made by the LDPR. The very genre of the social media post chosen for the confession, as well as the mixed nature of the follow-up media coverage on Davletgil'deev's coming-out, set a discursive framework similar to that of a bullying dynamic, which prompted the LDPR leadership to accuse the journalist of bullying and libel.

Reiterating the *#MeToo* movement discourse of multiple stories shared by multiple victims, in his Facebook Davletgil'deev included a call for other male victims of same-sex harassment to come forward. There was not a wave of same-sex harassment coming-out stories, however, one more man came forward soon after Davletgil'deev's confession. Pro-Kremlin political scientist (*politolog*) Sergei Markov told the media about an incident that had happened to him during the Soviet Union times. A young Komsomol member, he was invited to the home of a prominent member of the Communist Party and was sexually harassed by that man. The introduction of the themes of Soviet and Communist times, when both the male perpetrator and the victim of sexual harassment could potentially be penalised for their non-heteronormative behaviour with a prison sentence, into the narrative of same-sex sexual harassment takes the case beyond the framework of contemporaneity and political

opposition (the LDPR being *de jure* political opposition with regard to Russia's ruling party, while Putin's ideology being inherent to the Soviet/Communist era).

The March 2018 day-by-day monitoring of the selected media outlets demonstrated that seven of them provided coverage of same-sex sexual harassment coming-out stories. The table below compares the total number of publications related to the overall 'Slutsky-gate' case and those covering Davletgil'deev's confession and subsequently developing case on same-sex harassment committed by politicians and government officials (see figure 3.5.2). As the table demonstrates, there is no correlation between the volume of coverage of the overall case and attention to the same-sex harassment discursive line. Thus, *Novaya Gazeta* produced 30 publications on 'Slutsky-gate', but zero on Davletgil'deev's story – similarly to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which also ignored this line of discourse, having produced only one publication on the overall 'Slutsky-gate' case. The portal *life.ru* had a relatively low coverage of 'Slutsky-gate', but despite that still included a comment on Davletgil'deev's narrative into its coverage by producing one publication.

Figure 3.5.2. A table comparing the number of March 2018 publications on the Slutsky-gate case in general and on homosexual harassment narrative

Media outlet	Total number of publications	Homosexual harassment coverage
<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>	30	0
<i>meduza.io</i>	26	1
<i>Dozhd'</i>	49	4
<i>Svoboda.org</i>	28	3
<i>Kommersant</i>	19	1
<i>Rossiyskaya Gazeta</i>	1	0
<i>Komsomol'skaya Pravda</i>	11	0
<i>Argumenty i Fakty</i>	4	0
<i>life.ru</i>	2	1
<i>Parniplus.com</i>	1	1
<i>LGBT Discussions Board</i>	2	1

The data above shows that there is no consistency between the involvement of the media outlet in the development of the discourse on the 'Slutsky-gate' case and its coverage of the homosexual harassment allegations against Zhirinovskiy. Thus, four newspapers (*Novaya Gazeta*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty*) excluded Davletgil'deev's confession from their coverage despite participating in the coverage of the overall harassment scandal. To reiterate the conclusion made in Chapter Two, there is no interconnection between the political stance and the type of the media outlet and its involvement in a particular discourse: among the outlets which refrained from developing the

discursive line of same-sex harassment are an oppositional outlet, a pro-Kremlin outlets, broadsheet daily newspapers and tabloids. Interestingly, there is also no such consistency when it comes to LGBTQ media: thus, the Facebook community *LGBT Discussion Board* published a post on the ‘*Trade Union of Journalists*’ appeal for an investigation into allegations against Slutsky as well as a post on Davletgil’deev’s confession, whereas the LGBTQ resource *parniplus.com* only covered Daveltgil’deev’s narrative and did not devote separate publications to the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case (perhaps not recognising it as part of the LGBTQ agenda due to the heteronormative nature of the harassment allegations against the LDPR State Duma member).

The following section of the chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the following media publications devoted to the homosexual harassment line of the overall discourse:

- Four publications by *Dozhd’* on 22, 23 and 24 March 2018 (three with a reference to Davletgil’deev and one with a reference to Markov)
- Three publications by *svoboda.org* (22, 23 and 29 March 2018);
- One 22/03/2018 publication by *meduza.io*;
- One 22/03/2018 publication by *life.ru*;
- One 23/03/2018 publication by *Kommersant*;
- One 22/03/2018 publication by *parniplus.com*;
- One 22/03/2018 publication by *LGBT Discussion Board*.

Through the Critical Discourse Analysis of the publications listed above I investigate the strategies used by the monitored outlets for portraying non-heteronormative victims of sexual harassment.

3.6 Discursive strategies of communicating non-heteronormative masculinities within media discourses on sexual harassment

The quantitative analysis of the number and source of the publications on same-sex harassment confirms one of the research findings made in the previous chapter devoted to the media cases of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaigns and the murder of the French gay police officer. While the coverage of LGBTQ-related topics by specific LGBTQ-catered media outlets is natural and consistent, but there is no consistency and there is no direct interconnection between the political stance of the non-LGBTQ media outlet and its involvement in covering LGBTQ-related topics. There is also no direct connection between the quality of the media outlet in terms of content (e.g. news outlet, tabloid, broadsheet) and the frequency and number of articles devoted to LGBTQ published by that outlet.

Thus, among the mainstream non-LGBTQ outlets covering Davletgil’deev’s coming-out are the anti-Kremlin internet channel *Dozhd’* and internet radio *svoboda.org*, the liberally biased news and entertainment portal *meduza.io*, the neutral broadsheet *Kommersant*, and the pro-Kremlin tabloid-like news and entertainment portal *life.ru*. Since the only outlet among the monitored ones that included Markov’s story into its discursive narrative is the oppositional TV channel *Dozhd’*, a hasty conclusion could be made that the outlet’s rationale behind this coverage was propelled by the fact that the victim of the harassment is part of the pro-Kremlin political elite, i.e. that the objective of this media coverage was to somehow

mar the elite. However, when keyword search was conducted between 24 and 31 March 2018 for the names of Markov and Davletgil'deev, it returned links to publications by the newspaper tabloid *Moskovsky Komsomolets* that published two references to Davletgil'deev's coming-out (on 22 and 23 March) and a news bite on Markov's confession on 24 March.⁸⁸

The result of this keyword search further proves that the interest in and readiness to cover LGBTQ-issues is not explicitly defined by the media outlet's political position. The newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets* was not among the list of the media outlets selected for day-by-day monitoring and data sampling, therefore I decided not to include the three *Moskovsky Komsomolets* publications on same-sex harassment into the bulk of texts for an in-depth analysis. These publications are quoted to provide a background for the analysis. Thus, the following part of the chapter is devoted to a critical discourse analysis of the twelve publications on the coming-outs of the two victims of same-sex harassment.

The first point I look at in the analysis of each of the publication is whether the media text includes in any form the direct speech of the same-sex harassment victim, and if it does, in what form, e.g. whether there is a direct quote or an indirect retelling of the victim's narrative, whether that narrative is presented in a positive or negative way. This perspective allows me to make conclusions about the significance of the identity of the same-sex harassment victim and his personal interpretation of the events for the discursive value of the media text, i.e. to make conclusions about the inclusion or deletion of the agency of the victim in the harassment narrative. The analysis of what aspects of the victim's confession are reported in the media text (e.g. his feelings, actions, emotions, reminiscences, rationalisation of his experience) allows me to define whether the victim's agency is constructed as a discourse on a private experience, on a political matter, or an intersection of both.

The second point for the analysis is the way in which the media texts presents the position of the same-sex harassment perpetrator, e.g. whether the text contains a comment from Zhirinovskiy or his representative, and if it does, what kind of attitude to that comment the media text conveys. This enables me to compare and contrast the mediations of the male victims of same-sex harassment and that of the men of power accused of harassment, e.g. whether the media text conveys any sympathy towards either of the parties involved.

The third point I look at is the choice of linguistic tools applied in the media text to cover the story: e.g. whether the text uses the Russian word '*domogatel'stva*' (harassment) or the English borrowing '*kharasment*'; how the sexual identity of the same-sex harassment victim is labelled, i.e. whether Davletgil'deev is referred to as 'gay, homosexual, homosexualist' or whether his sexual identity is not mentioned at all. The use of the Russian term as opposed to its equivalent borrowed from English allows me to make conclusions about the extent to which a specific media text channels the views on the sexual harassment scandal as part of the global anti-harassment and women's rights movement.

I begin the Critical Discourse Analysis of the media publications on the homosexual harassment incident with the coverage by *Dozhd'* – the media outlet that produced the highest number of publications on the topic. Since the publications appeared on three consecutive dates – from 22 to 24 March 2018, apart from the analysis points defined above

⁸⁸ Source: 'Pro-Kremlin political scientist Sergei Markov confesses about being a victim of sexual harassment on the part of a high-ranking CPSU member' (*Prokremliovskiy politolog Sergei Markov priznalsia v domogatelstvakh vysokopostavlenogo chlena KPSS*), by *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 24 March 2018, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2018/03/24/prokremliovskiy-politolog-sergey-markov-priznalsya-v-domogatelstvakh-vysokopostavlenogo-chlena-kpss.html>, accessed 24/03/2018

I also identify whether the TV coverage of the case evolved and changed over those three days in terms of mediation of the victims of harassment, if there was a development in the coverage, what it consisted in. Also, since *Dozhd'* is the only of the monitored outlets that included both Davletgil'deev's and Markov's narratives into its coverage, I define whether the media strategies used in mediating those two narratives are similar or different. Although visual images are used to support the analysis, at this stage I do not focus on the visual aspects of the discourse but only look at the linguistically, verbally expressed discursive strategies of mediating NHM in the context of anti-harassment discourses. I move on to the analysis of visual aspects of discursive mediation of homosexual identities in Chapter Four of the thesis.

Dozhd' joined the discourse on the same-sex harassment with the following article of 22 March 2018 published in the section 'News' (*Novosti*): *Nastoiashchego vremeni* journalist accused Vladimir Zhirinovskiy of harassment' (*Zhurnalist Nastoiashchego vremeni obvinil Vladimira Zhirinovskogo v Domogatel'stvakh*).⁸⁹ The opening paragraph of the text contains a hyperlink to Renat's Facebook post as well as a quotation from it:

Nastoiashchee Vremia journalist Renat Davletgil'deev on his Facebook page told about harassment on the part of LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and called for other men to speak about similar cases on the part of people in power. As the journalist wrote, during the interview, the State Duma deputy 'was grabbing [him] by [his] buttocks in such a way that my hands were shaking and I could hardly hold the voice recorder' (*'lapal za zhopu tak chto ruki triaslis' s diktofonom*).

The article then continues with an account of the incident from Davletgil'deev's point of view: the text summarises the journalist's narrative, mentioning the attempt of Zhirinovskiy's bodyguards to forcefully take the journalist to the LDPR corporate sauna. The third paragraph provides a direct quote from Davletgil'deev's post, with the following sentences given in quotation marks:

Yes, I was so young, my knees went wobbly at the thought that I am standing in front of a State Duma deputy, a minister and so on, it seemed I had to treat them with awe (*smotret' im v rot*). Besides, for some reason, before the coming-out it seemed that it was my fault when someone's hand was getting into my pants, and that even a hint to my own homosexuality had to be hidden from everyone at any cost. Even when that hint was someone's harassment against me (*dazhe esli etot namiok byl chuzhim kharasmentom*).

The publication also contains a quote of the sentence in which Davletgil'deev alludes to the big scale of same-sex harassment taking place in the LDPR. Having provided an account of the event from Davletgil'deev's point of view, the article mentions that Zhirinovskiy's representative was contacted for a comment by *Dozhd'* but there was not reply. The article finishes with a reference to the 'Slutsky-gate', linking Davletgil'deev's coming-out narrative to the anti-harassment campaign in the media.

Overall, the publication focuses on the victim's perception and evaluation of the sexual harassment incident: Davletgil'deev's account of the events, in direct speech or provided indirectly as a narrative, takes up over 70% of the publication: it comes up to 193 words of the 271-word article, compared to the 24-word paragraph referring to Zhirinovskiy.

⁸⁹ Source:

https://tvrain.ru/news/zhurnalist_nastojaschego_vremeni_obvinil_vladimira_zhirinovskogo_v_domogatelstvakh-460220/ accessed 22/03/2018

Such a shift in representation demonstrates the general stance of the media outlet regarding the sexual harassment issue: it supports the victim and condemns the perpetrator. Like with the overall 'Slutsky-gate' case where *Dozhd'* openly supported the female journalists, the media outlet reported Davletgil'deev's narrative as unquestionably genuine. The outlet focused on the victim's side of the story and dismissed the responses from the LDPR leadership. Davletgil'deev's narrative was also marked as part of the wider media discourse on 'Slutsky-gate' and the anti-harassment and anti-Duma campaign unfolding in Russian media. These trends were later observed in the other *Dozhd'* publications on the topic: there was more focus on the victim's point of view and Davletgil'deev's story was covered within the wider scope of 'Slutsky-gate'. The text uses both the terms '*domogatel'stva*' and '*kharasment*', although the Russian term is used in the title and the English borrowing – in the quotation from Davletgil'deev's Facebook post. Although the homosexuality of the journalist is not mentioned directly, the reference to his '*kamin-aut*' (coming-out) is provided in the quotation of the journalist's direct speech.

Dozhd' continued the coverage of Davletgil'deev's story on the same day of 22 March 2018. On the evening show 'Here and Now' (*Zdes' i Seichas*), the journalist was interviewed about his confession. His interview was published on the *Dozhd'* website under the title 'This government can go to exactly where Zhirinovskiy grabbed me: *Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist accuses LDPR leader of harassment' (*Rovno tuda etu vlast', za chto menia lapal Zhirinovskiy: Zhurnalist Nastoiashchego vremeni obvinil lidera LDPR v domogatel'stvakh*).⁹⁰

The show 'Here and Now' is defined by the *Dozhd'* editors as the primary and most important news programme of the channel broadcast.⁹¹ The one-hour show is aired at 20:00 every weekday evening and summarises the most significant news of the day. The programme consists of several episodes, each devoted to a certain piece of news.

The show episode devoted to Davletgil'deev's coming-out starts with a reference to his accusations against Zhirinovskiy and immediately, with the first opening sentence, includes this case into the wider discourse on the media boycott against the State Duma and on the Slutsky-gate:

With (*na fone*) the collective boycott of the Duma, *Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist Renat Davletgil'deev accused LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy of sexual harassment (*v seksual'nyh domogatel'stvakh*) and called for the rest of men to speak publicly about harassment on the part of Duma members and government officials. Renat wrote a Facebook post about it. According to his words, Zhirinovskiy's assistants tried to forcefully take him to the 'LDPR corporate sauna'. And as for the party leader, while giving a short interview he was grabbing (Renat) in such a way that (Renat's) hands were shaking holding the microphone.

The show presenter then quoted Davletgil'deev's Facebook post, with the screengrab of the post shown too, and the quoted words highlighted on the screen for the programme viewers (see image 3.6.2).

Image 3.6.2. A screengrab of the *Dozhd'* show 'This government can go to exactly where Zhirinovskiy grabbed me: *Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist accuses LDPR leader of harassment'

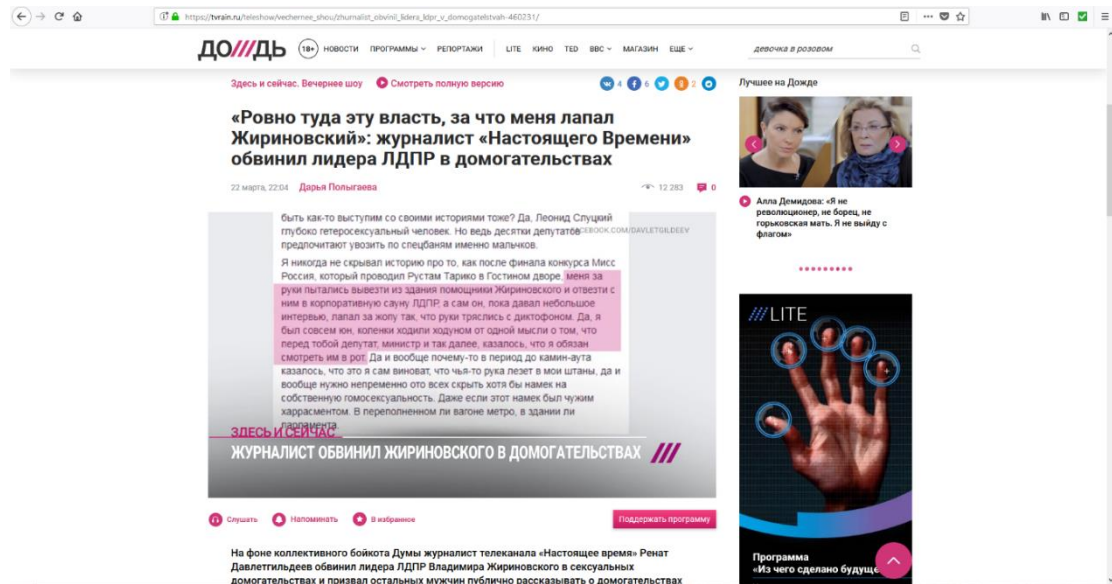
⁹⁰ Source:

https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/vechernee_shou/zhurnalist_obvinil_lidera_ldpr_v_domogatelstvakh-460231/ accessed 22/03/2018

⁹¹ Source: https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/vechernee_shou/ accessed 28/07/2019

Source:

https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/vechernee_shou/zhurnalists_obvinil_lidera_ldpr_v_domogatelstv_ah-460231/, accessed 22/03/2018

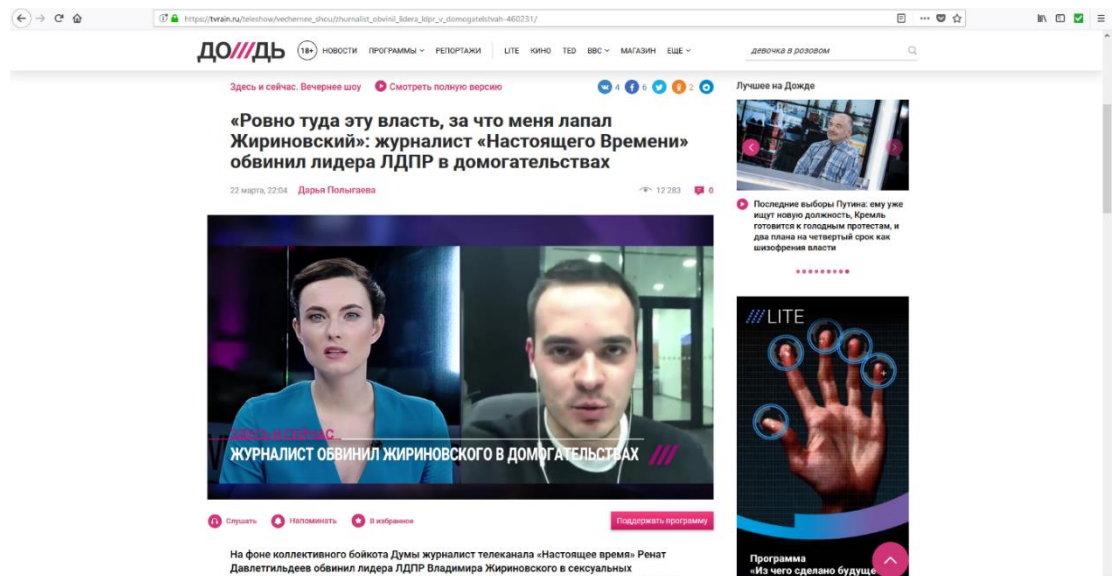


Having provided an account of the incident, the *Dozhd'* show presenter Daria Polygaeva asked the Davletgil'deev several questions in the live broadcast, the interviewee joining the talk on a videochat (see image 3.6.3).

Image 3.6.3. A screengrab of the TV show 'This government can go to exactly where Zhirinovskiy grabbed me: *Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist accuses LDPR leader of harassment'

Source:

https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/vechernee_shou/zhurnalists_obvinil_lidera_ldpr_v_domogatelstv_ah-460231/



The interview was structured so as to reveal how Davletgil'deev's felt about his personal experience of harassment. The questions were also framed in a way that invited the

interviewee to reveal the reasons for disclosing the sexual harassment incident. The interviewee was also encouraged to give his comments on the state of things with LGBTQ-rights in Russia and the outcome he was hoping to achieve with his confession. According to Davletgil'deev, it was the consolidation of journalists (i.e. the support to the female journalists in the 'Slutsky-gate' case and the boycott of the State Duma) that urged him to come forward and to speak out about the incident that happened in 2006 when he was covering the 'Miss Rossiia' beauty contest as part of his internship with the online news outlet *gazeta.ru*. When asked whether he had any concerns regarding the outing of a public figure, the journalist responded he was against outing as a strategy of fighting for LGBTQ-rights equality and explained that he himself did not consider his Facebook post to be an example of outing. In his opinion, since it had been often alluded before that the LDPR leader was homosexual, the Facebook post about Zhirinovskiy as a perpetrator of sexual harassment against a man contained nothing new with regard to the politician's non-heteronormative sexuality. By refusing to classify his confessional post on social media as an example of outing, Davletgil'deev effectively legitimises the rumours about the homosexuality of a major political figure, confirms that they are as valid an evidence of a man's non-heteronormativity as an act of publicly coming out as gay. This reinforces the important vector of politicising the private sphere which drives discourses on sexual harassment and LGBTQ rights alike.

Davletgil'deev also underlined that it was important to reveal to the public that it is not only women who become victims of sexual harassment but men can be harassed, too: thus, the homosexual harassment narratives takes the Slutsky-gate case beyond the borders of gender (not only female but also male victims) and sexuality (not only heterosexual but also non-heterosexual perpetrators). When discussing why he did not report on or disclose the sexual harassment incident earlier, Davletgil'deev explained that prior to publicly coming out as a gay man he found it challenging to talk about homosexuality in general, even when it was a reference to someone else's homosexual orientation. Not only did Davletgil'deev use the interview to dwell on the obstacles preventing male victims of sexual harassment from speaking out but he also raised awareness of gay rights in Russia and the importance of pro-gay rhetoric and LGBTQ-inclusive language in the media.

When the *Dozhd'* presenter mentioned that what complicates Davletgil'deev's story is the overall societal attitudes to 'representatives of non-traditional sexual orientation' (*predstaviteliam netraditsionnoi seksual'noi orientatsii*), the interviewee objected to the use of the term 'non-traditional sexual orientation' explaining that the use of such language does not help Russian LGBTQ communities: 'while our media use epithets such as "non-traditional" nothing will change' (*poka u nas v SMI zvuchat takie epitety kak 'netraditsionnyi', u nas nichego ne pomeniaetsia*). This remark by Davletgil'deev places the journalist's narrative within the borders of the LGBTQ-rights discourse, i.e. it brings together the feminist anti-harassment agenda and the anti-homophobic LGBTQ activist agenda. Putting blame on the media for the ongoing violence and harassment against non-heteronormative men, Davletgil'deev frames the homosexual harassment case as discourse on non-heteronormative victimhood, where the compassion and sympathy towards the victim can potentially lead to the change in institutional policies regarding the discriminated individuals.

The 22 March publications both place the victim's perspective in the centre of the narrative of the homosexual harassment. In the interview with the victim, the *Dozhd'* presenter invited Davletgil'deev not only to speak openly and sincerely about his experience of sexual harassment but also to share his opinion on coming to terms with one's homosexuality, on the anti-harassment movement, as well as on the consolidation of media

professionals against the State Duma. Such an approach to the coverage of a homosexual harassment narrative creates a positive, sympathetic media portrayal of a non-heteronormative man. The use of such terms as 'outing', 'sexual orientation', 'homosexual harassment' and 'non-traditional sexual orientation' in the discussion of the sexual harassment incident includes the *Dozhd'* publications into the discourse on LGBTQ rights, whereas the use of the term '*kharasment*' by Davletgil'deev introduces references to the global anti-harassment feminist discourse. In other words, these two media texts illustrate how the co-existence of two media discourses (discourses on LGBTQ rights and feminism) prompts a complex mediation of a homosexual identity.

Introducing a different line of the discourses around the 'Slutsky-gate' case, the media boycott and the homosexual harassment accusations by Davletgil'deev, on the next day of 23 March 2018, the evening show 'Here and Now' included a coverage of pickets taking place outside of the State Duma in support of Zhirinovskiy and against the media participating in the anti-harassment campaign: 'Pickets against 'deceitful media' taking place outside of State Duma' ('*U Gosdumy proshli pikety protiv "Izhiviyh SMI"*').⁹² The programme reported on the individual pickets (*odinochnye pikety*) and contained a brief interview with one of the picketers in support of Zhirinovskiy and Slutskiy, who, according to the picketers, were both wrongfully accused of harassment. By introducing an alternative point of view which channels the anti-feminist perspective of the anti-harassment scandal, the media outlet aims to present its coverage of the events as objective and to some extent impartial.

Confirming its consistent involvement in developing media discourses on NHM in particular and LGBTQ-rights in general, on 24 March 2018 *Dozhd'* published the narrative of another male victim of homosexual harassment. The publication 'Political scientist Sergei Markov tells about sexual harassment from a high ranking CPSU member' (*Politolog Sergej Markov rasskazal o domogatel'stvakh vysokopostavlenogo chlena KPSS*) was devoted to the confession made by Markov about his experience of sexual harassment.⁹³ The structure of the article replicates the publications on the incident with the LDPR leader: it opens with a reference to the interview in which Markov shared his experience and then summarises Markov's narrative in the form a mix of direct quotes and indirect speech, linking his confession to the wider anti-harassment campaign and focusing a lot on his perception of the event. The opening paragraph explains that in Markov's case the perpetrator of sexual harassment (*domogatel'stva*) was a high-ranking member of the CPSU. The media outlet's use of the same discursive strategies when mediating sexual harassment victims' narratives by a heteronormative man and by an openly gay man demonstrates that media discourses on NHM do not exist or develop in isolation from other public media discourses, but co-exist and intersect with other wider diverse discourses on sex, gender and sexuality.

In line with the discursive strategies of a confessional, coming-out narrative of a sexual harassment victim, the article about Markov's experience provides a detailed account of how the incident happened, narrated from the perspective of the victim. The political scientist recollects that the incident happened in the summer of the year when he returned from the army and entered the university. He was invited to the dacha⁹⁴ of the CPSU member on the pretext of looking at classified political paperwork. However, instead of a discussion on history, the man tried to 'get into bed with him'. In the same way as the media texts on

⁹² https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/here_and_now/u_gosdumy_proshli_pikety_protiv_izhiviyh_smi-460297/ accessed 23 March 2018

⁹³ https://tvrain.ru/news/politolog_sergej_markov-460369/ accessed 24 March 2018

⁹⁴ A dacha is a country house used by Russian people as a summer residence or for holidaying.

the incident between Zhirinovskiy and the Davletgil'deev revealed the details of the perpetrators' actions without any censoring of sexual references, the narrative about the high-rank communist attempting to assault the young aspiring Komsomol member clearly states what the perpetrator's actions were aimed at. Apart from adding factual credibility to the narrative, the introduction of the themes of Soviet masculinity (and in the context of criminalisation of homosexuality in the USSR – by default traditional masculinity) takes the sexual harassment media case beyond the current political agenda related to the presidential campaign or women's rights. It also introduces into the discourse a complex intersection of private and political: Markov's narrative shows how an invitation to meet up and talk about politics can be used as a pretext to lure the potential victim of homosexual rape into a private space of the perpetrator, while in the circumstances of both voluntary and involuntary homosexual acts classified as crime and penalised the act of the perpetrator's disclosing his homosexual orientation becomes political.

Another important similarity between the coverage on Davletgil'deev's and Markov's narratives is in the portrayal of the feelings and emotions of the victims after the sexual harassment incident. The article quotes Markov's direct speech sharing how he felt after the attack: "I understand the victims of sexual harassment (*seksual'nykh domogatel'stv*) who feel too shocked and to disgusted to make their stories public. I felt the same way: that night I locked myself in my room, could not sleep, paralysed with shock and fear", - reported Markov." The article then quotes Markov stating in the interview to the media outlet '*The Daily Beast*' that the phenomenon of government officials abusing their power is much more widespread in Russia than in the West.' Although this comment concerns not only sexual harassment but the problem of abusing power in general, the very opposition between Russia and the West adds an important discursive point to this publication. With the whole anti-harassment campaign having started as a response to the global #MeToo movement and with comparisons being made between Slutsky and Weinstein, quoting this comment by Markov implies that there are a lot more untold stories of sexual harassment performed by Russian political elites and that the anti-harassment movement has a lot of potential in Russia.

To conclude, the four *Dozhd'* publications analysed above demonstrate the outlet's use of the following set of strategies when portraying the male victims of harassment and tackling the topic of homosexuality. When conveying the victims' narratives, whether through an interview, summarising their confession or quoting their direct speech, *Dozhd'* chooses to represent their narratives as reliable, trustworthy and genuine. The publications also put the victim's emotions in the focus of the discourse: in the case of Davletgil'deev, the outlet interviews the victim thus giving him an opportunity to share how he feels about his own experience as well as about the unfolding 'Slutsky-gate' harassment scandal; in the case of Sergei Markov the outlet chooses the quotes from Markov's original interview to the *Daily Beast* which contain the man's memories of the distress he experienced after being assaulted. The portrayals of the victims as by default trustworthy and the compassionate, sympathetic reproduction of the victims' narratives clearly puts *Dozhd'* on the pro-feminist spectrum of the sexual harassment (#MeToo) discourse that invariably supports the victim of a sexual assault. Although the support of the victim does not exclude attempts at objectivity and though the outlet does present the views of Zhirinovskiy's and Slutsky's supporters (i.e. the anti-feminist side of the discourse), the overall focus of the outlet's coverage is consistent with its overall discursive take on the 'Slutsky-gate' case.

Dozhd' portrays the male victims of homosexual harassment in the same supportive and sympathetic light as it portrays the female victims of heterosexual harassment: in other

words, there is no difference or opposition in the discursive attitudes to homosexual and heterosexual harassment on the part of the outlet. This strategy of portraying male victims of harassment through highlighting the credibility of their narratives and through showing empathy to their experiences establishes a potential positive media visibility for non-heteronormative male subjects (Santos 2013: 132).

However, although the pro-feminist nature of *Dozhd'* publications on the case implies no discursive differences in covering homosexual and heterosexual harassment, the coverage cannot be interpreted as completely pro-LGBTQ: in none of the analysed publications the homosexual victim of sexual harassment is directly labelled as homosexual or gay. In Davletgil'deev's case it is the journalist's own confession, his own coming-out that discloses him as a gay man, and in Markov's case the sexual orientation of the harassment victim or the perpetrator of harassment (either heteronormative or non-heteronormative) is not mentioned at all. Instead, the sexual harassment victim's feelings, emotions, actions, and opinions are in the focus of those thematic publications. Such an approach to the issue of homosexuality is in line with the findings made in the previous chapter with regard to the *Dozhd'*s stance on LGBTQ rights or homosexuality: for this oppositional TV channel, LGBTQ issues only become part of the agenda when LGBTQ themes emerge as part of the anti-Kremlin discourse.

From the point of view of the linguistic tools of constructing the discourse on '*kharasment'*', all the four *Dozhd'* publications tend to use the Russian term '*domogatel'stva'*' and only mention the English borrowing '*kharasment'*' when quoting the words of Davletgil'deev. This preference for the use of the Russian term as opposed to the English borrowing, on the one hand, allows the inclusion of the discourse on same-sex sexual harassment into a wider discussion on harassment in general as performed by people in power. On the other hand, it demonstrates how the Russian media outlet nationalises the western *#MeToo* agenda at the same time taking the discourse on LGBTQ issues beyond the activist and civil rights framework. Thus, the discourse on the 'Slutsky-gate' case serves as an example of how a particular use of linguistic tools reflects the multiplicity of multi-faceted media discourses around sexual harassment.

What complicates this finding is that the outlet's support of the male victims of sexual harassment is limited by the linguistic constraints: for example, in the video interview with Davletgil'deev, homosexual men are referred to as 'representatives of non-traditional sexual orientation' (*predstaviteli netraditsionnoi seksual'noi orientatsii*), i.e. the TV channel uses and reinforces the term applied to NHM in legal and political discourses sustained by the Kremlin in a context which does not really require such a usage. This confirms the findings presented in Chapter Two regarding the absence of an interconnection between the media outlet's political stance and its choice of lexical tool of referring to non-heteronormative sexuality. Regardless of the context of media cases on NHM (presidential elections of 2018, human rights violation in 2017), *Dozhd'* relies on the same strategies of naming and reference (see section 2.3 of Chapter Two).

To identify the discursive strategies of construction of homosexual harassment victims' narrative applied by the internet radio *svoboda.org*, I analysed three publications on that media event. The first one appeared on 22 March 2018 under the title '*Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist accuses Zhirinovskiy of harassment' (*Zhurnalist Nastoiashchego vremeni obvinil Zhirinovskogo v kharasmente*) (see image 3.6.4). On the following day the article was amended: a comment of Zhirinovskiy's son, Igor' Levedev, was added in which he said he was ready to physically attack the journalist for the accusations against his father and in which he

expressed his discontent at the wave of sexual harassment accusations made by journalists against State Duma deputies. The amended article was published on the same weblink under the title 'Zhirinovskiy's son ready to "punch the face" of the journalist for the accusation against the leader of LDPR' (*'Syn Zhirinovskogo gotov "dat' v mordu" zhurnalistu za obvinenie lidera LDPR'*), with the same lead image showing a portrait of Devletgil' deev against a black background (see image 3.6.5; for the analysis of the use of visual imagery in the *svoboda.org* coverage of the case see section 2 of thesis chapter 4).

Image 3.6.4. A screengrab of the publication '*Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist accuses Zhirinovskiy of harassment'

Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29115632.html>, accessed 22/03/2018

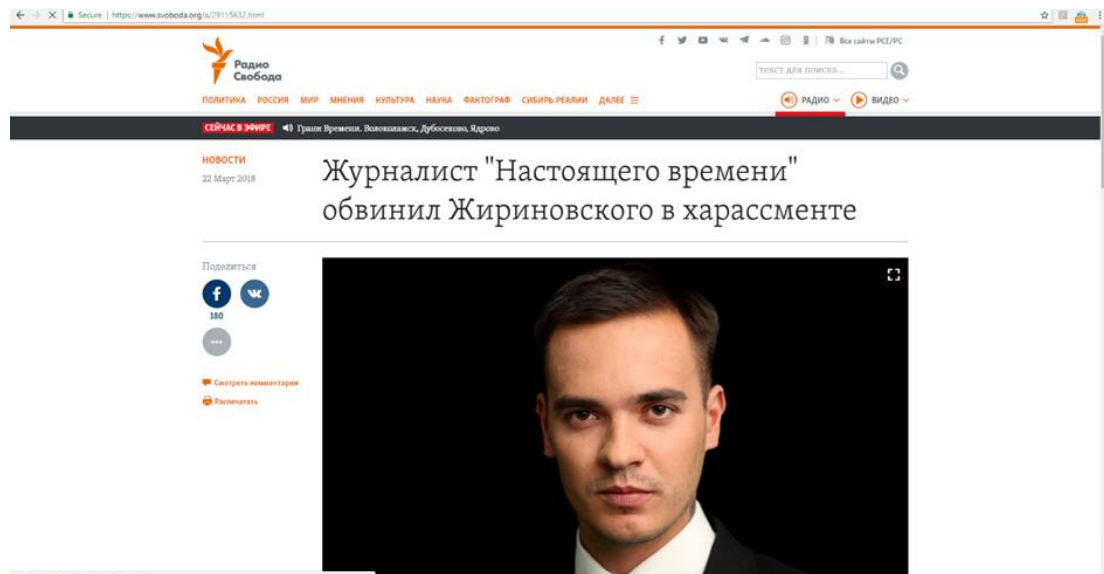
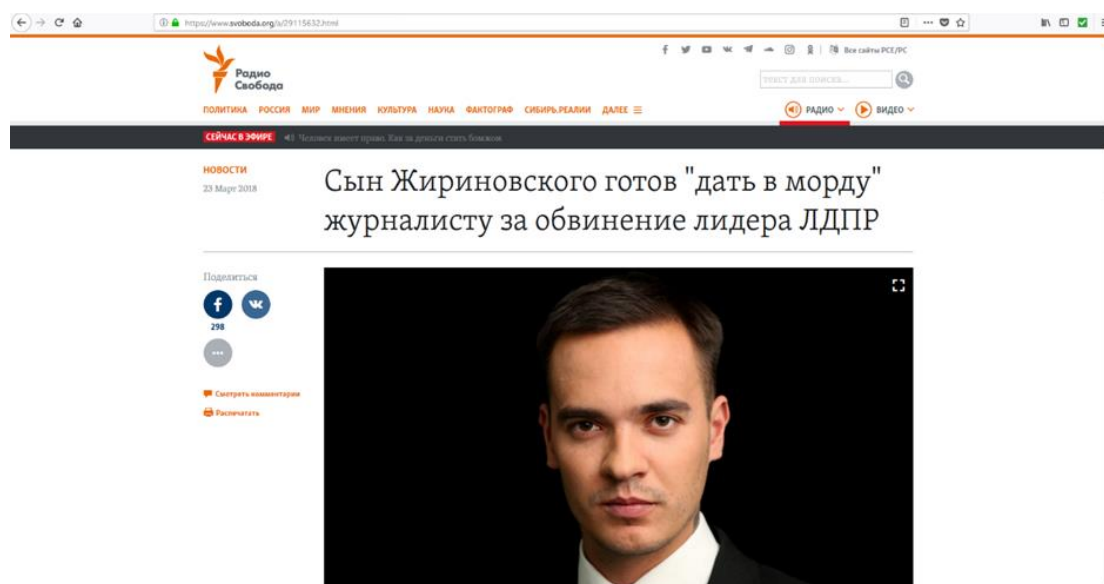


Image 3.6.5. Screengrab of the publication 'Zhirinovskiy's son ready to "punch the face" of the journalist for the accusation against the leader of LDPR'

Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29115632.html>, accessed 23/03/2018



Apart from the amendment with the inclusion of the comment by Igor' Lebedev, the content of the two articles is identical, with the earlier version not available online as a

separate text anymore. This strategy of amending the same text with an extended comment from the LDPR leadership rather than publishing a new text informing of the LDPR reaction to the accusations of sexual harassment against Zhirinovskiy shifts the discursive focus of the *svoboda.org* coverage from the victim's perspective to the response of the representatives of political elites, people in power, i.e. the outlet frames the confessional act of Davletgil'deev as part of the political discourses of power and not as a solely private matter.

Applying only reported, indirect speech as a tool of rendering the events around the homosexual harassment allegations, the publication highlights the fact that the incident happened before Davletgil'deev 'spoke publicly about his non-traditional sexual orientation' (*otrkrtyto rasskazal o svoei netraditsionnoi seksual'noi orientatsii*). By omitting the direct speech of Davletgil'deev and using a rendered account instead, the publication makes a discursive shift from a confessional narrative aimed at evoking compassion for the victim towards a factual report on serious allegations about a figure of authority. Such a reduction of the agency of the harassment victim reinforces the framing of discourses around 'Slutsky-gate' as discourses of power and political forces.

After that, both the texts describe the reaction to the accusations on the part of Zhirinovskiy's son Igor' Lebedev, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma. The unamended article that was published on 22 March 2018 only refers to a quote from a conversation between Lebedev and a *Nastoiashchee Vremia* correspondent, when Lebedev refused to comment on the incident: "I do not wish to talk to you. Why would I discuss with you your gay colleague – have I fallen that low? (*Ne khochu s vami govorit'. Chto ia budu obsuzhdat' s vami vashego kollegu-geia – ia chto, tak nizko pal?*)." The amended text of 23 March 2018 also contains a quote from Lebedev's interview to the information agency TASS, in which Lebedev branded Davletgil'deev's accusations as libel and offence, and declared that he was ready to 'punch on the face that representative of a random media resource' (*'dat' v mordu predstavitelii neponiatnogot informatsionnogo resursa*'). The amended *svoboda.org* publication also quotes Lebedev stating that the Russian parliament must take measures against the journalists who have started publicly speaking out about harassment on the part of politicians.

The evidence of the discursive shifts made in the amended version of the 22 March article demonstrates the methodological advantages of daily monitoring for media data sampling and media discourse analysis. What might be a minute change from the perspective of a media producer (the fact that the media outlet kept the same page for the updated publication proves that both the versions were perceived as more or less the same media text) brings about a change in the development of the discourse. This evidence also confirms the overall findings of this thesis which demonstrate how Russian media discourses on sexuality are always in the making, and for that reason a qualitative approach with media sampling performed through a rigorous minute recording and capturing is vital for analysing those media discourses.

The 22 and 23 March publications also provide a paragraph with background facts on the Slutsky-gate, summarising the case and quoting Slutsky branding the accusations as 'nonsense' ('bred'). Both the articles finish with an explanation that the TV channel *Nastoiashchee Vremia* is a joint project of the media corporation 'Radio Svoboda' and of 'The Voice of America' and that the mission of the channel is to provide Russian speaking audience across the globe with an access to objective information.

The ‘duplicate’ publications by *svoboda.org* analysed above demonstrate the use of writing up (or adding) in the coverage of the media case. With the original publication of 22 March already introducing extensive comments by Slutsky and Zhirinovskiy’s son on sexual harassment accusations against the LDPR members, the content added on 23 March shifts the focus further from the victim’s perspective to the perpetrator’s view of the situation. The addition of Igor’ Lebedev’s statement about him being ready to use physical violence against Davletgil’deev contributes to the portrayal of a weak non-heteronormative victim as opposed to the perpetrator’s representative. By depicting Lebedev as an embodiment of ‘macho’, strong, active masculinity and Davletgil’deev as a vulnerable, supposedly passive man *svoboda.org* resorts to the strategy of victimisation – a strategy that is considered as harmful in media representations of discriminated social groups such as gay men (Javaid 2017; Wiedlack 2017).

Another reference to Davletgil’deev’s accusations against Zhirinovskiy was made in a 29 March 2018 publication by *svoboda.org* devoted to the problem of tolerance and acceptance of widespread sexual harassment in contemporary Russian society: “‘Somewhere at the edge of the norm”. Why sexual harassment is acceptable in Russia’ (*Gde-to na grani normy. Pochemu v Rossii dopustimy seksual’nye domogatel’sstva*).⁹⁵ The article represents a full dossier on the situation with harassment in Russia rather than a narrative of a particular harassment case, with quotes from expert interviews, statistical data and analysis of the gender norms and attitudes to sex, consent and borders in Russian society.⁹⁶ The primary strategy applied by throughout this *svoboda.org* publication is that of evidencing: trustworthy experts from various fields and walks in life are invited to provide objective and reliable evidence of how serious the problem of harassment is in Russia, as well as to offer explanations to why the problem of sexual harassment tends to be either ignored or dismissed as significant by Russian society and in particular by people in power. This strategy aims to increase the credibility of the anti-harassment message conveyed throughout the

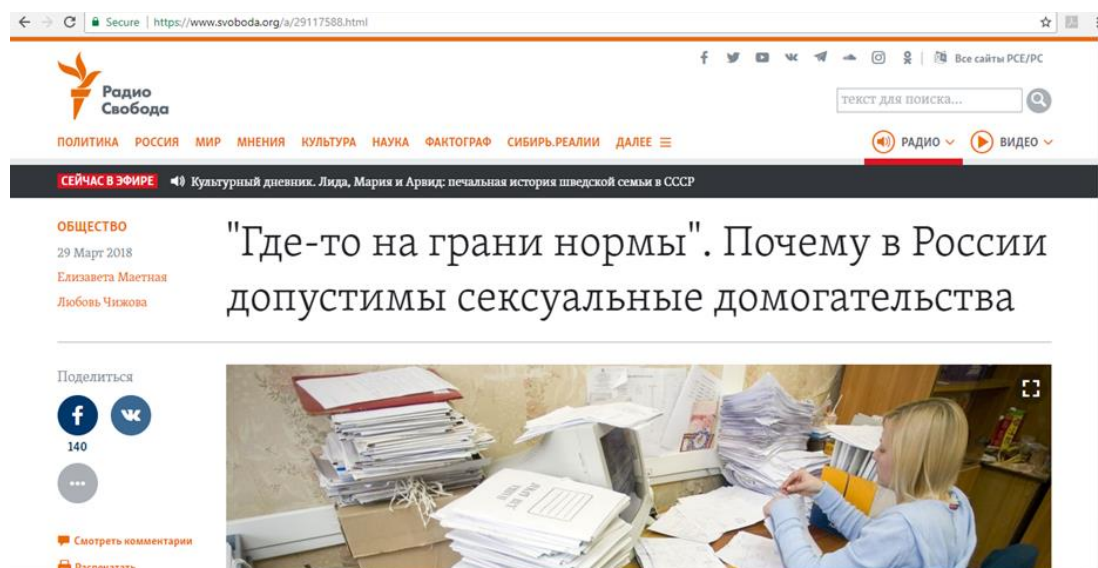
⁹⁵ <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29117588.html> accessed 29/03/2018

⁹⁶ The article provides a variety of evidence, facts, and expert advice to support the anti-harassment argument and to raise awareness about the scale of the problem. Accounts of several Russian female victims of sexual harassment in the workplace are accompanied by explanations of differences in Russian and western legislations on harassment, as well as by examples of real sexual harassment cases where the perpetrators were tried in court and punished. The article also presents available statistical data on harassment complaints submitted across various professions and age groups in Russia, with the underlined conclusion that the real figures of unreported cases of harassment must be much higher than the data shows. When analysing the consequences of the Slutsky-gate case for Russian society, the publication quotes ten individuals – representatives of various organisations and experts in various fields. For example, lawyer Anna Rivina, creator of the project ‘No To Violence’ (*Nasiliu net*), states that the Slutsky case must start a serious discussion on harassment as part of gender-based violence. Professor Anna Temkina, sociologist and gender studies scholar, explains that blurred borders and gender inequality originate from the 1990s when, on the one hand, there appeared sexual freedom, and on the other, the women’s primary role remained that of the object of men’s desire, which many women found flattering. Deputy Director of Amnesty International for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Anna Kirey, states that the media boycott of the State Duma is an important albeit only initial step on the way to realising how significant this problem is. The opinions of journalism students, future media professionals, are also mentioned, with the quote of Maria Menshikova, representative of the activist group of the Moscow State University who demanded that the rector of the MSU Vladimir Sadovnichiy fires State Duma deputy Slutsky from his position of the Chairman of the Department of Political Science of MSU. Olga Zdravomyslova, sociologist and gender studies scholar explains that the reason for the fact that sexual harassment is viewed as acceptable in Russian society lies in the patriarchal gender norms and in the view that this is part of the ‘sexual game’ (*seksual’naia igra*), part of flirting and courtship.

publication. The key idea of the publication – that it is high time the issue of sexual harassment in Russia was taken seriously and was addressed as an urgent social issues – is supported by the lead image featuring piles of paperwork that can be interpreted as legal documents, e.g. court files on sexual harassment complaints (see image 3.6.6.). The dossier does not address the issue of same-sex harassment as an aspect of the problem, which confirms the outlet's general interest not in victims' confessional narratives and private experiences but in the political meaning of discourses around harassment.

Image 3.6.6. A screengrab of the lead image of the publication “‘Somewhere at the edge of the norm’. Why sexual harassment is acceptable in Russia’

Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29117588.html>, accessed 29/03/2018



Apart from the evidence and opinions of various experts, the article also provides a summary of the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case and the media boycott of the State Duma. The article mentions the sexual harassment accusations against Zhirinovskiy from Davletgil’deev and a reference to the experience of theatre critic Viacheslav Shadronov (see image 3.6.7).⁹⁷

The closing section of the publication goes under the subheading ‘To please Putin’ (*V ugodu Putinu*). The idiom in the Russian original version, ‘в угоду’ (*v ugodu*), can be translated as ‘to please, to suit someone; for someone’s sake, for the benefit of someone’, and the overall message of the section is that all the ongoing attempts to introduce new helpful legislation on sexual harassment, albeit being supported by numerous pro-feminist movements, keep being stopped and sabotaged by anti-feminist activists and political organisations. Lawyer Liudmila Aivar, leader of the movement ‘For Women’s Rights’ (*Za prava zhenshchin*), and lawyer Maria Bast, Head of Association of Lawyers for Human Rights, refer to the 2015 initiative to introduce such legislation and explain that among those opposing anti-harassment legislation were nationalist and fascist groups; far-right activists propagating the so-called ‘Russian world’ (*russkii mir*); Orthodox activists promoting ‘traditional values’. Numerous petitions against the proposed legislation were submitted to President Putin, and

⁹⁷ Shadronov wrote about the experience of being the victim of harassment from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy on his *LiveJournal* page, but this narrative did not receive a response in the media: the observed media outlets did not mention this post in March 2018 and keyword search for this story did not return links to media texts.

at the final stage the legislative initiative was blocked in the State Duma by the LDPR faction. Maria Bast is also quoted blaming Putin's outdated social policies for the high rate of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, her quotes being supported with an image featuring President Putin and Margarita Simonian, Editor-in-Chief of Russian TV channel *RT* (see image 3.6.8):

According to Bast's opinion, "our society has been long ready for improving Russian legislation, and the law criminalising sexual harassment could have been passed long ago if laws criminalising domestic violence had been passed too etc., if it wasn't stopped forcefully for the sake of the medieval political course of Putin (*iesli by iego ne tormozili iskusstvenno v ugodu srednevekovomu politicheskomu kursu Putina*). We must differentiate between the real public opinion and the one formed artificially by the media outlets controlled by Putin. Those are different opinions.

The fact that the closing section of the extensive dossier on sexual harassment finishes with a reference to Putin's policies highlights the overall stance of the outlet on the issues of sex, sexuality, and gender. It also confirms the findings made in Chapter 2: namely, that for *svoboda.org* the issues of sex, gender and sexuality present an interest primarily as part of the anti-Kremlin discourse which the oppositional outlet consistently promotes. When pro-feminist anti-harassment narratives discursively merge with anti-Kremlin oppositional rhetoric, they receive full support on the part of the oppositional outlet.

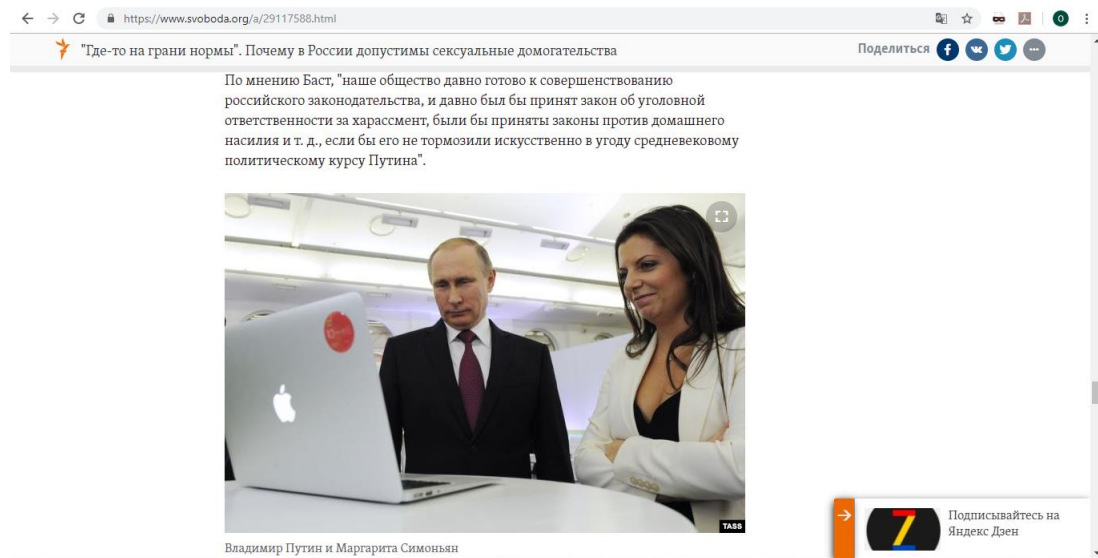
Image 3.6.7. A screengrab of the publication "'Somewhere at the edge of the norm". Why sexual harassment is acceptable in Russia' featuring a portrait of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy

Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29117588.html>, accessed 29/03/2018

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29117588.html>. The page title is "Где-то на грани нормы". Почему в России допустимы сексуальные домогательства". The main text of the article reads: "Тема сексуальных домогательств получила новое развитие после того, как три журналистки обвинили в непристойном поведении депутата от ЛДПР Леонида Слуцкого, а комиссия по этике Госдумы не нашла нарушений в его действиях, предложив журналисткам обратиться в правоохранительные органы. Сам же Слуцкий назвал выдвинутые против обвинения "бредом". В ответ на решение думской комиссии почти три десятка российских СМИ отказались работать в парламенте. Чуть позже журналист телеканала "Настоящее время" Ренат Давлетгильдеев обвинил в домогательствах главу фракции ЛДПР Владимира Жириновского. О домогательствах Жириновского в своем ЖЖ позднее написал театральный критик Слава Шадронов." Below the text is a portrait of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. On the right side, there is a list of related articles and a "СИБИРЬ РЕАЛИИ" banner with a "Подписывайтесь на Яндекс Дзен" button.

Image 3.6.8. A screengrab of the publication “‘Somewhere at the edge of the norm’”. Why sexual harassment is acceptable in Russia’ featuring Vladimir Putin and Margarita Simonian

Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29117588.html>, accessed 29/03/2018



This characteristic feature of the *svoboda.org* approach to the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case predefines the outlet’s representation of the same-sex harassment narrative, which is mediated primarily as part of the political discourse. Even though, unlike *Dozhd’* articles, the *svoboda.org* publications of 22 and 23 March do not omit Davletgil’deev’s homosexuality but directly refer to the victim’s ‘non-traditional sexual orientation’ and directly label him as ‘gay’, the LGBTQ-inclusive non-homophobic term ‘gay’ is used in the context of a highly homophobic quote from Lebedev’s comment: “Why would I discuss with you your gay colleague – have I fallen that low?”. Overall, the two publications thematically devoted to Davletgil’deev’s confession offer more focus on the comments from Zhirinovskiy’s son at the expense of the mediation of the victim’s perspective, and coupled with the portrayals of Davletgil’deev as the a priori vulnerable, weaker party in the conflict, this creates the effect of victimisation of the gay man rather than the effect of empathising with the victim of the harassment.

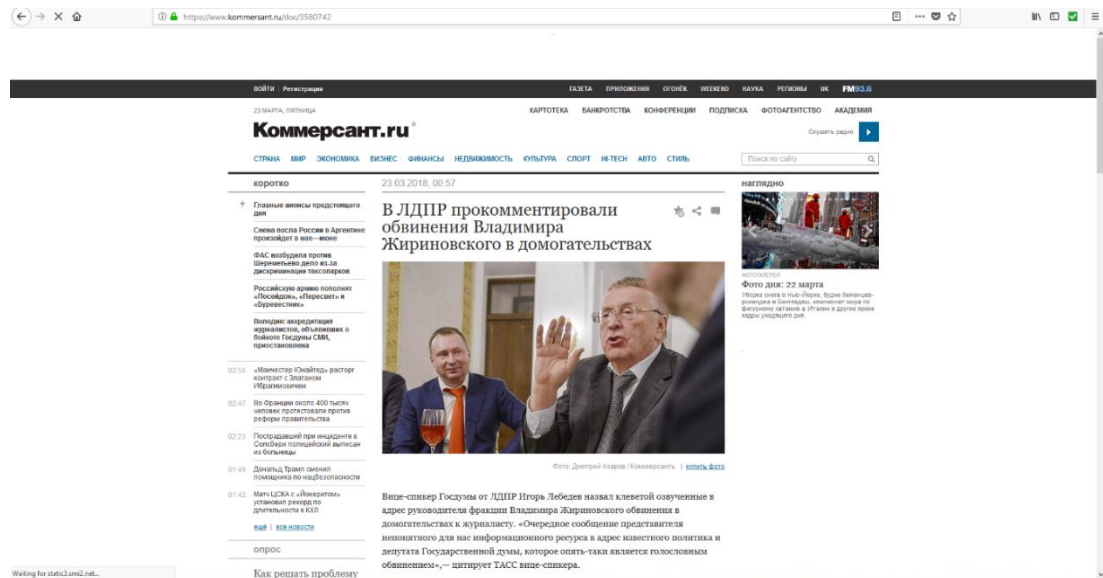
The newspaper *Kommersant* devoted one publication to the same-sex harassment narrative. On 23 March 2018 the outlet published an article under the title ‘LDPR comments on the accusations of sexual harassment against Zhirinovskiy’ (*V LDPR prokomentirovali obvineniia Vladimira Zhirinovskogo v domogatel’stvakh*). The title of the publication puts focus not on the experience of the sexual harassment victim but on the perspective of the political actors involved in the incident. This is enhanced by the lead image of the article featuring a close-up portrait of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy with his son Igor’ Lebedev sitting near him (see image 3.6.9).

The opening paragraph of the *Kommersant* publication contains a summary of and a direct speech quote from Lebedev’s interview by the media agency TASS, in which Zhirinovskiy’s son branded Davletgil’deev’s accusations as libel. The second paragraph of the article contains a quote of Lebedev’s words about his readiness to physically attack the *Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist: “Igor’ Lebedev noted that he considers the accusations as ‘an offence against the whole faction’: ‘If he told this to me in the street in the backyard, I

would punch him in the face without any discussions’ (*ia by dal emu v mordu srazu i bez razgovorov*)”.

Image 3.6.9. A screengrab of the publication ‘LDPR comments on the accusations of sexual harassment against Zhirinovskiy’ featuring Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and his son Igor’ Lebedev

Source: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3580742>, accessed 23/03/2018



The reference to the journalist’s version of events appears only in the third paragraph of the text: the publication quotes Davletgil’deev’s Facebook post and provides a brief description of the incident that happened in 2006. The publication finishes with a paragraph about the media boycott of the State Duma and summarising the Slutsky-gate media case.

The way in which *Kommersant* approached the portrayal of the same-sex harassment issue confirms the observations made earlier in the thesis: although not holding an anti-LGBTQ position and aiming to maintain neutrality when portraying LGBTQ individuals and LGBTQ-related themes, the outlet does not have its own LGBTQ agenda and only joins LGBTQ-related media discourses when there is a socio-political event to respond to, such as an official statement made by a politician. Thus, the 23 March publication devoted to sexual harassment accusations against Zhirinovskiy only briefly mentions the actual Facebook post where the accusations were made but provides a detailed account of the response to those accusations on the part of the LDPR. Placing the official comments by the LDPR leadership in the focus of the harassment-related publication is consistent with the outlet’s overall speciality and own agenda, i.e. with *Kommersant* catering primarily to businesspeople interested in political and economic events. However, this discursive shift and the contrast between the passive vulnerable image of the victim and the machist image of the perpetrator’s representative can be read as the discursive strategy of victimisation. ⁹⁸ When addressing the issue of the

⁹⁸ This article by *Kommersant* was amongst the media texts used while working with focus groups in my independent research project on the LGBTQ audiences’ perceptions of Russian media portrayals of LGBTQ people. The research was conducted in the Russian cities of Saint Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod in September 2018, and the focus group members were comprised of LGBTQ individuals, activists and non-activists. Interestingly, both the activist and non-activist audiences agreed that the focus of the *Kommersant* article shifts too much towards the figure of Zhirinovskiy and allows too little space for the account of events from the victim’s point of view, which was interpreted by all the

victim's homosexuality, *Kommersant* resorts to the strategy of omission, i.e. 'homosexual invisibility': there is no mention of Davletgil'deev's coming-out, his sexual orientation, or the internalised homophobia which kept him (and, according to his Facebook post, other victims of same-sex sexual harassment) from disclosing the sexual harassment incident earlier. Notably, the *Kommersant* publication does not use the borrowed term '*kharasment*' at all, with the Russian term '*domogatel'stva*' used exclusively throughout the article, i.e. the *Kommersant* publication places the homosexual harassment narrative not within the wider pro-feminist discourse on anti-harassment campaigns but within the local, domestic political discourse.

The news and entertainment portal *meduza.io* published one media text devoted to Davletgil'deev's confession within the monitored period: on 22 March 2018 the outlet published an article under the title '*Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist calls on men to speak out about harassment on the part of government officials and deputies' ('*Zhurnalists Nastoiashchego vremeni prizval muzhchin rasskazat' o domogatel'stvakh so storony chinovnikov i deputatov*'; see image 3.6.10).

Image 3.6.10. A screengrab of the publication '*Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist calls on men to speak out about harassment on the part of government officials and deputies'

Source: <https://meduza.io/news/2018/03/22/zhurnalists-nastoyaschego-vremeni-prizval-muzhchin-rasskazat-o-domogatel'stvakh-so-storony-chinovnikov-i-deputatov>, accessed 22/03/2018

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying an article on the Meduza website. The article title is 'Журналист «Настоящего времени» призвал мужчин рассказать о домогательствах со стороны чиновников и депутатов'. The author is identified as Ренат Давлетгильдеев, dated 15:29, 22 марта 2018. The article text discusses the journalist's call for men to speak out about harassment by officials and deputies, mentioning a specific case involving a deputy and a journalist's personal experience. A yellow callout box contains an update about a politician's reaction. An advertisement for a car is visible on the right side of the page.

participants as a mildly homophobic attitude. It was also noted by the focus groups that the quote about Igor' Lebedev being ready to punch Davletgil'deev's face creates a macho image of the politician, which contributes to an unfavourable mediation of the gay man. At the same time, the interview with a *Kommersant* journalist conducted as part of another independent pilot research project on views of Russian media professionals on the anti-gay-propaganda law revealed that the *Kommersant* takes pride in the neutrality of the outlet in portraying sensitive issues such as LGBTQ-related agenda, and that the fact that *Kommersant* needs an official, political stimulus to cover a certain topic is explained by the specific nature of the media outlet and its target audience – business people primarily interested in political and economic events. The interpretation of the *Kommersant* publication as homophobic by the LGBTQ audiences demonstrates the gap between what is considered homophobic and tolerant among LGBTQ communities and among media professionals.

Below the title of all *meduza.io* media texts, together with the date and time of publication, there is always a link to the original source of the material, marked as 'reliable' or 'unreliable'. Under the title of the 22 March publication 'Renat Davletgil'deev' is quoted as a 'reliable source' of the original material. The opening paragraph of the article provides a summary of Davletgil'deev's Facebook post, mentioning that the journalist is calling for other male victims of sexual harassment by officials and deputies to come forward. The main body of the article consists of a summary of the incident, with two direct quotes from Davletgil'deev's post. One quote mentioned the corporate sauna where Zhirinovsky's assistants were trying to take Davletgil'deev, and the other quote referred to Zhirinovsky's actions: "grabbed my buttocks so that my hands were shaking holding the voice recorder". The closing paragraph of this short publication contains a reference to the journalist's sexual identity:

The journalist underlines that at that time he had not yet come out (*eshche ne sovershil kaming-aut*) and was a closeted gay (*ne byl otkrytym geiem*), and he was ashamed of this situation and also tried to hide his own homosexuality (*staralsia skryt' sobstvennuu gomoseksual'nost'*).

Below the main publication there is an update with Igor' Lebedev's comment on the accusations. It quotes his words about Davletgil'deev's post being 'libel' which is an offence against the whole LDPR faction, as well as his statement that the journalist should be punished for his post. The update finishes with the direct quote from Lebedev's interview for the news agency TASS: 'If he told this to me in the street in the backyard, I would punch him in the face without any discussions' (*Esl'i on skazal by eto mne vo dvore na ulitse, ia by dal emu v mordu srazu bez razgovorov*)."

The publication by *meduza.io* combines pro-LGBTQ inclusive language such as 'to come out' (*sovershit' kaming-aut*), 'gay', 'homosexuality' with an anti-LGBTQ discursive tool of victimising a LGBTQ person as compared to his 'macho' homophobic opponent. When referring to sexual harassment, the outlet uses the Russian term '*domogatel'stva*' exclusively, linking the same-sex harassment case to the local political discourse on 'Slutsky-gate' but not to the wider western pro-feminist discourse on sexual harassment. This mix of discursive strategies demonstrates that, although *meduza.io* is very skilled and experienced in using pro-LGBTQ language, implements communicative strategies which introduce the theme of victimisation of gay men rather than create a discourse of empathy and support of sexual harassment victims.

The news and entertainment portal *life.ru* devoted one publication to the topic of same-sex sexual harassment and Davletgil'deev's confession. On 22 March 2018 it published an article under the title "'Nonsense". Zhirinovsky's son renounced harassment accusations against his father' ("*Bred*". *Syn Zhirinovskogo otverg obvineniya v domogatel'stvakh v adres ottsa*'). The title puts in the focus the figures of LDPR leader and his son, which is enhanced by the lead image featuring the two politicians (see image 3.6.11).

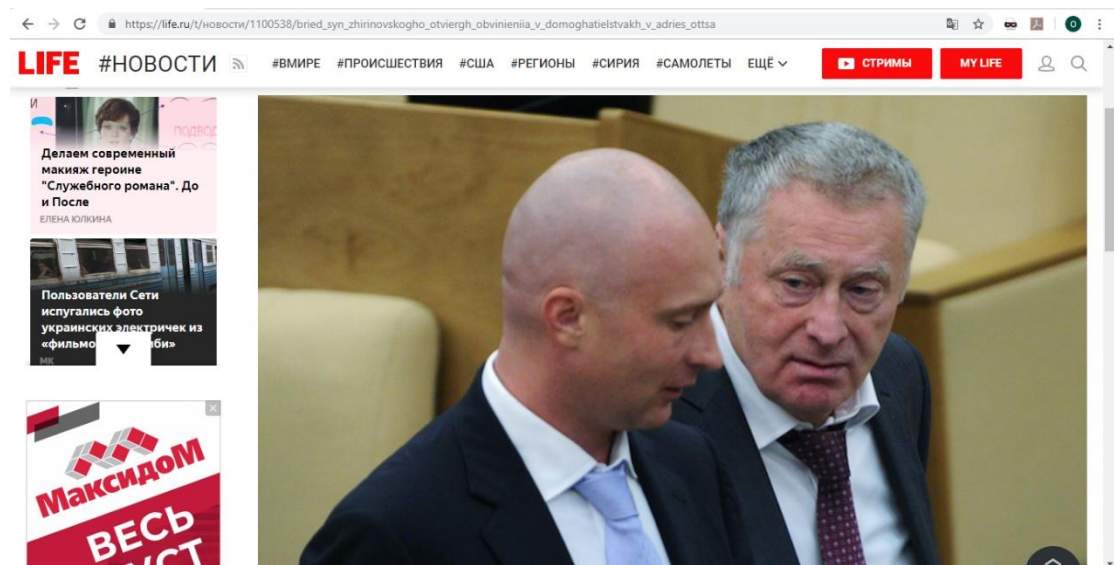
The publication itself is remarkably short (47 words in total) and contains very few details of the case. The opening lines quote Igor' Lebedev's interview for the radio station '*Govorit Moskva*' in which the politician disproved the accusations against his father. A direct quote of Lebedev's calling the accusations 'nonsense' (*bred*) and refusing to comment on them is provided too. The closing lines mention that journalist Davletgil'deev, who works for the portal '*Nastoiashchee Vremia*' reported on harassment from Zhirinovsky. The article was published with the hashtags 'news' (*novosti*), 'vladimirzhirinovsky', 'sexualharassment'

(*seksual'nye domogatel'stva*) and 'igorlebedev'. This example of the *life.ru* publication reinforces the findings made earlier in the thesis: i.e. the outlet's inclusion in the coverage of LGBTQ-related issues does not mean that overall stance of the outlet is pro-LGBTQ. Thus, an outlet like *life.ru*, which is characterised by a generally homophobic attitude can nevertheless include in its coverage publications tackling LGBTQ themes.

Image 3.6.11. A screengrab of the publication “‘Nonsense”. Zhirinovsky’s son renounced harassment accusations against his father’ featuring Vladimir Zhirinovsky and his son Igor Lebedev.

Source:

https://life.ru/t/%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8/1100538/bried_syn_zhirinovskogho_otviergh_obvinieniia_v_domoghatielstvakh_v_adries_ottsa, accessed 22/03/2018

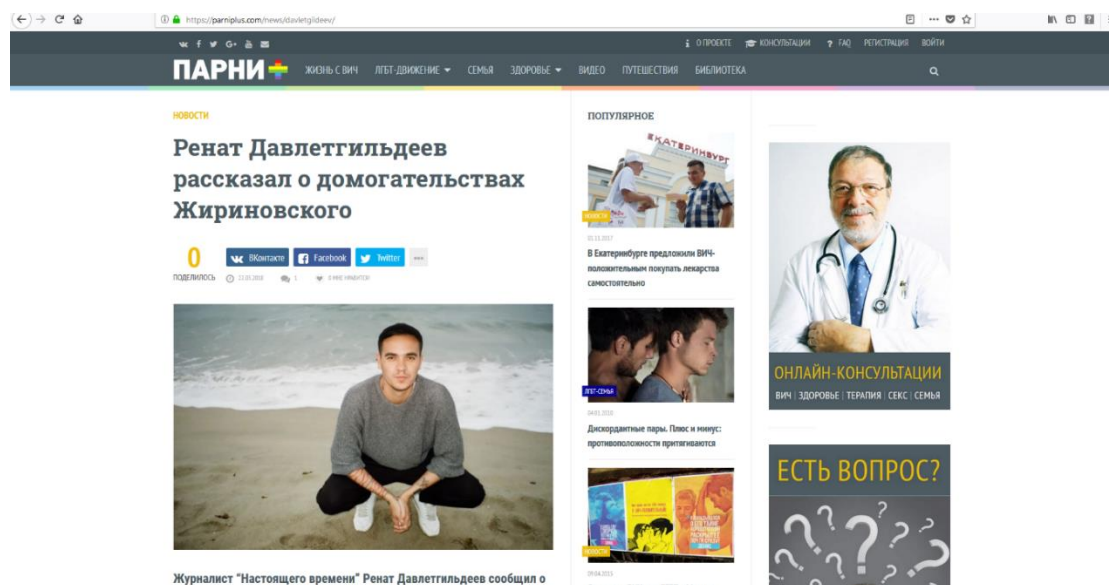


Both the LGBTQ-catered media outlets monitored in March 2018 – online magazine *parniplus.com* and Facebook community for Russian speaking LGBTQ people *LGBT Discussion Board* – joined the mainstream media in the coverage of same-sex harassment story. The information portal *parniplus.com* (a website specifically targeted at HIV positive non-heteronormative men but also catering to the whole LGBTQ community) covered Davletgil'deev's confession in the 22 March 2018 publication under the title 'Renat Davletgil'deev spoke about harassment from Zhirinovsky' (*Renat Davletgil'deev rasskazal o domogatel'stvakh Zhirinovskogo*). The article opens with a summary of the incident which also contains quotes from the Facebook post by Davletgil'deev and the main body of the text is comprised primarily of Davletgil'deev's direct speech quoted from his confessional Facebook post. The publication finishes with a paragraph containing details of Davletgil'deev's public coming-out as a homosexual man in 2013 in an interview he gave for the special issue of the magazine '*Afisha*' (#339, 25th February – 10th March 2013). That special issue was inspired by the debate around the proposals of the 'anti-gay-propaganda' legislation and was devoted to coming-out stories by ordinary citizens and public figures. In the reporting on the same-sex sexual harassment coming-out and in the narrating about the incident involving the LDPR leader the *parniplus.com* publication focuses completely on Davletgil'deev's perception of the event. The extensive use of Davletgil'deev's direct speech is supported by the lead image featuring Davletgil'deev's personal photo, probably taken from

his archive or social media pages (see image 3.6.12; source of photo not identified in the publication).

Image 3.6.12. A screengrab of the publication ‘Renat Davletgil’deev spoke about harassment from Zhirinovskiy’ featuring Davletgil’deev’s personal photo

Source: <https://parniplus.com/news/davletgildeev/>, accessed 22/03/2018



The opening paragraph of the *parniplus.com* publication quotes Davletgil’deev’s words on Facebook in which he describes the inappropriate sexual actions performed by Zhirinovskiy in 2006 – i.e. the quote about Zhirinovskiy grabbing Davletgil’deev by his buttocks. The second paragraph of the text contains a lengthy quote from the Facebook post in which the journalist explained why he did not speak out about the incident earlier. The publication also contains a reference to other narratives on homosexual harassment: “Earlier Editor-in-Chief of Moscow-based radio station ‘*Echo Moskvy*’ Aleksei Venediktov hinted to incidents involving male journalists harassed by deputies. He stated that the Russian parliament is an unsafe working environment not only for women but for men too.”

Having quoted Venediktov, *parniplus.com* includes into the publication a summary of the media boycott against the State Duma which was declared on the same day following the failed investigation into the case of Leonid Slutsky. This paragraph is immediately followed by the passage with details of Davletgil’deev’s coming-out in the 2013 special issue of the *Afisha* magazine.

Davletgil’deev’s coming-out story was published among the 27 coming-out narratives gathered in the *Afisha* special issue inspired by the discussions around the then proposed legislation against propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors. The special issue cover represented the colours of the LGBT pride flag (see image 3.6.13) and the objective of the special issue was to reveal what kind of lives were lived by openly gay and lesbian people in Russia. The special issue gained a collectable status and can now be purchased from LGBTQ-catered online shopping websites (see image 3.6.14). The inclusion of this detail into the coverage of the incident with Zhirinovskiy positions Davletgil’deev’s story not only within the wider discourse on sexual harassment but also within the wider discourse

on LGBTQ rights in Russia, and the quote from Venediktov who underlined that men become victims of sexual harassment too, just like women, reiterates that.

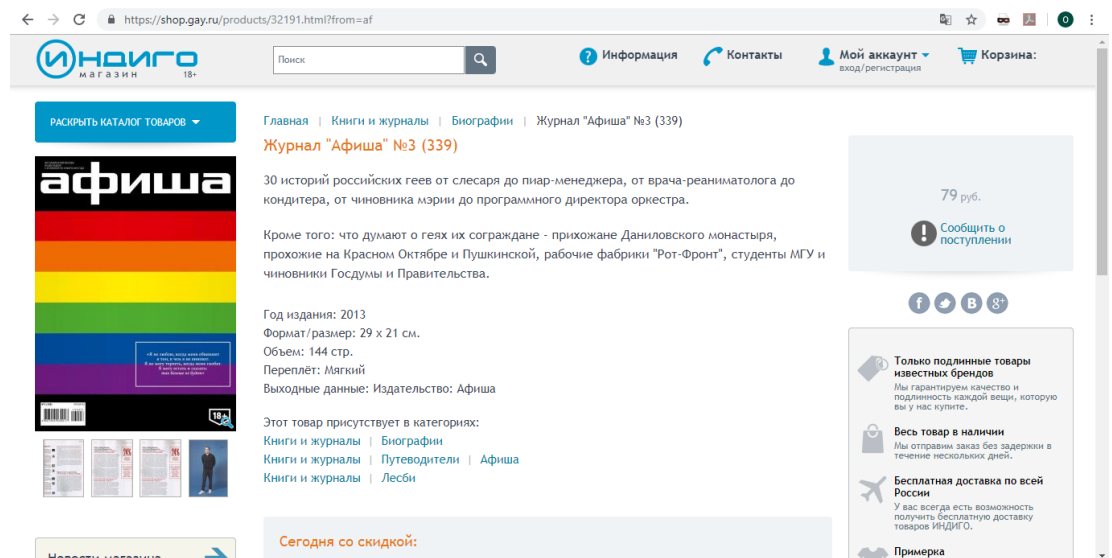
Image 3.6.13. A screengrab of the archive issue of *Afisha* devoted to coming-out

Source: <http://mag.afisha.ru/issues/339/>, accessed 29/07/2019



Image 3.6.14. A screengrab of a LGBTQ-catered online shopping webpage advertising the collectable archive issue of *Afisha*

Source: <https://shop.gay.ru/products/32191.html?from=af>, accessed 29/07/2019



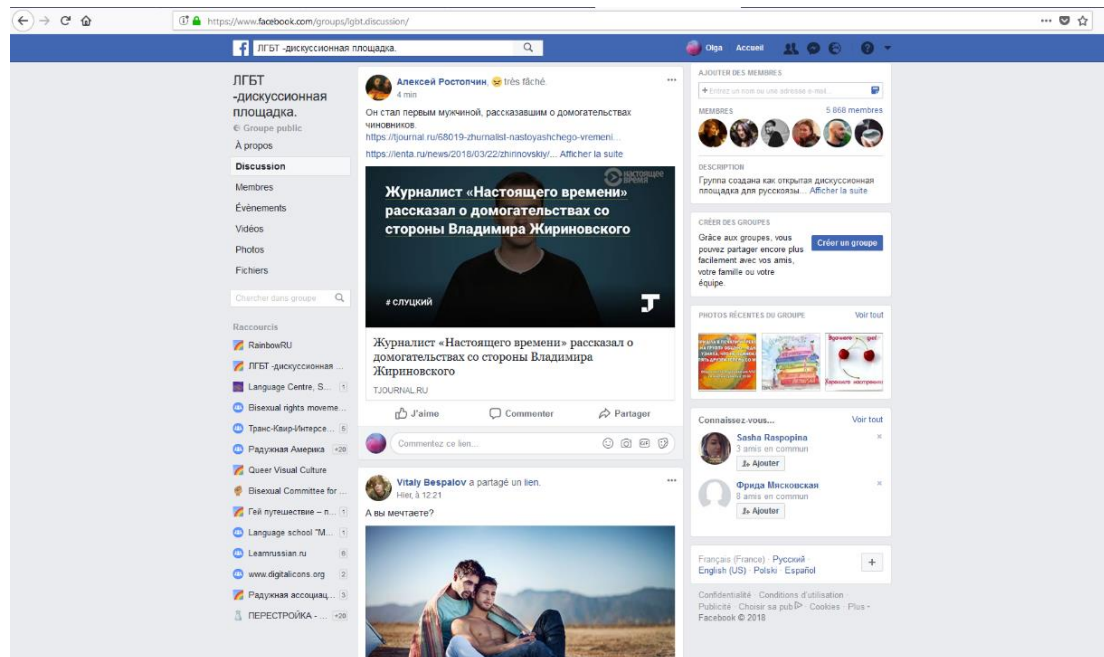
The LGBTQ-catered Facebook community *LGBT Discussion Board* also joined the overall discourse on the Slutsky-gate on 22 March 2018 with a publication on Davletgil'deev's confession. The post contained hyperlinks to the related publications by *Nastoiashchee Vremia*, *TJournal* and *lenta.ru*, and was accompanied by the comment 'He became the first man to speak out about harassment on the part of government officials' (*On stal pervym muzhchinoi, rasskazavshim o domogatel'stvakh chinovnikov*). The post also calls for depriving

Zhirinovsky of all his awards and privileges as his behaviour goes against ethical norms and infringes LGBTQ rights (see image 3.6.15).

Image 3.6.15. A screengrab of the LGBT Discussion Board post devoted to Davletgil'deev's coming-out as a same-sex sexual harassment victim.

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/lgbt.discussion/permalink/1519220031523973/>, accessed 22/03/2018



The media coverage of the same-sex harassment incident which followed Davletgil'deev's confession on Facebook and the inclusion of LGBTQ-catered media resources into this coverage demonstrate how agile, fast and responsive Russian media are to global and local media events. When a LGBTQ person publishes a social media post related to an important current media trend – in this case to sexual harassment performed by people in power against journalists – it is immediately drawn into the mainstream media discourse on the topic, and various outlets, regardless of their political stance and attitude to LGBTQ issues, include into their coverage the said social media post or official political responses to it. When the currently popular media trend tackles a LGBTQ person or LGBTQ issue, specific LGBTQ-catering media outlets make it part of their media coverage just as quickly and readily. This proves that Russian media, both mainstream and new ones, have a well-developed and highly efficient mechanism of both bottom-up and horizontal, outlet-to-outlet, developmental mechanisms when it comes to sustaining and promoting media discourses.

To conclude, the analysis of the discursive strategies applied by the media outlets while reporting on Davletgil'deev's confession and while mediating narratives of male victims of homosexual harassment allows to reiterate, reconfirm, and deepen the argument made in Chapter Two of this thesis. Firstly, the choice of discursive strategies is defined not by the top-down political discourses but by the outlet's own policies and linguistic preferences. Secondly, the use of strategies of creating narratives on harassment demonstrates no obvious consistency between the outlet's political stance regarding the Kremlin and political power and its framing of the discourse on homosexual harassment as a confessional private narrative

or a political matter. Thirdly and most importantly, this analysis allows to reiterate the point made in Chapter Two of the thesis that in certain contexts where a sympathetic, empathetic and compassionate mediation of non-heteronormative men arises from the intersection of discourses on victimhood (men as victims of terror, terrorism or sexual harassment), the development of media discourses orients towards if not a wider acceptance but at least a greater sympathy and support, resulting in the emergence of positive and neutral portrayals of NHM.

3.7. Conclusion

The analysis of the media case of homosexual harassment as part of the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case revealed that the issues of sex and sexuality are highly topical in public Russian discourses and are therefore covered extensively and consistently in contemporary Russian media, which constantly seek to satisfy the interests and expectations of the audiences. The sexualisation of sexual harassment media debates (the ‘buttock-grabbing’ motif) demonstrates the complexity of societal attitudes to sex and sexuality, which reflects the duality of the Soviet and post-Soviet legacy that contemporary Russian discourses on those issues have inherited: i.e., the sexless sexism of the Soviet times, the moral liberalisation and the large-scale mass introduction to pornography and erotica in the media which happened in the 1990s.

The media case of (homo)sexual harassment demonstrates the deeply rooted sexualisation of contemporary Russian political discourses (Sperling 2015), where references to a political opponent’s sexuality are often used to mar the opponent. Thus, in the context of the 2018 presidential elections, the representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia receive negative publicity and negative media portrayals on the grounds of their sexuality: Leonid Slutsky’s unethical, morally wrong and ‘incorrect’ sexuality due to his commitment of sexual harassment; and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s unethical, morally wrong and ‘incorrect’ sexuality due to his commitment of sexual harassment.

The analysis of the dynamic of the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case media coverage demonstrated how contemporary Russian media not only follow already existing discourses on sex and sexuality, but initiate new discourses in that field, creating and promoting new agendas. While generating and sustaining new discourses on sex and sexuality, Russian media do so not according to frameworks imposed by the Kremlin but rather following the global (e.g. the #MeToo movement) and local (e.g. the #IAmNotAfraidToTell hashtag campaign) media trends. The analysis of the media boycott against Leonid Slutsky and the State Duma proved that in the process of creating new sex and sexuality discourses Russian media outlets choose their stance in the pro- and anti-feminist dichotomy rather than from the pro- and anti-Kremlin perspective. This calls for a revision of the conceptualisation of Russian media as oscillating between the two opposing vectors focused on the Kremlin.

The findings made while investigating the discursive strategies of media portrayals of male victims of sexual harassment demonstrate that these strategies do not correlate with the overall political stance of the monitored media outlets (e.g. one of the most influential oppositional outlets *Dozhd’* using the term ‘non-traditional orientation’ which belongs to the Kremlin-sustained discourses on non-heteronormativity). Therefore, LGBTQ issues cannot be placed solely within the pro- and anti-Kremlin dichotomy, which reinforces the findings made in the previous chapter when analysing the mediation of the anti-LGBTQ campaigns in Chechnya and the murder of a gay policeman in France. Namely, that in certain circumstances

the discursive trends evolving in the media allow for positive portrayals of non-heteronormative men regardless of the existing restrictive legislation and despite the state-sustained homophobia.

On a broader scale, the analysis of the media cases of 'Slutsky-gate' and homosexual harassment proves that positioning Russia as opposed to the global West and defining Russian media as lagging behind and fully controlled by the Russian government is problematic. The analysis presented in this chapter clearly demonstrates that Russian media support global media trends even when those trends contradict the discourses on 'traditional values' advocated by some members of the government.

It also proves that contemporary Russian media discourses exist not only in the top-down dimension but also in the bottom-up perspective, with the media creating and developing discourses that are aimed at influencing the political elites. An especially valuable finding of the analysis of the harassment case is that it demonstrates how media professionals in Russia are willing to promote those bottom-up discourses regardless of the overall lack of protection to hired employees in Russia, the relevant weakness of trade unions, and the potential outcome of their job being jeopardised (e.g. such as the loss of press accreditation for the outlets and individual journalists boycotting the State Duma, which restricted and negatively impacted their journalistic freedoms and work opportunities). The research findings listed above complicate the discussions of Russian media as operating solely along the top-down discourses of power and censorship.

Having devoted Chapters Two and Three of the thesis to the analysis of verbally expressed discursive strategies of communicating NHM, in the next chapter I focus on non-verbal, i.e. visual expressions of NHM in contemporary Russian media. Having discussed the media strategies of naming and referencing of non-heteronormative sexual identity in the context of online news media (Chapter Two) and the strategies of mediating non-heteronormative men as victims of homosexual harassment (Chapter Three), in Chapter Four of this thesis I investigate how NHM are visually communicated in contemporary Russian online news media online and in Russian entertainment TV.

Chapter 4

Visual communication of non-heteronormative masculinities in Russian online news media and prime-time television

4.1 Introduction

In Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis, I identified and investigated the verbally expressed strategies used by Russian online news media to communicate NHM. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated how the discourses on NHM, which are initiated and shaped by Russian online news media in a bottom-up way, affect the local and global public discourses on non-heteronormativity. I proved that the strategies used by Russian media in the development of the discourses on NHM are in line with the overall media trends and agendas rather than with the top-down discourses of censorship imposed by the Kremlin. Through an analysis of the mediation of non-heteronormative men as part of transnational media events, I explored the intersection of discourses on sexuality, ethnicity, and religion. I identified the communicative strategies used by news media outlets to name and refer to non-heteronormativity of the mediated masculine subjects and revealed that there is no interconnection between the media outlets' political stance and the choice of the verbal communicative tools for naming and reference of non-heteronormativity. Conceptualising the mediation of non-heteronormative men within the discursive framework of orientalisation and victimhood, I demonstrated how in such intersections ethnicity as a social category can override sexuality, which can lead to the emergence of sympathetic and positive portrayals of non-heteronormative masculine victims as opposed to the orientalist discursive 'other'.

In Chapter Three, through a conceptualisation of homosexual harassment as part of the media discourses on the global anti-harassment campaign *#MeToo*, I focused on the appropriation of western media discourses on harassment by Russian media. Investigating the case of a sexual harassment scandal around a Russian deputy and the subsequent boycott of the Russian State Duma by Russian news outlets, I demonstrated how the intersection of the bottom-up media discourses on sex and sexuality and of the discourses on victimhood creates a discursive space for the emergence of a compassionate mediation of the confessional narratives initiated by male victims of homosexual harassment. I revealed how the westernisation of media discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities correlates with the choice of the discursive strategies used by news outlets to portray the male victims of harassment.

In the previous two chapters, the critical discourse analysis of the communicative strategies of portraying non-heteronormative men was based on the linguistic type of data: e.g. the use of various reference terms for 'homosexual' (such as 'gay' or 'representative of non-traditional sexual orientation'); the use of direct or reported speech for rendering the confessional narratives. This analysis allowed me to make conclusive findings concerning the verbal aspects of media discourses on NHM. However, restricting the discourse analysis to verbal strategies makes these findings incomplete. All the media outlets used for the media data sampling in the analysis of the three media cases explored in Chapters 2 and 3 are new, digital, online media, which rely heavily on computer technology and contemporary visual culture (Manovich 2002). Producing comprehensive content through various means of communication (verbal texts, visual imagery, videos, sound), they are 'largely visual and symbolic' (Hoover and Kaneva 2009: 14), which reflects the importance of the visual turn

(Kolodii et al. 2015; Martin 2002) in modern society, the computerisation of culture (Manovich 2002) and the ongoing media convergence (Jenkins 2006).

Approaching the concept of ‘language’ from a post-structuralist perspective – as a system of signs, signifiers and signified meanings, which goes beyond speech and writing as a form of recording speech, I interpret it as a comprehensive means of representation of meaning, which includes any organised activity for communicating knowledge (Derrida 2016). Communication, as a way of expressing representations of meanings, is therefore understood as a complex structure too, blending verbal, visual and sonic aspects. Since most of the bulk of the media data analysed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis is comprised of verbal texts where visual images are used to accompany and illustrate news and investigative publications, in this chapter, I focus on the visual communication of non-heteronormative masculinity, and not on the use of sound in, for example, radio programmes or podcasts devoted to NHM.

When studying visual communication in Russian media, it is important to consider the overall cultural climate and background in which visually expressed messages about NHM are created and interpreted. The concept of visual literacy (Elkins 2009) and an understanding of how it works in Russian society is helpful here.

The concept of visual literacy comprises skills and expertise used by people to visually perceive objects and to interpret their perception, producing new knowledge about the world through their visual experiences. When it comes to the visual communication of non-heteronormativity through media, the phenomenon of ‘visuality without visibility’⁹⁹ leads to the media audiences failing to perceive and interpret, or experiencing difficulties while interpreting non-heteronormative visuality: the absence of visible (in the sense of political and social visibility; Edenborg 2020) non-heteronormative people from Russian public discourses blurs the line where transgressive, queer or non-heteronormative performances can be recognised, unless the audience is ‘in the know’ (*v teme*; Stella 2015).

This absence of the visibility factor in visual literacy practices of Russian audiences gives grounds for the emergence and growth of rich and diverse visual discourses on the non-heteronormative transgressive performance of gender and sexuality. One example of such discourses is designer Gosha Rubchinsky’s project of queering fashion through a reinvention of post-Soviet aesthetics of ‘chavs’, or *gopniki* (Roberts 2019). Through a renegotiation of the Soviet iconography and ideological slogans, through an exploration of a post-Soviet sensibility (see images 4.1.1 and 4.1.2) Rubchinsky creates images that queer and transgress the concepts of politicised, heteronormative, homophobic, extreme Russian masculinities (Roberts 2019: 60-61).

⁹⁹ See ‘Visuality without Visibility: Queer Visual Culture in Post-Soviet Russia’ – research project led by Dr Vlad Strukov (University of Leeds, UK) and Dr Maria Engström (University of Uppsala, Sweden); <http://queervisualculture.org/about/>

Image 4.1.1. A screenshot showing an example of Gosha Rubchinsky's designs

Source :

https://www.vogue.ru/collection/autumn_winter2018/menswear/moskva/Gosha_Rubchinsky/#gallery1/888867, accessed 26/04/2020

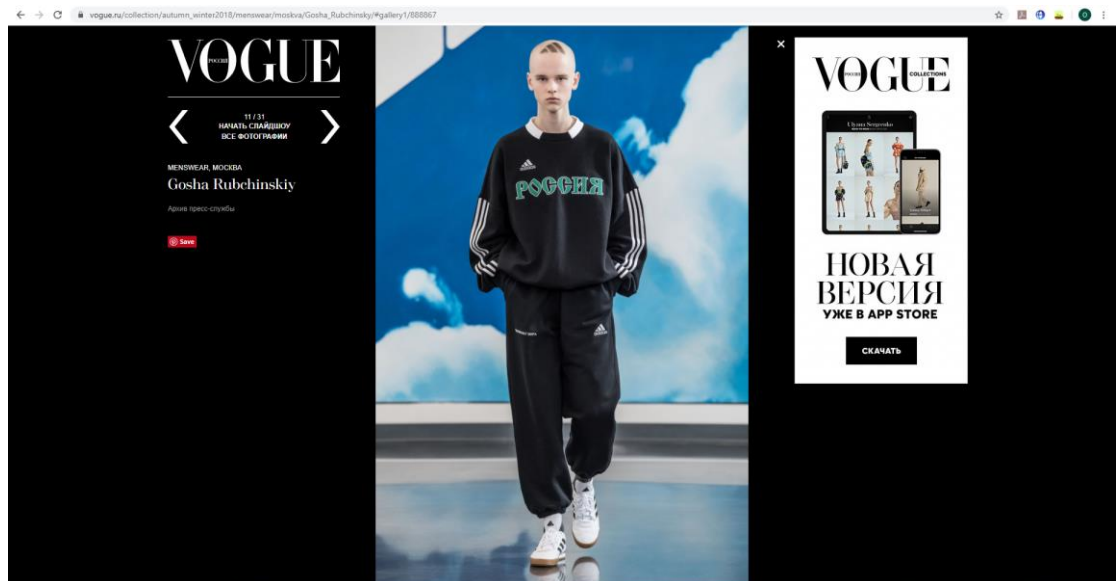
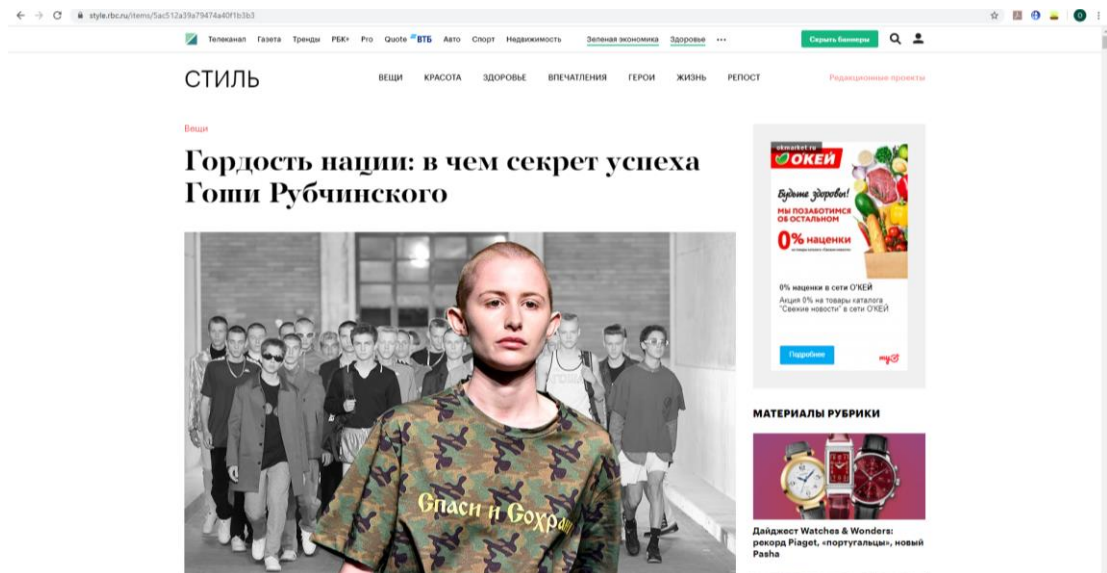


Image 4.1.2. A screenshot showing an example of Gosha Rubchinsky's designs

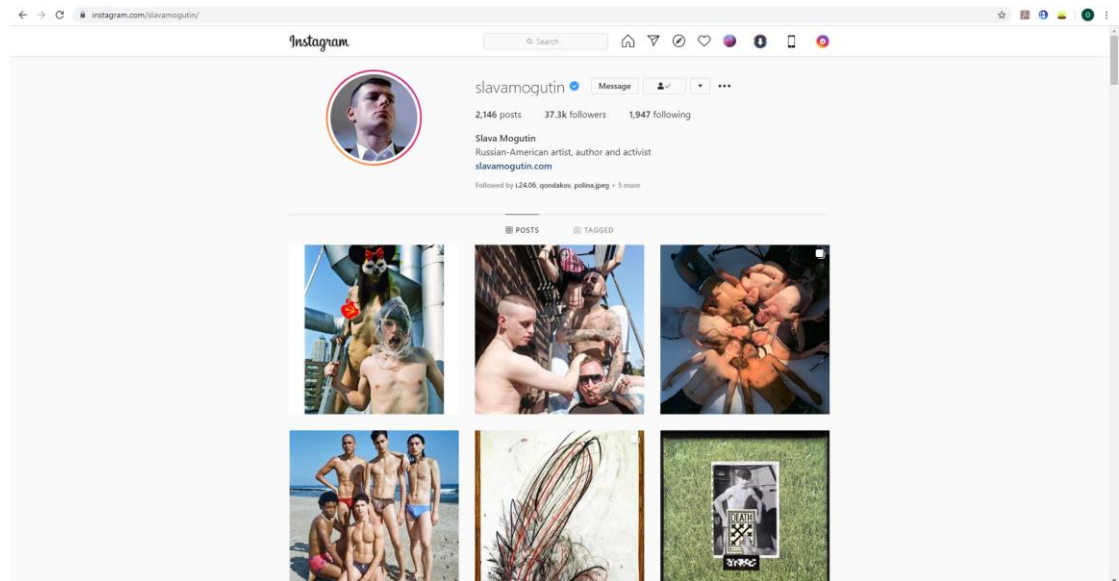
Source: <https://style.rbc.ru/items/5ac512a39a79474a40f1b3b3>, accessed 26/04/2020



Rubchinsky's homoeroticism echoes the aesthetic experiments of another pioneer in Russian transgressive and queer visibility: his eroticisation of the military-kind of masculinity is discursively linked to the eroticisation and queering of the skinhead body in the homoerotic works of queer artist and photographer Slava Mogutin (see image 4.1.3).

Image 4.1.3. A screenshot of Slava Mogutin’s work showcased on his official *Instagram* account.

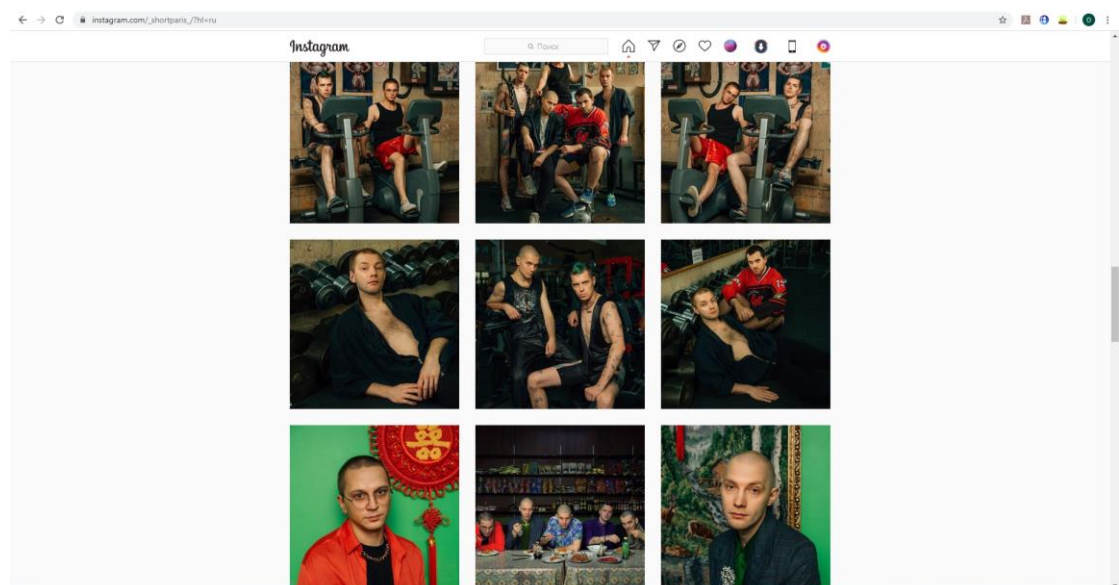
Source: <https://www.instagram.com/slavamogutin/>, accessed 26/04/2020



Rooted in the post-Soviet aesthetics of the eroticisation of extreme masculinity of ‘gopniki’ and skinheads is the contemporary Russian visual culture of ‘neo-camp’.¹⁰⁰ This trend is represented by such artistic groups as *Shortparis* (see image 4.1.4) and *Little Big* (see image 4.1.5), which both play with the themes of queer, camp and neo-camp aesthetics.

Image 4.1.4. A screenshot of *Shortparis*’ official account on Instagram.

Source: https://www.instagram.com/_shortparis_/?hl=ru, accessed 26/04/2020

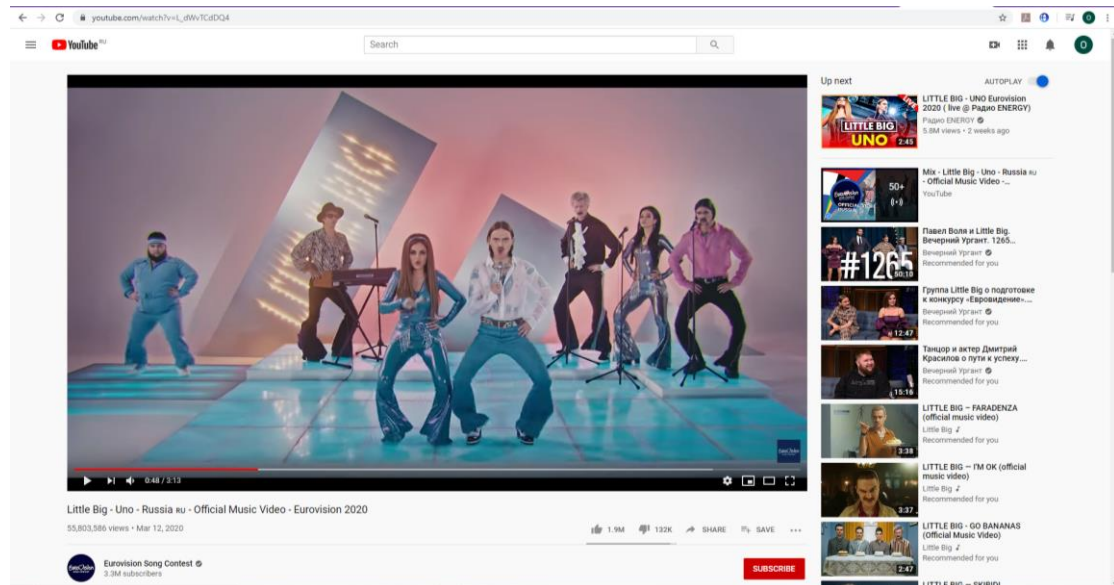


¹⁰⁰ See Engström, M. 2019. Little Big: Neo-camp and a new generation of Russian identity. Source: <https://www.ridl.io/en/little-big-neo-camp-and-a-new-generation-of-russian-identity/>, accessed 21/05/2019

Images 4.1.5. A screenshot of the official music video of Russia’s Eurovision 2020 song ‘Uno’ by ‘Little Big’

The video was released on 12 March 2020 and had gathered over 55,800,000 views by April 2020, with 1.9 million likes vs 132,000 dislikes.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_dWvTCdDQ4, accessed 5/04/2020

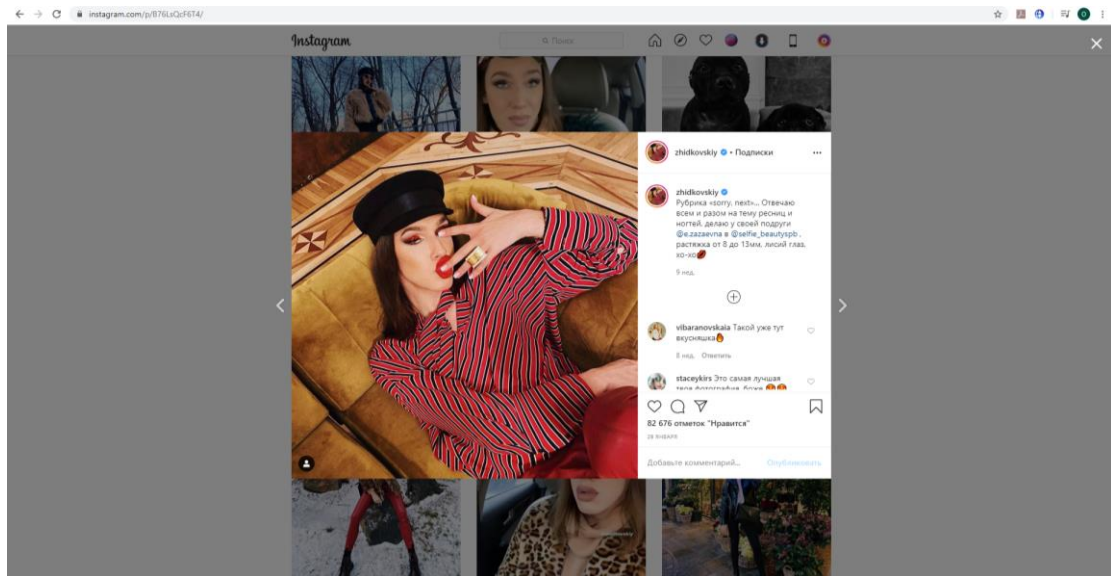


Alongside other popular and successful representatives of the Russian entertainment industry such as the self-proclaimed king of Russian pop-industry Filipp Kirkorov, Sergei Shnurov’s band (or ‘gang’ – *grupperovka*) *Leningrad*, the stand-up comedian turned showman Alexander Gudkov, and a new gay icon and former reality TV star Olga Buzova, the band *Little Big* explore the expressive and artistic opportunities of neo-camp, a ‘radicalised version of a generalised Russian Gopnik style’ which today ‘is becoming the global language of the Generation Z and the defining style of the era of metamodernism, with its absolute uncertainty, non-binary categories and openness to interpretations’ (Engström 2019). For art collectives like *Shortparis* and *Little Big*, an important factor contributing to the freedom of their transgressive queer performance is the fact that their viral popularity started online, on social media platforms like *YouTube*.

In terms of contemporary Russian culture of transgression and non-heteronormative performativity, it is participatory social media platforms and alternative media where these visual representations emerge in abundance and where the discourse-driving powers are located. The top-down discourses on ‘traditional sexuality’ and heteronormativity are challenged by new younger generations of media users and prosumers, who do not turn to state-owned TV channels for information about the world (including information about sex and sexuality) but find it online, on their mobile social media apps. The growing significance of digital and social media in the lives of millennials, Generation Z and Generation Alpha creates an alternative media space where non-heteronormative sexuality performances are not only uncensored but celebrated. This media trend allows lifestyle bloggers like male blogger Aleksei Zhidkovskii (see image 4.1.6) to experiment with gender-bending and transgressive sexuality performance.

Image 4.1.6. A screenshot of the Instagram account of popular blogger Zhidkovsky. The account had nearly 900,000 followers in April 2020.

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/zhidkovskiy/?hl=ru>, accessed 5/04/2020



In the case of lifestyle and beauty bloggers, transgressive sexuality and gender performances are discursively expressed as the process of crossing the boundaries of the self and cultural norm and as the process of destabilising the accepted social and gender order (Jenkins 2003; Wolfreys 2008). This discursive trend is further explored and developed by alternative LGBTQ media created by LGBTQ media producers for LGBTQ audiences.¹⁰¹ Apart from individual social media accounts devoted to contemporary Russian queer culture and visual representations of experiences of Russian LGBTQ people through their creative work (e.g. the *Instagram* account *russian.queer.revolution*; see image 4.1.7), there are also projects which renegotiate Russian queer history through visual imagery (e.g. the *Instagram* account 'Famous queens', or '*Izvestnye tiotki*') and which reclaim Russian celebrities of the past as representatives of the LGBT and queer community (see image 4.1.8).

¹⁰¹ For LGBTQ media channels on social networking platforms see, for example, 'A Russian queer revolution is in the making and you can now follow it on Instagram', by The *Calvert Journal*, published on 20/02/2020, available from <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/11647/russian-queer-creatives-instagram-follow-of-the-week>, accessed on 25/04/2020

Image 4.1.7. A screenshot of the *Instagram* account *russian.queer.revolution*

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/russian.queer.revolution/>, accessed 26/04/2020

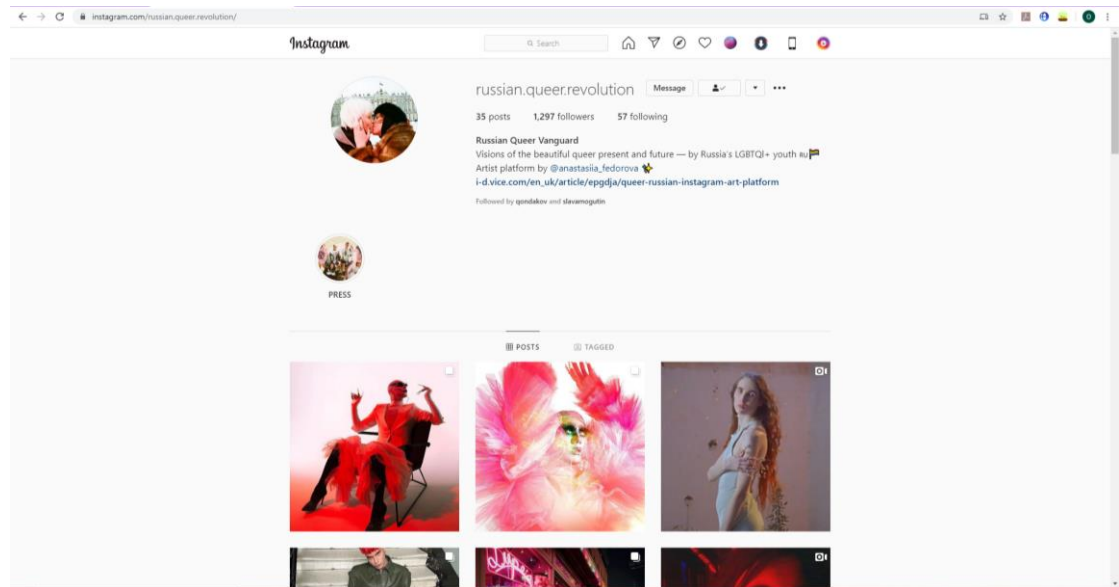
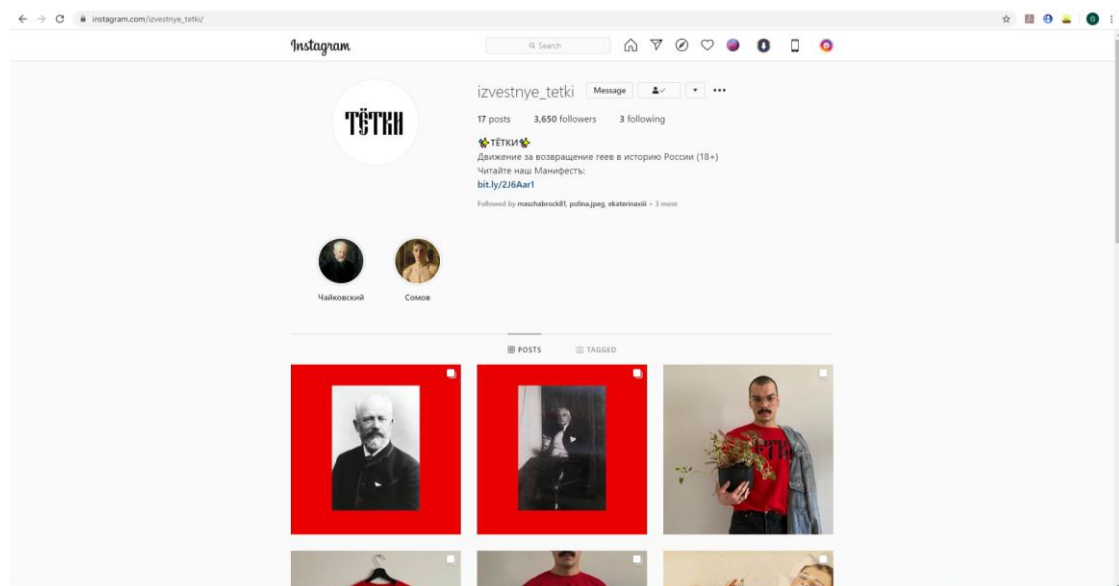


Image 4.1.8 A screenshot of the *Instagram* account *Famous queens (Izvestnye tiotki)*

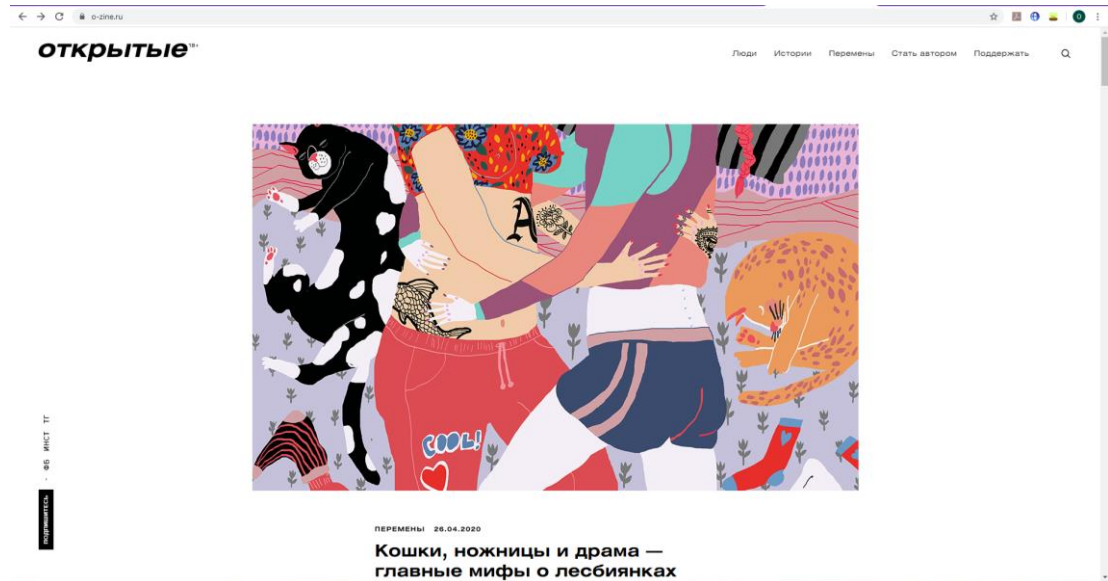
Source: https://www.instagram.com/izvestnye_tetki/, accessed 26/04/2020



We have also seen online purpose created zines appearing that focus solely on queer and LGBT cultures. These media outlets, one example of which is *O-zine* – the online magazine ‘Open’ (*Otkrytye*), serve as trendsetters of queer visual canon in contemporary Russia (see image 4.1.9).

Image 4.1.9. A screenshot of the homepage of the Russian queer and LGBT online magazine *O-zine*.

Source: <https://o-zine.ru/>, accessed 26/04/2020



In the context of the 2013 ‘traditional sexuality’ legislation applied against LGBTQ activists and of the 1998 ‘decency law’ (criminal law 242 banning the production and promotion of pornographic media content), there co-exist contradictory discursive trends regarding visual expressions of transgressive sexuality. On the one hand, court cases are filed against artists whose work on body-positive images is treated as pornography.¹⁰² On the other hand, the lack of literacy in what concerns visual representations of queer and transgressive sexuality (as well as different levels of censorship applied to verbally expressed statements of activists and visual content created and disseminated within the constraints of the entertainment industry) enables artists like singer Andrei Petrov¹⁰³ to produce very provocative videos. One such example is the video clip for a rap song ‘Faggot’ (*Pidor*),¹⁰⁴ which caused quite a stir on *Runet* and among Russian LGBTQ communities when it was released in December 2019. In the song, Petrov, who is openly gay and who favours eccentric make-up and over-glamourised looks and outfits, sings about his same-sex encounters, and the visual imagery supporting the song employs explicit references to homosexuality (see image 4.1.9).

As the examples above demonstrate, the visual discourses on non-heteronormativity in Russia reveal even more complexity than verbally expressed discourses. On the one hand, there exists a strong undercurrent of cultural resistance of queer and LGBT artists and activists. On the other hand, there are restrictive legal trends that can lead to censorship and persecution of certain types of visual expression. In the current chapter of the thesis, I analyse how the intersection of these two conflicting trends, as well as how phenomena of low visual

¹⁰² See, for example, ‘Russian police question activist for ‘pornographic’ body-positivity project, by The Moscow Times, published on 22/03/2019, available from <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/03/22/russian-police-question-activist-for-pornographic-body-positivity-project-a64925>, accessed 27/04/2020

¹⁰³ In April 2020, Petrov’s *YouTube* channel had over 1.05 million subscribers. Source: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0UK9eo_m6v4DDGXQKQf5Ww

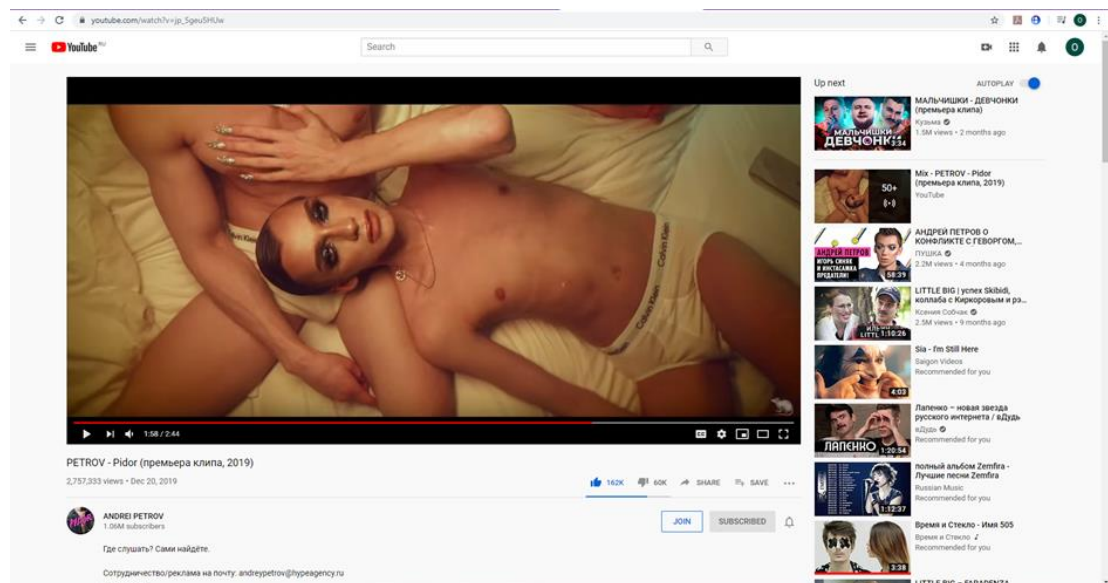
¹⁰⁴ The video clip, which in April 2020 had 162,000 likes vs 60,000 dislikes, is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jp_5geu5HUw

literacy on the part of Russian media audiences and of a low level of overall non-heteronormative visibility in Russian public discourses affect the choice of visual strategies applied by Russian media to non-heteronormative masculinities. The multimodal discourse analysis of these strategies which I carry out in sections 4.3 and 4.4 of the current chapter draws on the data from the online news media outlets investigated in Chapters 2-3 and from Russia's main TV channel, *Pervyi Kanal* ('Channel 1'). Thus, I look not at the alternative LGBT and queer media which offer a considerably free discursive space for transgressive sexuality expressions, but at the media where such expressions are most problematic: at the news outlets which are subject to the Kremlin censorship and the main state-owned channel of the country, which is the core of the Kremlin propaganda.

Image 4.1.9. A screenshot of Andrei Petrov's music video 'Faggot'

The screenshot features Petrov (centre) resting his head on the body of his boyfriend.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jp_5geu5HUw, accessed 5/04/2020



Understanding visual communication as the process of the interpretation of a message passed on in the form of an image designed with the help of graphic and design technology (Baldwin and Roberts 2006), in the current chapter I carry out a discourse analysis of the strategies applied to visually communicate the non-heteronormativity of the mediated masculine subjects. In section 4.3, I study the visual images retrieved as part of the investigation into the media cases of the anti-LGBTQ violence in Chechnya in 2017; the killing of French gay policeman Xavier Jugelé in the 20 April 2017 terrorist attack in Paris; the coming-out of male victims of homosexual harassment amid the 'Slutsky-gate' sexual harassment scandal in 2018. In section 4.4, I present a case study of the visual communication of NHM in the context of makeover TV at the example of Russian TV presenter and fashion historian Alexandre Vassiliev. The methodology of this discourse analysis is rooted in scholarship on multimodality, which I outline in the next section of the chapter.

4.2 Visuality and masculinity in Russian discourses: a multimodal approach to a media discourse study

The critical discourse analysis of verbally expressed portrayals of non-heteronormative men, which was carried out in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, demonstrated, among others, the following finding: contrary to the state-promoted discourses on ‘traditional family values’, ‘traditional sexuality’ and homophobia, media discourses on sex, sexuality and gender in general, as well as on LGBTQ-related issues in particular, are constantly evolving, prolific, reflecting the discursive shift of media audiences’ growing awareness of LGBTQ-related issues.

As the overall findings of this thesis reveal, the anti-LGBTQ policies are part of a wider discourse of oppression against media and potential liberal oppositional activity rather than a specific policy aimed against LGBTQ individuals as such. To illustrate how such media and political oppression works in Russia, I use the example of the popular image of President Putin as ‘gay clown’ (see image 4.2.1) which in April 2017 was banned by the Russian Ministry of Justice as ‘extremist’.¹⁰⁵

Image 4.2.1. A screengrab of the ‘Gay Clown Putin’ meme, banned in Russia as extremist material

Source: <https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1240354-gay-clown-putin>, accessed 19/11/2019



The image which went viral in the 2010s as the ‘Gay Clown Putin’ meme seems to have an obvious link to the current anti-LGBTQ policies exercised by Russia’s government: the make-up serves as a reference to camp gay culture and drag; the rainbow colours of President Putin’s tie and the picture background are a clear reference to the rainbow colours of the LGBTQ-pride flag. The reasons behind banning of this image as ‘extremist’ are, therefore, often interpreted as another manifestation of the institutionalised homophobia of Putin’s

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Russia cracks down on Putin ‘gay clown’ memes in the war on ‘internet extremism’ (6 April 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-putin-gay-clown-memes-internet-extremism-opposition-president-kremlin-a7669486.html>)

regime. However, on the website of Russia's Ministry of Justice (*Miniust*) this image is listed among extremist materials in a slightly different context (see image 4.2.2.).

The content is listed under number 4071 and the date of inclusion into the list of banned extremist materials shows as 30.03.2017. The following verbal description of the 'Gay Clown Putin' image is used:

Placard with an image of a person resembling President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin, and wearing facial make-up – the eyelashes and lips are made-up, which, according to the intention of the author(s) of the placard, should serve as a hint to the allegedly non-standard (*nestandardnuu*) sexual orientation of the president of the Russian Federation. The caption under the picture (replicated with the original spelling and punctuation and with the removal of obscene language): "Putin's voters are like ... there seems to be a lot of them, but they are not among the people I know" (*"Izbirateli Putina kak... vrode by ikh mnogo, no sredi moikh znakomykh ikh net"*), published on 7 May 2014 on the social networking site "Vkontakte" on the account page nicknamed "Aleksandr Tsvetkov" (a verdict of the Central Court of the town of Tver' of 11.05.2016).

Image 4.2.2. A screengrab of the Ministry of Justice (*Miniust*) web list of extremist internet content, including the image of 'Gay Clown Putin'

Source: <https://bit.ly/2O8VJKS>, accessed 19/11/2019

3827.	«рологенинова» (адрес http://vk.com/id179122792), – иллюстрация, на которой изображен мужчина, имеющий очевидное визуальное сходство с Президентом России В.В. Путиным, держащим нож в руке, которую удерживает другая рука, и текст «Останова Заразу» (решение Железнодорожного районного суда г. Екатеринбург Свердловской области от 16.03.2016);	
3878.	Графическое изображение, размещенное в социальной сети «ВКонтакте» на Интернет странице « http://vk.com/id215600746 » с ником «Миша Штык» на «стене», внутри которого содержится текст: «военный переворот верим, надемся, ждем и изображением В. Путина с поднятыми вверх руками, к спине которого человек в маске приставил автомат. Внизу - подпись: смерть Путину» (решение Кузнецкого районного суда города Москвы от 09.03.2016).	
4004.	Статья «Сумчатый крот Путина – Ходорковский в действии», размещенная в сети Интернет по адресу: http://www.chechenews.com/world-news/breaking/15594-1.html ; статья «А разве нет войны?», размещенная в сети Интернет по адресу: http://www.chechenews.com/world-news/breaking/15578-1.html ; статья «Что отобьет у русских охоту от Кавказа», размещенная в сети Интернет по адресу: http://www.chechenews.com/world-news/breaking/15594-1.html (решение Тверского районного суда г. Москвы от 27.06.2014);	
4071.	Плакат с изображением человека, похожего на президента РФ В.В. Путина, на лице которого макияж – накрашены ресницы и губы, что, по замыслу автора/авторов плаката, должно служить намеком на якобы нестандартную сексуальную ориентацию президента РФ. Текст под изображением (воспроизводится с сохранением особенностей орфографии и пунктуации, с сокращением ненормативной лексики): «Избиратели Путина, как ... вроде бы их много, но среди моих знакомых их нет», размещенный 07 мая 2014 года в социальной сети «ВКонтакте» на аккаунте http://vk.com/id161877484 с никнеймом «Александр Цветков» (решение Центрального районного суда г. Твери от 11.05.2016);	30.03.2017
4072.	Плакат-коллаж с изображением трех человек, двое из них (в форме солдат Третьего рейха) похожи на президента РФ В.В. Путина и председателя правительства Д.А. Медведева; справа - фотография Патриарха Московского и всея Руси Кирилла; надпись под изображением: «Окутанты – еже в Москве», размещенный 04 марта 2014 года в социальной сети «ВКонтакте» на аккаунте http://vk.com/id161877484 с никнеймом «Александр Цветков» (решение Центрального районного суда г. Твери от 11.05.2016);	30.03.2017
4095.	Видеоматериал под названием «Обращение ИГИЛ к Президенту Владимиру Путину», размещенный на видеохостинге «You Tube», имеющий сетевой адрес https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PWhg-Pug51 (решение Калужского районного суда Калужской области от 01.03.2017);	19.05.2017
4289.	Видеозапись «Великая реп битва - Путин против Гитлера», длительность 2 минуты 36 секунд, начинающаяся словами «Даны и господа, добро пожаловать на неинтересный реп-баттл...», заканчивающаяся словами «... выбирай одну из альтернативных концовок, личная реп-битва продолжается» (решение Курганского городского суда от 07.09.2017);	10.11.2017
4297.	Книга «Книга истины», автора В.Распутина, место издания неизвестно, на 91 листе (решение Лодынопольского городского суда Ленинградской области от 26.09.2017);	28.11.2017

Наши ошибки на сайте? Выделите ее и нажмите **Ctrl + Enter**

О сайте
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Реклама и публикации

Адрес: 119991, ГСП-1, город Москва, улица Житная, дом 14
Телефон: (495) 994-93-55

The description of the extremist visual material demonstrates that it is not the LGBTQ-connection that motivated the banning of the image but rather the breach of article 139 or Russia's Criminal Code against insulting a representative of authority (*oskorblenie predstavitelia vlasti*). Of course, the interpretation of a hint to someone's non-heteronormative ('non-standard') sexual orientation as an insult is still a manifestation of homophobia, but it is still the insult of a representative of the political power and authorities rather than pure homophobia that is behind the branding of this image as extremist. The omission of the obscene reference to homosexual men used in the original *Vkontakte* post is also quite telling in this context: the Ministry of Justice website, following Russia's Federal Law #34 against the use of obscene language in media, omitted the derogatory term used to

denote homosexual men, which effectively reduced the homophobic component of the original post in the Russian social media.

The interpretation of the *Miniust* ban given above is further supported by the evidence that not every parody or impersonation of Russia's president for entertainment or artistic purposes is persecuted. Thus, the work by drag and queer artist Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe contains queer visual representations of the Russian president's image; however, those images did not undergo censorship but are widely accessible now and were used as part of Mamyshev-Monroe's personal exhibitions (see images 4.2.3 and 4.2.4).

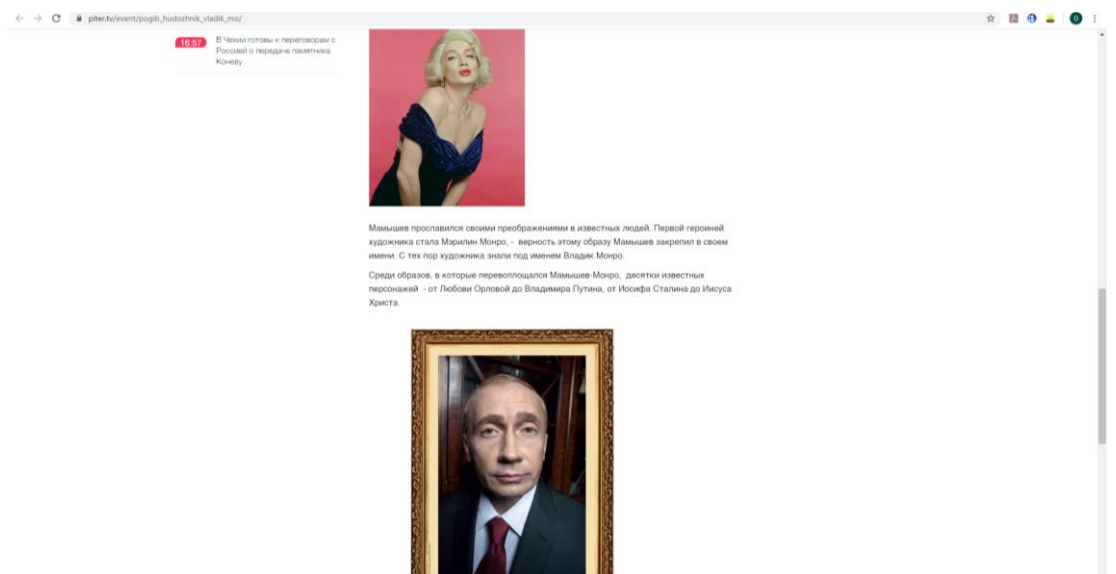
Image 4.2.3. A screenshot showing Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe impersonating Russia's president Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime-minister Dmitry Medvedev and Ukrainian politician Iulia Timoshenko.

Source: <https://vmmf.org/series/view?id=42#work-series-42-4>, accessed 27/04/2020



Image 4.2.4. A screenshot showing Vlad Mamyshev-Monroe impersonating actress Marilyn Monroe and Russia's president Vladimir Putin.

Source: https://piter.tv/event/pogib_hudozhnik_vladik_mo/, accessed 27/04/2020



Arguably, it is the use of the rainbow image, the mockery of the make-up and the degrading comments on social media that caused the ban of the 'Gay clown Putin' rather than the manifestation of a homophobic act.

The example of the banning of the 'Gay Clown Putin' image demonstrates the complexity of Russian discourses on masculinity. On the one hand, a reference to NHM can be perceived as an insult when used to talk about a representative of political elites (see Sperling 2015). On the other hand, queer representations of people who tend to be perceived as hypermasculine (like Russia's president – an ultimate symbol of patriarchal power) are allowed and not penalised. Current scholarship on Russian masculinity tends to focus on political masculinity (e.g. Eksi and Wood 2019), where conservative gender performance is perceived as an act of exercising or cementing political authority. Such studies often focus on the figure of the Russian president as an embodiment of a strong masculine man, and the studies of visual representations of Russian masculinities, therefore, oftentimes feature viral images of the macho-like shirtless hypermasculine President Putin as a gay icon or 'gay clown' (Baker et al. 2020, Foxall 2013, Sperling 2015, Goscilo 2013, Wood 2016).

Another important trend in scholarship on Russian masculinity in visual culture concerns studies of (queer) masculinity in the spheres of visual art and fashion (e.g. Engström 2016 and 2017, Roberts 2019, Strukov 2019). Although Russian non-heteronormative masculinity has been in the focus of consistent scholarly attention of Russian and western researchers alike, the topic of non-heteronormative visibility in contemporary Russian public discourses is still under-researched. The visibility of queer masculinity tends to be approached either from the perspective of LGBTQ-rights social movement (e.g. Wiedlack 2017) or from the point of view of show business and entertainment industry (e.g. Miazhevich 2010 and 2017; Healey 2010). In the current chapter of the thesis, for the first time in existing scholarship in the field, I analyse visual communication of non-heteronormative masculinities not from the point of view of political or activist agendas, but as an integral part of media strategies used for initiation and development of contemporary Russian discourses on sex, sexuality and gender.

By turning to the communicative strategies applied by Russian new and entertainment media through photographic and video portrayals of non-heteronormative men, I achieve several research objectives of this PhD research. I identify what visual tools are used by contemporary Russian media outlets to portray non-heteronormative masculinities and investigate how the applied visual tools interact with the verbal expressions and representations of male homosexuality. I also define whether the applied visual tools reinforce or challenge the state-imposed discourses on heteronormativity, and I particularly look at the interrelation of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' visual concepts in the visual construction of male homosexuality.

Addressing the thesis research questions and objectives outlined above, the analysis draws on the scholarship in the fields of multimodality (Belting 2011, Kress and van Leeuwen 2001 and 2006, Machin 2016, O'Halloran and Smith 2011, Stanczak 2007, van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001) as a 'way of characterising communicative situations (considered very broadly) which rely upon combinations of different 'form' of communication to be effective' (Bateman et al. 2017: 7). Some examples of multimodality are the use of images and infographics in print texts; the use of spoken language and non-verbal (gestures and facial expressions) communication in TV; the use of images or other visual aids to enhance the content of a radio podcast.

Multimodal studies of media take further the model of communication used in media semiotics – the model that disseminates the communication chain into the source of the message (e.g. the author of a media text), message (e.g. the media text and its meaning), encoder (e.g. the verbal or visual language used to create the media text), channel (the medium through which the text reaches the audience), receiver (the target audience of the media text), decoder (the visual or verbal language codes used by the receiver to interpret the meaning of the message) and feedback (the reaction of the audience to the media text that the audience perceived and processed) (Danesi 2002: 21). In the context of media convergence, practically every type of communication via media is multimodal – e.g. TV programmes comprising text and videos; the use of emoji or images in a thread on a mobile messenger; accessing a newspaper via a gadget or music played via a website (Bateman et al. 2017: 7-14). The multimodal nature of modern (multi)media and culture leads to a multiplication of meanings (Lemke 1998), i.e. multimodality presupposes an ‘additive’ relationship in a sum of two and more modes of communication.

In Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, I investigated the strategies of communication of non-heteronormative masculinities through verbally created portrayals of mediated masculine subjects. In particular, I explored how NHM is communicated through the naming and referencing of the subjects’ non-heteronormativity and through the mediation of confessional narratives of the mediated subjects. In section 4.3 of this chapter, I apply the multimodality discourse analysis to further explore such portrayals by looking at the lead and inset images that accompany the online publications covering the media cases presented in the previous two chapters. Section 4.4 introduces a case study of the transgressive gestures of Russian TV presenter Alexandre Vassiliev as a visual manifestation of non-heteronormative masculinity.

The media data used for visual discourse analysis consists of a selection of photographic images related to the three media cases discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 and a selection of episodes of the Russian prime-time makeover TV show ‘*Fashion Verdict*’ (*Modnyi Prigovor*). The photographic images were retrieved from the media coverage by the outlets selected for the daily monitoring in 2017 and 2018: the images were published online as part of the content on the anti-LGBTQ Chechen campaigns, the murder of French gay policeman Xavier Jugelé, and the sexual harassment coming-out narrative of the openly gay male journalist Renat Davletgil’deev’s. The images were captured and stored in the form of screengrabs and are analysed in the context of the related verbal text and the overall media case. The primary objectives of the analysis of the photographic portrayals of non-heteronormative men are to identify the discursive relations between the image and the related media text; to outline the mediation strategies applied by the outlet in that specific case; to define whether the visual discourse strategies of mediating non-heteronormative masculinities in Russian media are different from or similar to the verbal discourse strategies.

The prime-time makeover TV show ‘*Fashion Verdict*’ is one of the most popular entertainment programmes on *Pervyi Kanal* and one of the longest-running ones (it was first broadcast in 2007). From the very beginning, the show has been hosted by male hosts famous and respected in the world of fashion and art: fashion designer Slava Zaitsev (2007-2009); fashion historian Alexandre Vassiliev (2009 to date); queer performative artist, sculptor and designer Andrei Bartenev (2017).¹⁰⁶ The tendency for the show to engage non-heteronormative masculine presenters as hosts, as well as the show’s popularity, were the reasons for including ‘*Fashion Verdict*’ into the material for the current chapter’s analysis.

¹⁰⁶ Source: <https://www.1tv.ru/shows/modnyi-prigovor>

Although some scholars have turned to this programme before for analysis of neoliberal and traditional citizenship and DIY identities constructed through makeover television (e.g. Kazakevich 2010; Rajagopalan 2010), a study of the visuality of the popular makeover programme as a manifestation of non-heteronormative masculinity is conducted for the first time in the current scholarship on Russian media.

4.3 Visual communication of non-heteronormative men in Russian online news media: the intersection of discourses on orientalisation, martyrdom and victimhood

4.3.1. Representations of non-heteronormative male bodies in contemporary media: fetishizing 'non-traditional' masculinity

The categories of mediated visuality and mediated gendered body are interwoven in contemporary European cultures. Arguably, the mediality of images is rooted in a body analogy and 'our bodies function as media themselves, living media as opposed to fabricated media. Images rely on two symbolic acts which both involve our living body: the act of fabrication and the act of perception, one being the purpose of the other' (Belting 2011: 3). In this respect, the history of images can be read and interpreted as 'a cultural history of the human body' (Belting 2011: 17). Representations of the gendered male body in visual culture are always linked to societal ideas about gender and masculinity (Adler and Pointon 1993), so in this respect, visualisation of masculinity is a source of information on cultural stereotypes of acceptable and unacceptable kinds of masculinity. At the same time, visual culture and visual representations of gendered bodies are a prerequisite for visual expressions of queerness: the very term 'queer' is impossible to define without references to its visual aspects. In my analysis of the visual images of non-heteronormative men, I will look at how such ideas of acceptable, 'traditional' masculinity and unacceptable, 'non-traditional' (or queer) masculinity are conveyed through photographic images accompanying news bites and through the bodily performance of queer masculinity on Russian makeover TV.

The importance of the visual aspects for the category of non-heteronormative masculinity stems from its unfixed and unclear nature (Doty 2000: 6). Besides, the notion of NHM and reading of cultural content as non-heteronormative is culture-specific and, potentially, will vary in different contexts. For example, in his study of gay culture and non-heteronormative embodiment in the digital age and in the context of gay apps and websites such as *Grindr* or *Gaydar*,¹⁰⁷ Sharif Mowlabocus (2010: 99) presents a case study of the Gaydar profile owned by UK Labour Party MP Chris Bryant:

The furore in 2003 surrounding the revelation that Labour MP Chris Bryant had a Gaydar profile focussed not on the written content of his profile but on the accompanying profile image. Tabloid culture ensured that the photo of the underwear-clad Bryant was reproduced by several newspapers and it was the visual, as opposed to the textual aspects of the profile that upset the conservative news press the most. Bryant's sexuality was not the shock revelation (he was neither closeted, nor had he been forced out of the closet by the media, having been open about his sexuality for a number of years), neither was his membership of Gaydar. What *was* shocking – for the likes of the *Daily Mail* at least – was the fact that the MP had posted a picture of himself almost naked, on a website for all to see. While the

¹⁰⁷ A mobile dating app and an internet dating website designed specifically for gay and bisexual men.

likes of the *Daily Mail* found such behaviour aberrant, Bryant's photograph did not look particularly different in terms of style, quality and content from a number of similar images that litter profiles on Gaydar today.

In this example, the high visual literacy of the media audiences resulted in their interpretation of Bryant's images as explicit, of sexual nature and unbecoming of a public figure and a politician. The almost naked picture of a politician was regarded as socially unacceptable though it was published in the context of a dating website, revealing pictures being a common and legitimate type of content on such resources. This reading of the image of an openly gay politician as unacceptable differs dramatically, for instance, from the positive and enthusiastic attitudes to revealing pictures of President Putin circulated widely in Russian and western media. Photographic images of shirtless Putin on a horse became viral and the reaction to them was mixed: Russian media audiences tended to see the image of a strong masculine leader, whereas western media tended to interpret those images as homoerotic (Baker et al. 2020, Foxall 2013, Sperling 2015, Goscilo 2013, Wood 2016).

In the context of gay culture and non-heteronormative visibility, images of non-heteronormative men's faces (or 'face-pics' as they tend to be referred to on dating websites and apps) are invariably linked to the queer men's identity, gay men's being proud of and open about who they are, not wanting to hide. Such pictures are viewed as validation of non-heteronormative men's identities and proof of their legitimate visibility as queer (Mowlabocus 2010: 104). On the contrary, pictures showing only bodies without faces (or with faces blurred via Photoshop) can be viewed as oversexualising and fetishising of non-heteronormative men. In sections 4.3.2-4.3.4 of this chapter, through an analysis of the visual content referring to openly gay men and men who can potentially be non-heteronormative, I investigate the contexts in which images were used to support the coverage of media cases related to non-heteronormative men. I define what kind of images were chosen by the media outlets and what strategies of discursive communication of masculine non-heteronormativity those images represent.

4.3.2 Visual portrayals of non-heteronormative men in the context of discourses on human right violation: orientalisation of violated male bodies

In the current section of the chapter, I carry out a visual discourse analysis of photographic images related to media case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign, the evolution of which I observed during the first stage of media monitoring in the spring of 2017. I particularly focus on the images used in three publications on the case which appeared online between 1 and 4 April 2017. Two of the publications under analysis are by the oppositional newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and one – by the liberally biased news and entertainment outlet *meduza.io*. The April 2017 publication by *Novaya Gazeta* presented the results of the media outlet's investigation into the anti-LGBTQ campaign and served as the starting point for the media case. The 3 April 2017 publication by *meduza.io* provided an in-depth analysis of the situations with human rights and LGBTQ rights in Chechnya and quoted various experts, including prominent Russian LGBTQ-rights activists. The 5 April 2017 publication by *Novaya Gazeta* contained evidence of the men who managed to escape from the secret Chechen prisons where the victims were detained and tortured.

The *Novaya Gazeta* investigative materials of 1/04/2017 which was published under the title '*Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist's Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya*' and revealed shocking details of anti-gay purges in Chechnya are an

illustrative example of the use of images to support the overall discursive trend promoted in a media text. In the lead image (see image 4.3.1) the viewer can see two male persons wearing traditional ethnic Chechen costumes, the hands of both the men are folded as though they are applauding or clapping the rhythm of traditional Chechen dance: during a traditional dance performance all male dancers would make a semi-circle, and individual dancers would step inside that semi-circle in turns to perform their individual dances, while the others would stand around watching and clapping their hands to cheer the individual performers (see image 4.3.2).

Image 4.3.1. A screengrab of the lead image of the Novaya Gazeta 1 April publication ‘Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist’s Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya’

Source: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti>, accessed on 1.04.17

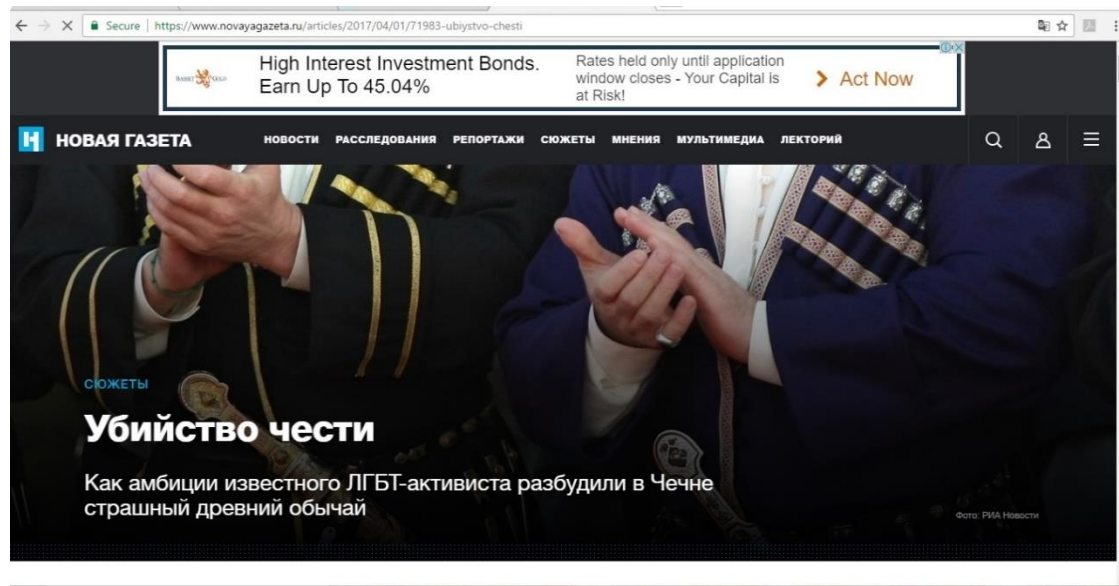


Image 4.3.2. A screengrab showing a fragment of a traditional Chechen dance performed by Chechen State Academic Dance Ensemble ‘Vainakh’

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Wo9l_M5_SM, accessed on 17/11/2019



The image and the reference to Chechen cultural customs would be recognisable to a reader of *Novaya Gazeta* immediately: due to the availability and visibility of media content with references to Chechen ethnic dress and dance, and also through the discussions about lifestyles and customs of the Chechen diasporas dwelling in large regional centres of Russia. The debates about Chechens 'dancing lezginka¹⁰⁸ in the streets' and shooting guns have been particularly heated with regard to the Chechen diasporas of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and they are still going on. For example, on 10/02/2011, the newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets* published an article under the title 'Bad dancers are in everyone's way. Is it worth banning lezginka from Moscow streets?'¹⁰⁹ The publication quotes various sources (human rights defenders, choreographers, representatives of authorities) to demonstrate that lezginka as such is harmless, and it is spontaneous street fights that happen between men while doing lezginka that have to be punished in accordance with the administrative penal code. The *MK* article also highlights the fact that opinions about lezginka presenting threats to Russian society serve as proof of a high level of discrimination against natives of North Caucasus ('kavkazophobia'). Thus, in a publication of 29 November 2013, the news portal *lenta.ru* wrote:

both members of the liberal opposition and the regional authorities are ready to declare war against natives of the Caucasus dancing on the squares of Russian cities. In August 2013, during the electoral campaign for the position of the Moscow mayor, member of opposition Aleksei Navalnyi promised to declare lezginka an administrative offence.¹¹⁰

The discussions about lezginka danced on Russian streets are still ongoing. Recently, an interview was taken by oppositional politician and media celebrity Kseniya Sobchak for her show 'Beware of Sobchak!' (*Ostorozhno, Sobchak!*) from Ukrainian journalist Anatoly Sharii caused controversy.¹¹¹ In the interview, Sobchak and Sharii discussed the issue of migration, and Sobchak compared the Chechen diaspora of Moscow who 'dance in the street, shoot their guns and thus make the lives of Muscovites unbearable' to illegal immigrants from African and Arab-speaking countries living in Paris, the comparison subsequently interpreted as an attempt to tarnish Chechen people.¹¹²

The complexity of the cultural and political relations between republics of North Caucasus and regions of the Russian Federation is not in the focus of the current section, but the examples of media references quoted above serve to demonstrate the complexity of associations and mental images can be conjured by the readers of the *Novaya Gazeta* shocking material. Whether those associations would be negative and consist in thoughts about Chechen men congregating in the centres of large Russian cities, or whether they would

¹⁰⁸ Traditional North Caucasian dance performed by male dancers

¹⁰⁹ 'Bad dancers are in everyone's way. Is it worth banning lezginka from the streets of Moscow?', by the *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 10.02.2011, <https://www.mk.ru/social/2011/02/10/564838-plohie-tantsoryi-vsem-meshayut.html>, accessed 17/11/2019

¹¹⁰ 'Dance, Caucasus! Why lezginka alienates peoples', by *lenta.ru*, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2013/11/29/lezginka/>, accessed 17/11/2019

¹¹¹ 'Anatoly Sharii on racism, working for the Kremlin and Poroshenko's revenge', in 'Beware of Sobchak!', 9/10/2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LNE46kVM14>, accessed 17/11/2019

¹¹² "She spat on the whole Chechen people". Sobchak compared Chechens with illegal Arab immigrants in Europe', by *Tsargrad TV*, 10/10/2019, https://tsargrad.tv/news/pljunula-v-ves-chechenskij-narod-sobchak-sravnila-chechencev-s-nelegalnymi-arabami-v-evrope_221012, accessed 17/11/2019

be positive and consist in mental images of beautiful Chechen dancing (like the performances of the ethnic dance ensemble shown in image 4.3.2), they would invariably evoke ideas about Chechen Muslim (*vainakh*) traditions and customs, which are considerably different from other traditions available in Russia including those by other Muslim groups such as tartars and other groups from the Caucasus such as Dagestanians.

Thus, in the 1 April 2017 publication by *Novaya Gazeta*, the problem of the anti-LGBTQ violence in Chechnya is placed within the discourses on tradition and traditional values from the very lead image and are supported by further photographs. For example, one of the inset photographs (see image 4.3.3) shows a Chechen woman adjusting a traditional Chechen male costume on a mannequin in the Museum of Grozny, the capital city of Chechnya. Not only does this photograph reinforce the discourse on Chechen traditions and customs (which permeated the media coverage of the Chechen anti-purge case), but it also symbolically pre-empt the primary line of the discourse around this media case which was analysed earlier in section 2.2 of this thesis: i.e. whether there are non-heteronormative men in Chechnya, or in other words, whether a Chechen man can be non-heterosexual. The mannequin represents an 'empty', non-existent body, a simulacrum of body, which allows for multiple symbolic interpretations, from the relativity of the concept of 'tradition' to the symbol of the absence of non-heteronormative bodies from Chechen public discourses.

Apart from setting the discursive thread of 'traditional values' with regard to the investigation into the Chechen anti-gay purge, the 1 April publication by *Novaya Gazeta* also demonstrates a discursive trend in portraying representatives of LGBTQ communities which is typical of Russian news media. In the publication '*Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist's Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya*', the reference to LGBTQ-rights activist Nikolai Alekseev was accompanied by an inset image of the activist (see image 4.3.4).

Image 4.3.3. A screengrab of an inset image of the *Novaya Gazeta* 1 April publication '*Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist's Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya*', showing a Chechen woman adjusting a Chechen traditional costume

Source: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti>, accessed on 1.04.17

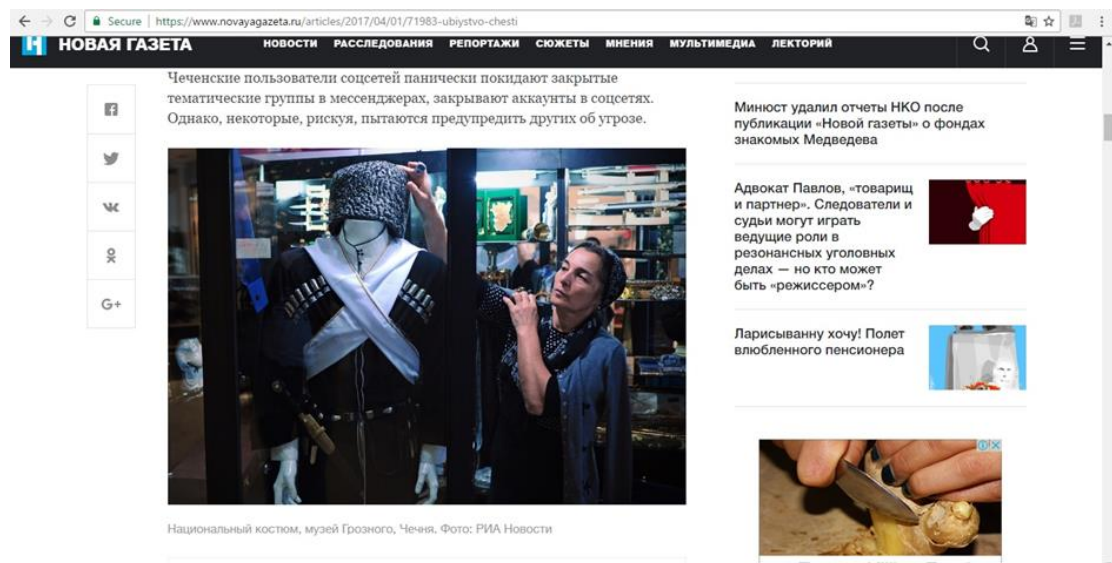
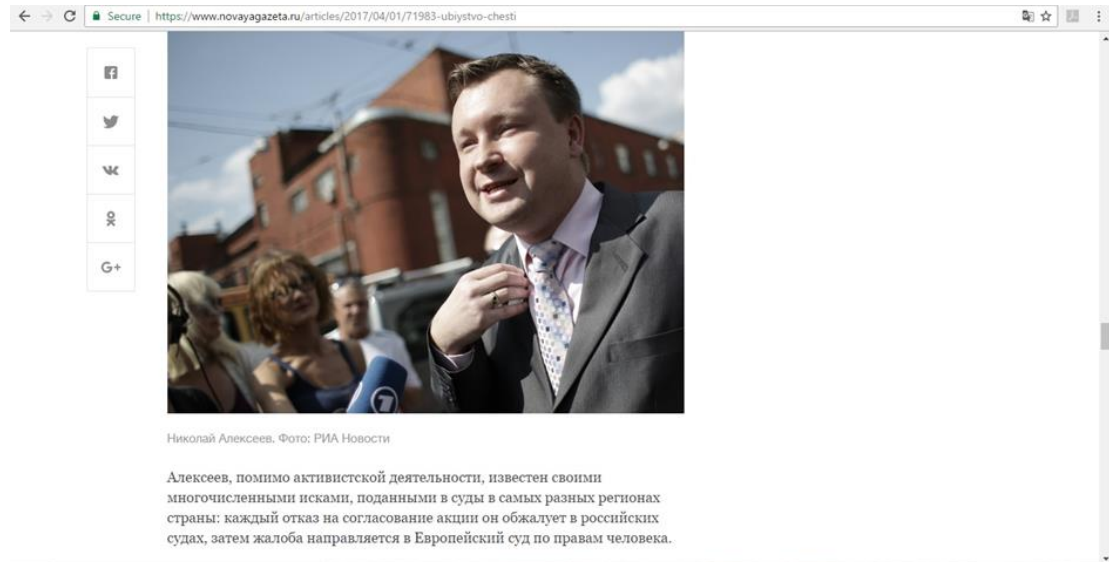


Image 4.3.4 A screengrab of an inset image of the *Novaya Gazeta* 1 April publication ‘*Honour Killing. Notorious LGBT-Activist’s Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya*’, showing prominent Russian LGBTQ-rights activist Nikolai Alekseev.

Source: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti>, accessed on 1.04.17



In this photograph, Alekseev is shown in his formal attire – suited and wearing a tie, the picture having been taken in a street, most likely during an interview Alekseev was giving to *Pervyi Kanal* (the microphone at the bottom of the foreground of the picture has the logo of Russia’s main state-funded TV channel). In other words, Alekseev is presented not as part of the LGBTQ community but part of the political and media establishment. The focus is on Alekseev’s face, head and upper body. The hand gesture (palm directed towards the body, fingers touching the tie or the right lapel of his suit) looks as if Alekseev is explaining or justifying himself.

The *Novaya Gazeta* publication promotes this public image of Alekseev as an activist who uses the problematic situation with LGBTQ rights in Russia for his own agenda. The very title of the publication contains an indirect accusation of Nikolai Alekseev causing the anti-LGBTQ campaign in Chechnya: ‘*Notorious LGBT-Activist’s Ambitions Bring About a Horrific Ancient Ritual in Chechnya*’. This idea is supported throughout the text of the publication. The article highlights that Alekseev submitted several applications for gay-pride parades in various cities of North Caucasus, which was followed by a series of anti-LGBTQ pickets and a serious backlash, including arrests and detainments of (allegedly) gay men in Chechnya. The accusations of Alekseev in the anti-LGBTQ oppression were so implicit that they spurred a court case started by Nikolai Alekseev himself against *Novaya Gazeta*, which he subsequently lost. The activist claimed that discredited his honour, dignity and business reputation and caused moral harm (i.e. effectively applied the same reasoning which was behind the banning of the ‘Gay clown Putin’ image, which serves as another proof of the importance to

differentiate the discourses on ‘decency’ and insult of figures of authority from discourses on state-promoted homophobia in Russia).¹¹³

Ultimately, the publication by *Novaya Gazeta*, from the very title and lead image, creates a binary opposition between the discourse on Chechen traditions and customs (presented as alien to or different from those of the Russian mainstream) and the discourse on LGBTQ-rights (presented as politicised and problematised through the involvement of activists like Alekseev, pursuing his personal goals). According to the overall statement of the article, the disrespect shown to local Chechen customs, traditions and lifestyles by the Europe-based activist caused anti-LGBTQ purges. Alekseev’s contribution and positive input in the development of the LGBTQ movement are omitted; also omitted is the fact that LGBTQ-rights activism and LGBTQ communities are not alien to Chechnya – there are LGBTQ people in that region whose rights, arguably, Alekseev was supposed to be supporting when applying for permission for a gay-pride parade in North Caucasus. Inadvertently and unwittingly, the very first publication on the anti-gay purge set the overall trend for the primary media discussions around that topic: the questioned existence of gay people among Chechens and the contrast between the Muslim traditionalist anti-gay (and in this respect – uncivilised) Chechnya and (presumably more civilised) Russia. This controversial opposition is in line with the moderately homophobic language used by the *Novaya Gazeta* at the start of the coverage of the anti-gay purge in Chechnya (see section 2.3 of this thesis).

Apart from sustaining and developing the statement made in the title of the publication about the personal responsibility of a leading LGBTQ-rights activist in the Chechen anti-gay purge, the 1 April publication demonstrates a trend in depicting LGBTQ individuals in Russian news media. The visual image of Alekseev in his professional attire and working to increase his media publicity represents him as a professional activist and, in this respect, part of the socio-political establishment, of the public discursive field rather than a member of the LGBTQ community, a gay man happily married to his Swiss husband. A similar approach to portrayals of prominent LGBTQ people can be defined in a 3 April 2017 publication by *meduza.io* “*In Chechnya, to come out as gay can be deadly*”. *Comments on the publication of the Novaya Gazeta about detainment and murders of homosexuals in Chechnya*.¹¹⁴ The *meduza.io* article features portraits of two prominent LGBTQ-rights activists – Nikolai Alekseev (see image 4.3.5) and Igor’ Kochetkov, Russian LGBT-Network committee member (see image 4.3.6), both images being loaned copyrighted materials from the TASS¹¹⁵ resources.

In both the visual portrayals, *meduza.io* presents the two activists in their professional capacity: Alekseev is featured when giving a public speech; Kochetkov – present at an official formal event. The introductory texts wrapping the inset portraits contrast the roles played by Alekseev and Kochetkov in the Chechen case. In the introductory passage above the photo of Nikolai Alekseev, it is mentioned that, according to the *Novaya Gazeta* article, it is Alekseev’s applications for gay pride parades that spurred anti-LGBTQ aggression in Chechnya. On the contrary, the text wrapping the portrait of Igor’ Kochetkov quotes him being in the middle of ‘coordinating efforts to evacuate people from Chechnya and to gather information’ about the anti-LGBTQ campaign Alekseev and Kochetkov are contrasted and opposed to each other:

¹¹³ ‘*GayRussia Today. LGBT-activist Nikolai Alekseev lost the court case to the Novaya Gazeta, depriving Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs of their main argument in the case on the persecution of gays in Chechnya*’, by *Novaya Gazeta*, 14/09/2017, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/09/14/73830-gayrussia-today>, accessed 17/11/2019

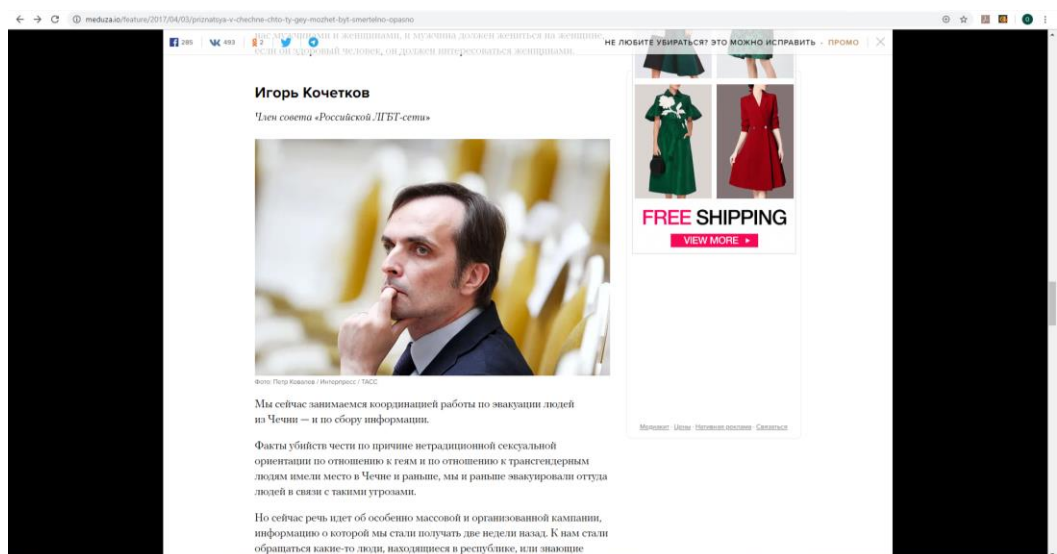
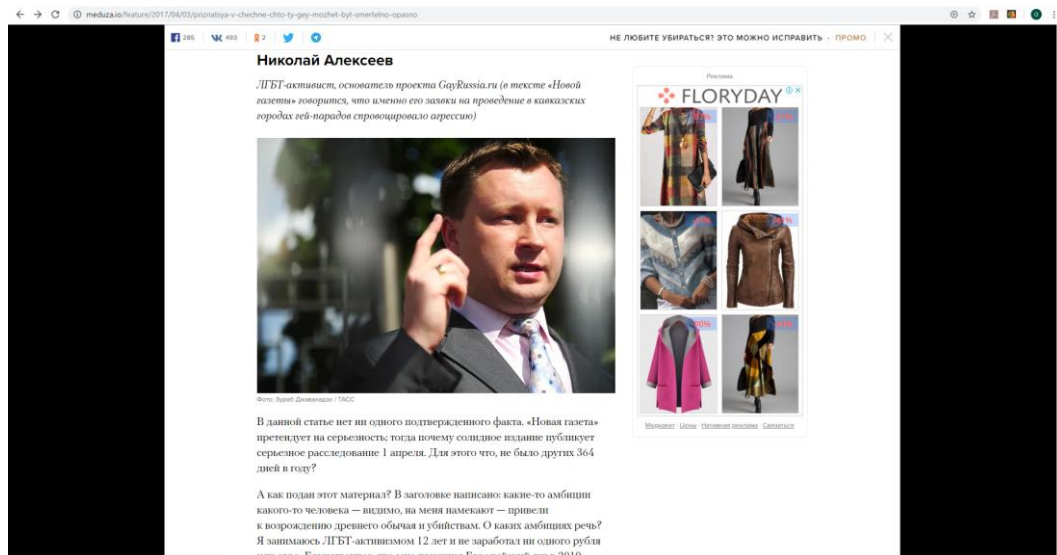
¹¹⁴ Source: <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/04/03/priznatsya-v-chechne-cto-ty-gey-mozhet-byt-smertelno-opasno>

¹¹⁵ Russia’s leading news agency - <https://tass.com/>

one as causing the anti-gay policies and thus indirectly harming LGBTQ people; the other saving LGBTQ people from anti-LGBTQ purges and thus directly helping the communities.

Images 4.3.5-4.3.6. Screenshots of inset images from the *meduza.io* publication “*In Chechnya, to come out as gay can be deadly*”. Comments on the publication of *Novaya Gazeta* about detainment and murders of homosexuals in Chechnya’, showing a portrait of Nikolai Alekseev (top) and a portrait of Igor’ Kochetkov (bottom).

Source: <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/04/03/priznatsya-v-chechne-cto-ty-gey-mozhet-byt-smertelno-opasno>, accessed 17/11/2019



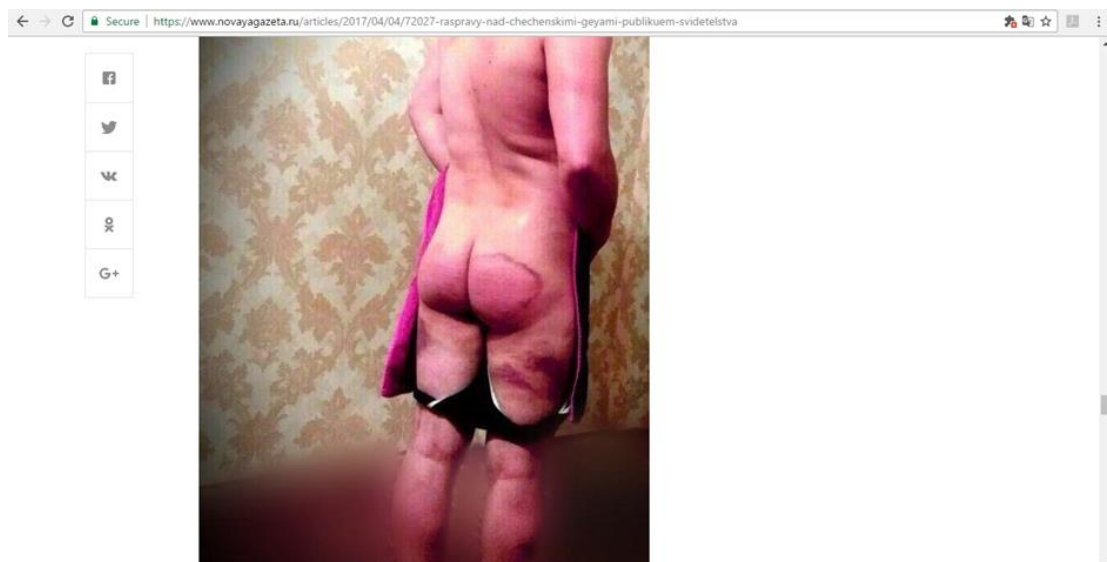
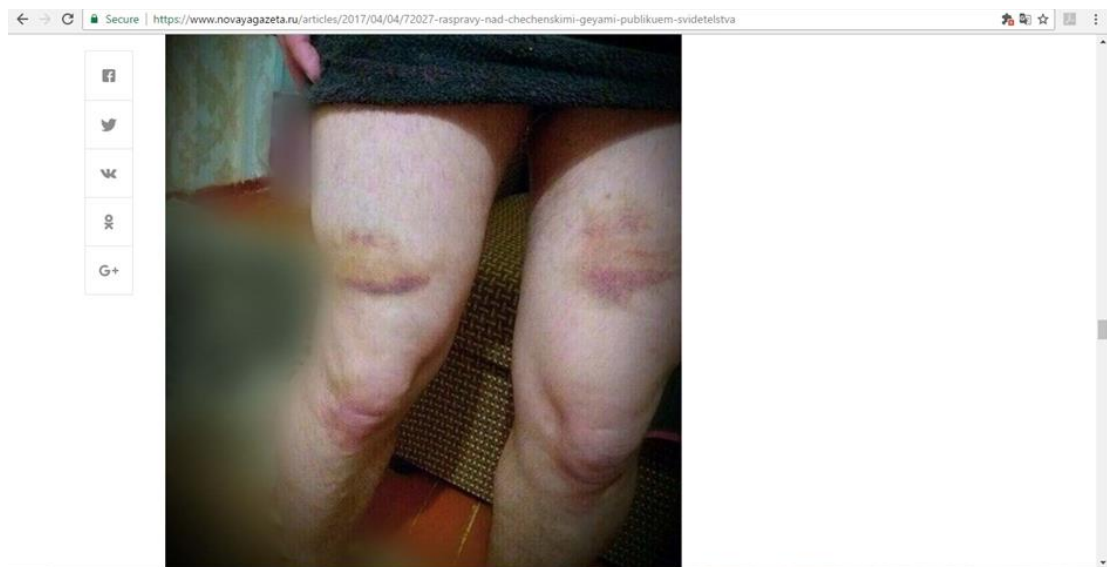
The polarising images of the two activists thus reinforce the discursive trend prevailing in the overall coverage of the Chechen purge by liberally biased media outlets, i.e. the positioning of the non-heteronormative Chechen men within the framework of victimhood and therefore in need of protection from human rights supporters (see section 2.3 of the thesis).

The portrayals of non-activist representatives of LGBTQ communities, however, stand in sharp contrast to visual portrayals of non-activist LGBTQ people. For example, in a 4 April 2017 publication under the title ‘*Reprisal against Chechen gays (18+). Stories of survivors*

published',¹¹⁶ the *Novaya Gazeta* presented evidence of unlawful arrests, detainments and tortures in secret prisons of several Chechen men suspected in non-heteronormative relationships. To support the first-person narratives of two attestors who managed to escape from the secret prisons and who shared their experiences of being beaten up and tortured, the media outlet used photos from the men's personal archive (see images 4.3.7 and 4.3.8).

Images 4.3.7-4.3.8. Screenshot of inset images from the 4 April 2017 *Novaya Gazeta* publication '*Reprisal against Chechen gays (18+). Stories of survivors published*', showing the bruises on the thighs of a victim of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign.

Source: [novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/04/72027-raspravy-nad-chechenskimi-gejami-publikuem-svidetelstva](https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/04/72027-raspravy-nad-chechenskimi-gejami-publikuem-svidetelstva), accessed 4/04/2017



The image of the first attestor shows his knees and the front of his thighs covered in large yellow-and-blue bruises (image 4.3.7). The photo of the second attestor shows his back, buttocks and legs, the buttocks, and the back of his thighs extensively bruised (image 4.3.8).

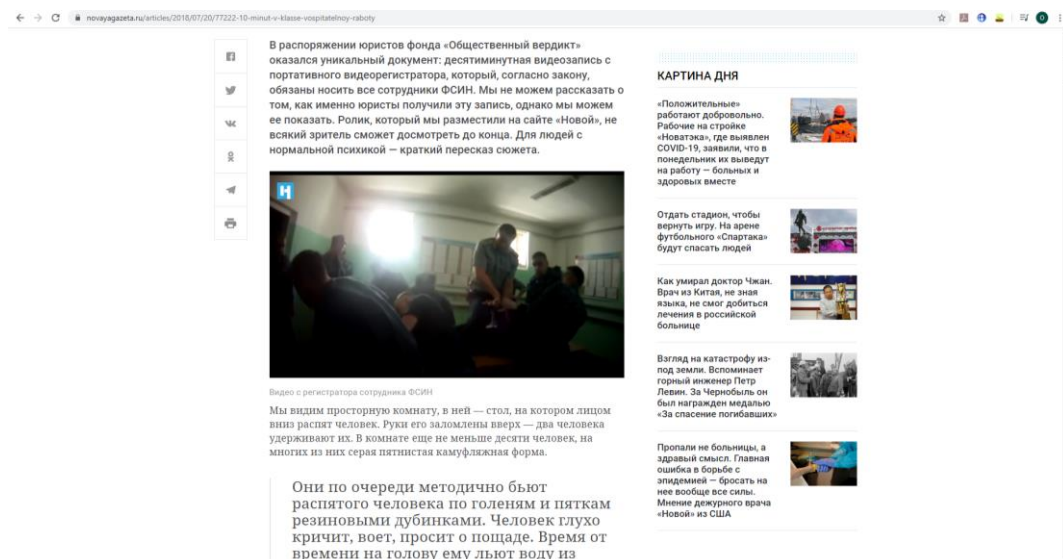
¹¹⁶ Source: [novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/04/72027-raspravy-nad-chechenskimi-gejami-publikuem-svidetelstva](https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/04/72027-raspravy-nad-chechenskimi-gejami-publikuem-svidetelstva)

Both the inset images have an identical wording of explanatory text underneath: ‘hematomas recorded after the release from prison’.

It is striking how corporeal, physical, material – and objectified, sexualised and fetishised are the bodies of (allegedly) non-heteronormative men in these two visual portrayals. The images are published unedited – there is no cropping, no blurring of body parts that would normally be covered with clothing. Though the interplay of the discourses of victimhood and torture, these portrayals bear similarity to the martyred masculinity of the Saint Sebastian visual canon (Badenes 2008), as well as to the Soviet hero masculinity of the ‘wounded, long-suffering invalid’ as opposed to a ‘virile and productive’ exemplary masculine body (Kaganovsky 2008: 22). Although such corporeal visual images referring to tortures and beatings are not restricted to cases involving non-heteronormative individuals (similar kind of materials can be found, for example, in publications about human rights violations and torture taking place in Russian prisons and detainment centres; see images 4.3.9-4.3.10), the reinforcement of the themes of victimhood in the case of the men beaten up and tortured during the Chechen anti-LGBTQ purge is very important as it initiates redirection of media discourses on NHM towards if not acceptance but empathy and compassion.

Images 4.3.9 - 4.3.10. Screenshot of the *Novaya Gazeta* publication ‘10 minutes in a correction class’ (*10 minut v klasse vospitatel’noi raboty*), showing tortures of Russian prison inmates by prison guards.

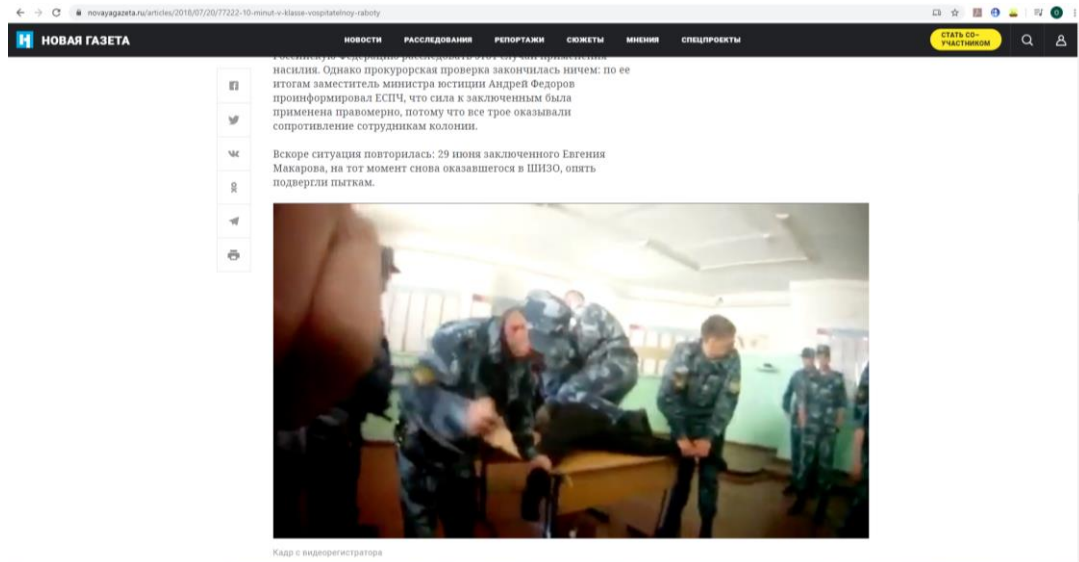
Source: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/07/20/77222-10-minut-v-klasse-vospitatelnoy-raboty>, accessed 26/04/2020



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying an article on the Novaya Gazeta website. The main content area features a video player with a dark, grainy image of a prison interior. Below the video, there is a caption in Russian: "Видео с регистратора сотрудника ФСИН. Мы видим просторную комнату, в ней — стол, на котором лицом вниз распят человек. Руки его заломлены вверх — два человека удерживают их. В комнате еще не меньше десяти человек, на многих из них серая пятнистая камуфляжная форма." Below this, a paragraph of text reads: "Они по очереди методично бьют распятого человека по голени и пяткам резиновыми дубинками. Человек глухо кричит, воеет, просит о пощаде. Время от времени на голову ему льют воду из..."

The right sidebar is titled "КАРТИНА ДНЯ" and contains several small news items with accompanying images:

- «Положительные» работают добровольно. Рабочие на стройке «Новатэка», где выявлен COVID-19, заявили, что в понедельник их выведут на работу — больных и здоровых вместе
- Отдать стадион, чтобы вернуть игру. На арене футбольного «Спартака» будут спать люди
- Как умерал доктор Чжан. Врач из Китая, не зная языка, не смог добиться лечения в российской больнице
- Взгляд на катастрофу из-под земли. Вспоминает горный инженер Петр Лавин. За Чернобыль он был награжден медалью «За спасение погибавших»
- Пропали не больница, а здравый смысл. Главная ошибка в борьбе с эпидемией — фросать на нее вообще все силы. Мнение дежурного врача «Новой» из США



The examples analysed in section 4.3.2 of this chapter demonstrate the different approaches to depicting non-heteronormative, where the categories of sexuality and ethnicity intersect. The visual images of white openly gay men (the activists) are communicated as desexualised ‘talking heads’, while the images of Chechen men are communicated within the framework of tradition and the prism of orientalisation, as well as through the discursive trend of corporeal visibility of heroic martyrdom and victimhood. In the following section, I further explore the theme of heroic martyrdom and victimhood as a strategy of communicating NHM in the context of coverage of a terrorist attack.

4.3.3 Visual representations of same-sex male couples in the framework of discourses on ‘fallen hero’: queering the ‘traditional family’ discourse

In the current section of the chapter, I analyse the visual coverage of the events related to the killing of French gay police officer Xavier Jugelé in a Paris terrorist attack, his funeral and the subsequent posthumous marriage between Jugelé and his partner Etienne Cardiles (for an in-depth analysis of the evolution of this media case see section 2.3 of the thesis).

On 20 April 2017, gay-rights activist and Parisian police officer Xavier Jugelé was on duty in Champs Elysees when he was killed during a terrorist attack performed by Islamist gunman Karim Cheurfi.¹¹⁷ When the identity of the murdered policeman was disclosed on 21 April, Western and Russian media started circulating an image of the murdered policeman, issued by French authorities and later used in Jugelé’s funeral service (compare images 4.3.9 showing a publication by Russian news and entertainment portal *life.ru* and 4.3.10 showing a publication by the *Guardian*).

¹¹⁷ See, for example, ‘Paris Champs Elysees attack gunman named as Karim Cheurfi’ 21 April 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-39671542>

Image 4.3.9 A screengrab of 21/04/2017 *life.ru* publication 'Media: The policeman killed in Paris took part in the liberation of "Bataklan"', showing a portrait of Xavier Jugelé

Source: <https://bit.ly/2WUwGg3>, accessed 19/03/2019

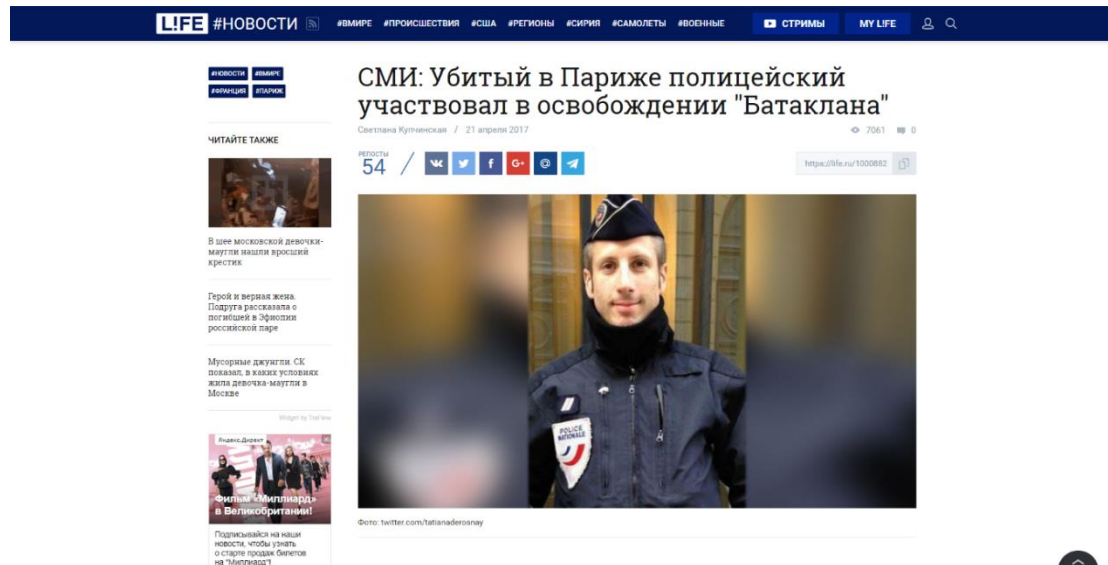
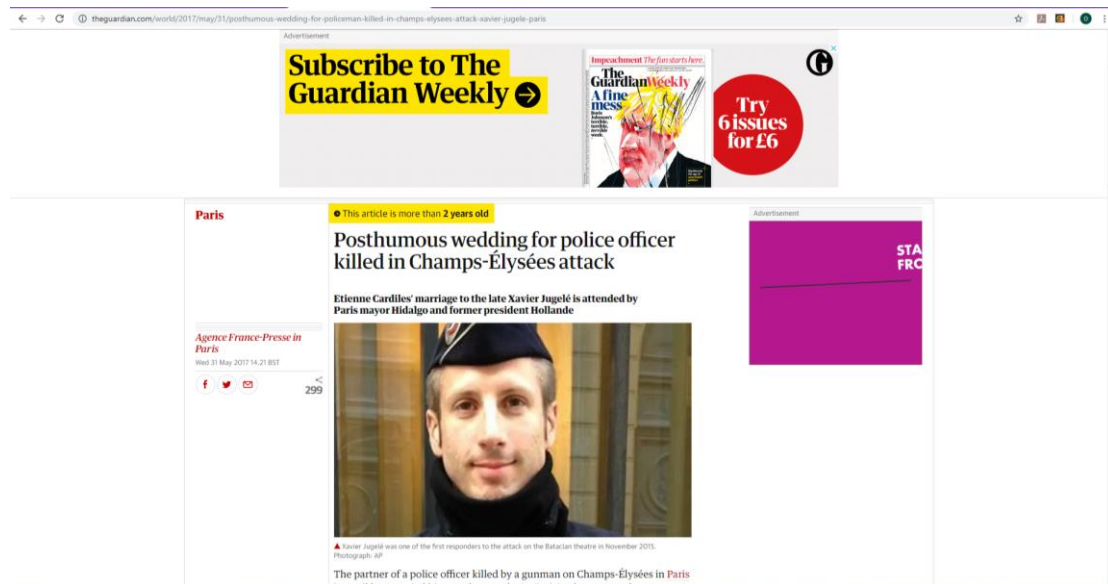


Image 4.3.10 A screengrab of 31/05/2017 *Guardian* publication 'Posthumous wedding for police officer killed in Champs-Élysées attack' showing a portrait of Xavier Jugelé

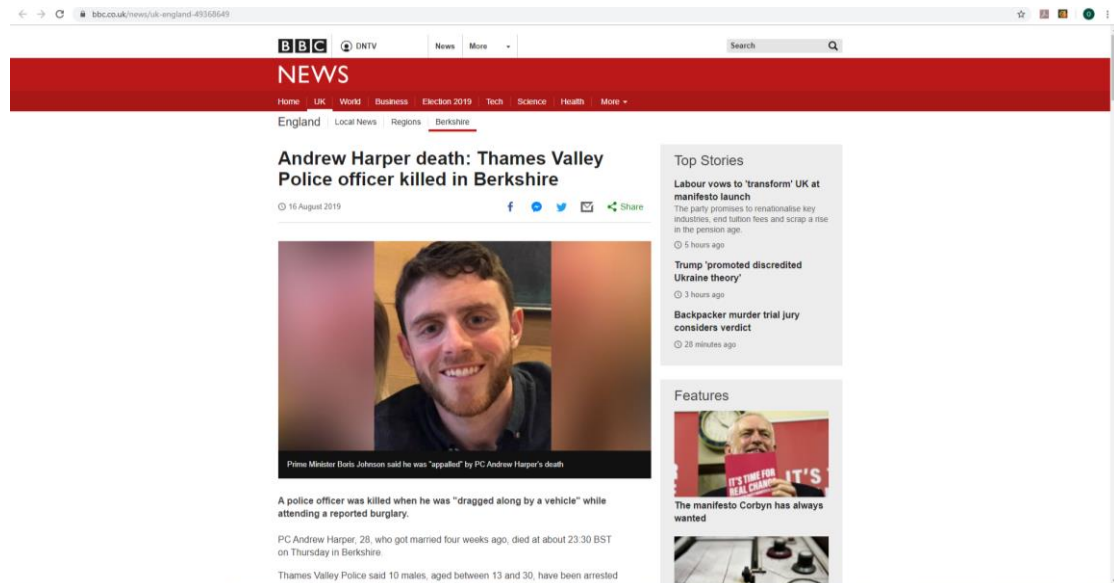
Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/31/posthumous-wedding-for-policeman-killed-in-champs-elysees-attack-xavier-jugele-paris>, accessed 22/11/2019



The head and chest image shows Xavier in his police officer's uniform, looking straight into the camera. Such photographs are often used to support articles about police officers killed in action (compare images 4.3.11 and 4.3.12). In this respect, it is a typical, standard image – a positive portrayal of a hero aimed to evoke respect for the murdered professional and sympathy for their family. The image is completely desexualised, therefore, the sexual identity of the French gay policeman cannot possibly be inferred from the image.

Image 4.3.11 A screengrab of 16/08/2019 BBC publication 'Andrew Harper death: Thames Valley Police officer killed in Berkshire'

Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-49368649>, accessed 17/11/2019



4.3.12 A screengrab of 29/09/2019 publication by the *Financial Express*, 'Indian-American Sikh police officer's funeral set for October 2; shooter charged with capital murder'

Source: <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/indian-american-sikh-police-officers-funeral-set-for-october-2-shooter-charged-with-capital-murder/1720800/>, accessed 17/11/2019



What disclosed the sexual identity of the murdered policeman was the coverage of the solemn ceremony of Xavier Jugelé's funeral, at which his bereft partner Etienne Cardiles delivered an emotional speech. Russian media outlets either broadcast the video recording of the speech (see image 4.3.13) or published a screenshot of the speech to accompany the news bite about it. The image of Xavier Jugelé's partner is also desexualised through the official, formal representation. In this visual text (image and screenshot), Etienne Cardiles is depicted wearing a formal black suit and a white shirt; he looks serious, solemn, respectable.

Image 4.3.13 A screengrab of the *Dozhd'* publication on Xavier Jugelé's funeral

Source: https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/videooftheday/rech_boyfriend-433288/ (26.04.2017)

ДОЗДЬ 16+ НОВОСТИ ПРОГРАММЫ РЕПОРТАЖИ ЛТЕ КИНО ТЕД ВВС ЕЩЕ

25 апреля 2017 55 230

Ксавье, в четверг утром я как всегда ушел на работу, а ты еще спал.

Полицейский Ксавье Жюжеле погиб во время перестрелки на Елисейских полях 20 апреля, когда 39-летний Карим Шерфи открыл стрельбу по полицейским из автомата Калашникова. Во время церемонии прощания его партнер Этьенн Кардилес произнес невероятно трогательную речь.

Перевод с французского: RFI

Ксавье, в четверг утром я как всегда ушел на работу, а ты еще спал. В течение дня мы обсуждали наши планы на каникулы в одной далекой стране, а ты говорил, как тебе не терпится туда поехать, что ты никогда не был так далеко. Мы обсуждали детали получения визы и где мы будем жить. Ты был так рад. Ведь билеты мы

Чехол для iPhone ТАКАЯ РАБОТА

Mentioning the partners and/or family left after the murder of the police officer, with images of the family sometimes included too, is also part of the genre. For example, image 4.3.14 demonstrates how an image of the policeman murdered in action and his partner is used to intensify the positive portrayals of the murdered hero. Image 4.3.15 demonstrates how a reference to the murdered policeman's family is made through a comment wrapping the lead image of the article (the caption under the image of the policeman shot in Alabama, USA, says 'Officer Billa had a wife and a child'). Thus, the images portraying the murdered gay policeman and his partner are in line with the media genre of the obituary of a 'fallen hero'.

Image 4.3.14 A screengrab of 16/08/2019 BBC publication 'Andrew Harper death: Thames Valley Police officer killed in Berkshire', showing the murdered policeman alongside his female partner

Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-49368649>, accessed 17/11/2019

time," he added.

Mr Campbell said PC Harper was a "highly regarded, popular member of the team" and his death was a "significant loss" to the force and also to his colleagues and friends.

- 'I've been spat on, bitten and kicked'
- Police 'shocked and saddened' by killing

PC Harper got married just four weeks ago

Members of PC Harper's family paid tributes on social media to the "loveliest person that you will ever meet".

Maureen Strimington wrote: "Just a really horrible day. Our grandson Andrew was killed last night while doing his police work.

"So proud of him. Our love goes to his lovely wife, mum and dad, brother and all of his family and friends."

Andy Fidler, from the Thames Valley Police Federation, added: "This is totally devastating news.

"All our thoughts - and the thoughts of the entire police family across the UK - are with the family, friends and close colleagues of PC Andrew Harper who died last night."

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) said it had been made aware of

'I was given three sheep for doing well in my GCSEs'

Young Offenders 'pretty accurate', say Cork locals

The Portrait Salon Awards 2019

Will this place become the world's next country?

Elsewhere on the BBC

Plastic Surgery
Separating the Fact from the Fiction

Daily news briefing
direct to your inbox.

Image 4.3.15 A screengrab of 21/02/2018 publication by the *Independent* ‘Police officer shot dead by murder suspect during standoff’, showing the portrait of the murdered policeman and a caption below with a reference to the policeman’s wife and children

Source: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/police-officer-shot-dead-justin-billa-murder-suspect-standoff-alabama-a8221516.html>, accessed 17/11/2019



As these examples demonstrate, the discourse of ‘fallen hero’ does not only allow for a positive media portrayal of a non-heteronormative man but it also enables the inclusion of non-heteronormative couples into the media discourse on the family. The husband of the fallen national hero is represented in the same sympathetic, positive way as the female partners of murdered heterosexual policemen.

4.3.4 Visual portrayals of male victims of homosexual harassment: non-heteronormative masculinities in the context of discourses on victimhood

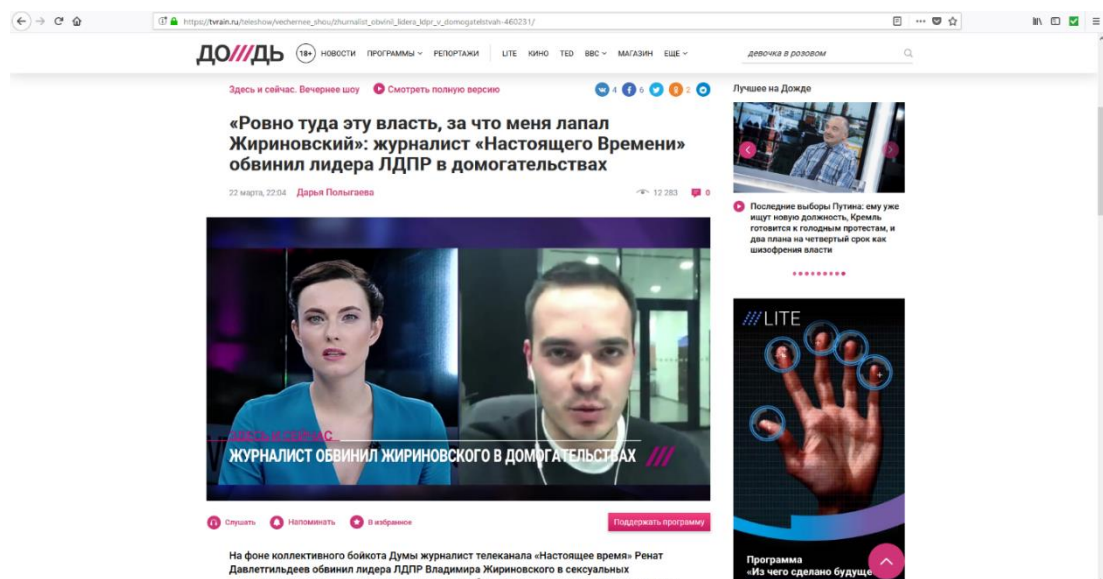
The media coverage of the ‘Slutsky-gate’ case evolved not only around the narratives of female journalists who were subjected to sexual harassment on the part of LDPR (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) Duma MP Leonid Slutsky. The coverage of this media case, which was observed in the spring of 2018 during the second stage of media monitoring, also included a male journalist’s narrative on his experience of being a victim of sexual harassment on the part of LDPR leader Zhirinovskiy (for the critical discourse analysis of the media coverage of same-sex sexual harassment narrative (see sections 3.6 and 3.7 of chapter 3). Although the same-sex sexual harassment narrative was covered by the majority of the monitored outlets, only three publications on the male journalist’s story included visual portrayals of Renat Davletgil’deev, and these three publications are in the focus of the visual analysis presented in the current section of the chapter. I analyse the images of Davletgil’deev as they appeared in the publications by the oppositional TV channel *Dozhd’*, the oppositional internet radio channel *svoboda.org*, and the information portal catering for LGBTQ communities *parniplus.com*.

The photographic images of the journalist used by the mainstream news media *Dozhd'* and *svoboda.org* are in line with the observations made in section 4.3.1 of this chapter: they were portrayals of 'talking heads', desexualised and official-looking (see images 4.3.16 and 4.3.17). However, there is a difference between the *Dozhd'* and *svoboda.org* visual representations of the gay journalist. The *Dozhd'* publication is a recording and a textual script of a video call from the *Dozhd'* presenter to Davletgil'deev, and Davletgil'deev's appearance on the screen is therefore juxtaposed to the portrayal of the female presenter (see image 4.3.16). By symbolically placing Davletgil'deev next to the *Dozhd'* interviewer, this kind of portrayal provides the non-heteronormative man with a discursive agency, puts him on the same level as the other media actors in the discourse. This vivid and lively representation supports the title of the publication which conveys Davletgil'deev's active position in the harassment debate and his firm determination to stop harassment against people working in and for the State Duma.

Image 4.3.16. A screengrab of the 22/03/2018 TV programme 'This government can go to exactly where Zhirinovksy grabbed me: *Nastoiashchee Vremia* journalist accuses LDPR leader of harassment', showing a video call between the *Dozhd'* presenter and her interviewee, Renat Devletgil'deev

Source:

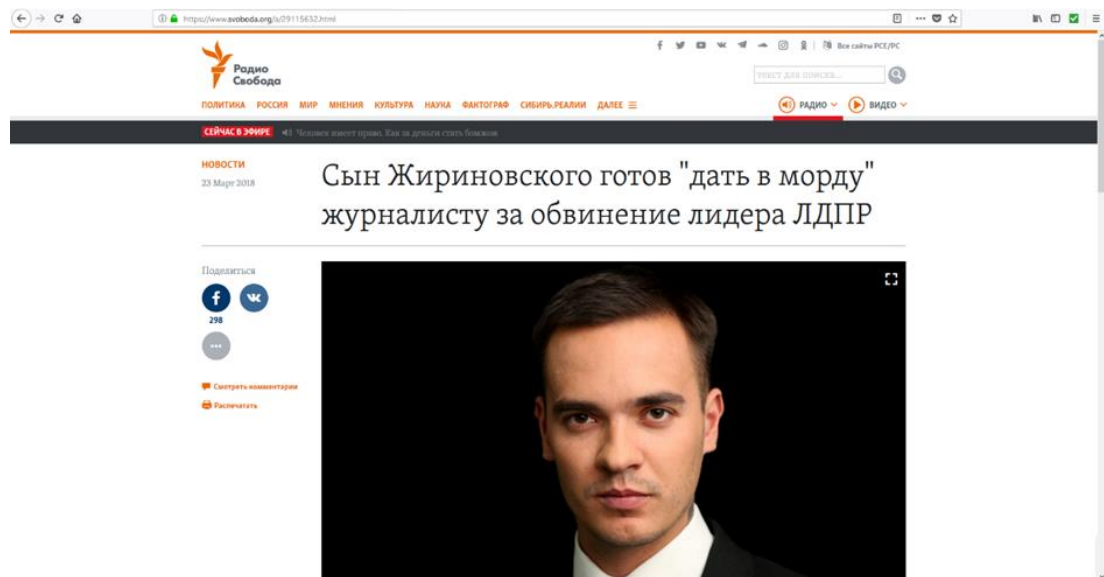
https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/vechernee_shou/zhurnalists_obvinil_lidera_ldpr_v_domogatelstv_ah-460231/, accessed 22/03/2018



A different approach to portraying the non-heteronormative victim of same-sex harassment is presented in the *svoboda.org* publication. The photographic image chosen by the media outlet is a head photo that could be taken for a passport photo if not for the black background (see image 4.3.17). The black background and Davletgil'deev's intent look in the camera create a solemn and even tragic image, like a photo for an obituary or a tombstone. The tragic representation reflects the title and overall tone of the publication, which victimises Davletgil'deev and opposes him to the machoistic LDPR leadership.

Image 4.3.17. A screengrab of the 23/03/2018 publication ‘Zhirinovsky’s son ready to “punch the face” of the journalist for the accusation against the leader of LDPR’

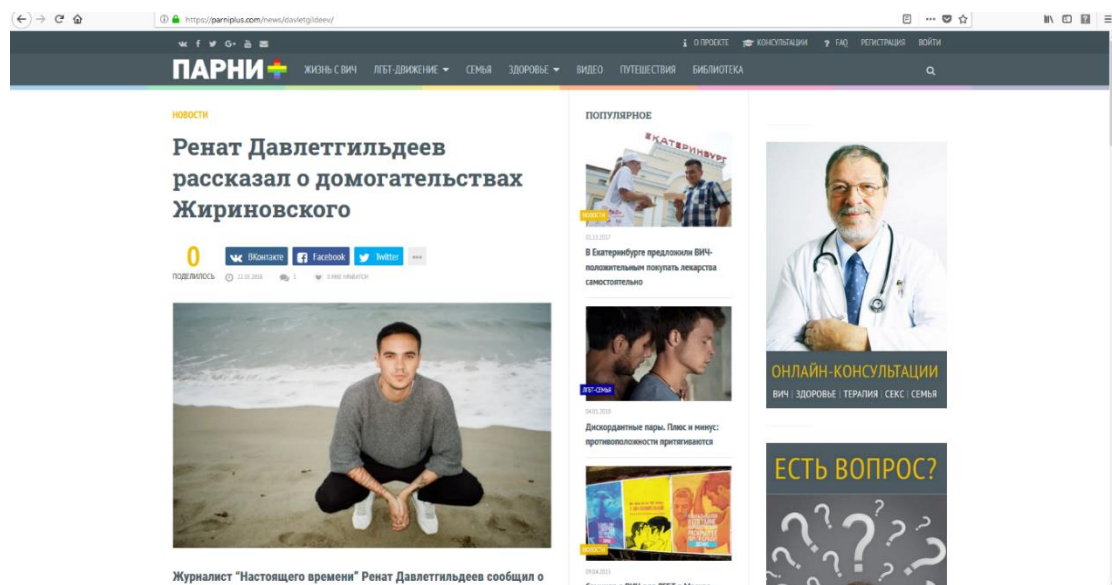
Source: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29115632.html>, accessed 23/03/2018



The third visual portrayal of the non-heteronormative journalist which was published as part of the media coverage of the LDPR sexual harassment scandal differs dramatically from the first two. The 22 March 2018 publication by *parniplus.com* - a media outlet produced by LGBTQ people for LGBTQ audiences – is the only text among the media data on the case that contains a full-body image of Davletgil’ deev taken from his personal social media account and not an official formal headshot (see image 4.3.18).

Image 4.3.18. A screengrab of the 22/03/2018 *parniplus.com* publication ‘Renat Davletgil’deev spoke about harassment from Zhirinovskiy’ featuring Renat’s personal photo

Source: <https://parniplus.com/news/davletgildeev/>, accessed 22/03/2018



In what is likely to be a photo from the image archive on the journalist's Facebook page, Davletgil'deev is pictured wearing casual clothes, squatting against the seashore background, with his whole body visible, looking straight into the camera in a relaxed and peaceful way. This photographic image is the only personalised portrayal of Davletgil'deev in the observed media coverage, which shows that when LGBTQ media outlets approach the task visual representation of non-heteronormative men, their strategies are different from those applied by mainstream media: it is a sympathetic portrayal, a visual embodiment of a non-heteronormative man with a reference to his personal life and experience.

As the analysis presented in this section of the chapter revealed, visual discourses on NHM in Russian digital news media are still evolving, which affects the discursive strategies applied by media outlets to portray non-heteronormative men. It is only the outlets which can be defined as 'queer media' (made by LGBTQ media professionals for LGBTQ media audiences) that approach portrayals of queer men as a task of revealing their queer identity in a personalised context. Mainstream news media tend to either desexualise openly gay men completely by portraying them exclusively in a professional, formal context or to oversexualise anonymous non-heteronormative bodies.

Arguably, this might be due to the nature of the specific identities under analysis. In the case of oversexualised portrayals of anonymous Chechen men, the media are likely to be deliberately trying to reduce any references to the men's identities for personal safety reasons. In the case of desexualised portrayals of prominent LGBTQ-rights activists or murdered national heroes, it might be more important for the news media outlets to place those men in the political framework of human rights and the war on terror rather than within the discourses on queer sexuality. In the next section of the chapter, I analyse the discursive differences in visual portrayals of non-heteronormative men outside of restrictive political discourses. Through the case study of the transgressive gendered bodily performance of Alexandre Vassiliev, the host of the Russian prime-time makeover TV show '*Fashion Verdict*', I investigate the visual manifestations of an embodiment of NHM in the context of entertainment TV.

4.4 Transgressive sexuality performance on Russian makeover TV: the case study of fashion historian Alexandre Vassiliev

4.4.1. Makeover show *Fashion Verdict* as a display of non-heteronormative masculinity

As I demonstrated in section 4.3 of this chapter, visual media discourses of Russian online news media reveal a limited set of discursive strategies for communicating non-heteronormative masculinities. A whole range of factors impact the outlets' choice of visual images for portrayals of mediated masculine subjects: e.g. copyright issues; the use of a specific image by the outlet where the content was republished from; the personal safety of the subjects. Bearing in mind the prolific, diverse, provocative and explicit visual discourses emerging in alternative media and in queer cultural projects which were outlined in section 4.1, the question arises whether any kind of such alternative diverse visuality can be observed in federal mainstream media. Following Graham Roberts' argument of 'the central role of clothing in constructing a queer identity' (Roberts 2019: 61) and following scholarship on the intersection of fashion and non-heteronormative masculinity (e.g. Roberts 2019, Vanshtein 2012), I turned to one of the most popular and longest-running fashion shows in Russian federal media: the *Pervyi Kanal* programme *Fashion Verdict* (*Modnyi prigovor*), which since its start has been hosted by artistic men whose performance of masculinity can be interpreted

as non-heteronormative: fashion designer Slava Zaitsev (2007-2009); fashion historian Alexandre Vassiliev (2009 to date); queer performative artist, sculptor and designer Andrei Bartenev (2017). For the purpose of this study, I focus on the non-heteronormative performance of Alexandre Vassiliev, the current host who has had the longest presence at the show.

The lifestyle entertainment program *Fashion Verdict* has been broadcast on Russia's primary TV channel, *Pervyi Kanal* (Channel One), since 2007. The program imitates a court trial with Aleksandre Vassiliev, fashion historian, acting as the 'fashion judge'; Evelina Khromchenko, fashion expert and journalist, as the 'prosecutor'; and Nadezhda Babkina, a folk-pop star, as 'counsel for defense'. The plaintiff accuses the defendant, almost invariably a woman, of violating the rules of fashion, and the trial results in the defendant's total makeover. Various celebrities are invited to each show to support the defendant and encourage her to embrace a more feminine look and lifestyle. Each episode of '*Fashion Verdict*' evolves around the defendant being helped to balance a professional career and a successful personal life as mother and wife/partner, i.e. being urged to comply with the gender stereotype of 'double burden' common in contemporary Russian society, where this stereotype stands for women combining the roles of a full-time housewife and a full-time worker (Stella 2015).

Throughout its history, the programme has consistently enjoyed an impressive level of popularity with a wide and diverse audience within Russia and globally (the show presenters tend to refer to their audience as the '35 million viewers'). The fact of a makeover show enjoying such popularity and longevity is not at all surprising or specific to Russian media culture. The 'demotic turn' (Turner 2010) in contemporary global media has opened limitless opportunities for 'ordinary people' to actively participate in media discourse. A new form of cultural identity existing purely in the media sphere, a do-it-yourself identity, has gained momentum: 'the media have entered a phase in which they now operate as the authors or translators of cultural identities; <...> reality TV must be right at the forefront of this trend' (Turner 2010: 66).

Since it is easy for the audience to relate to this new DIY cultural identity which they see translated from the TV screen, the numerous and various formats of makeover television are so highly viable. Apart from the entertainment value, such programmes serve an educational purpose promoting a healthy lifestyle or offering advice on how to improve one's image. What attributes a lot to the popularity of makeover shows is the fact that they do not only 'model appropriate behaviours for their viewers' (Turner 2010: 39) and criticise those who do not fit into the advised behavioural patterns, but also 'repudiate the standards against which such failure might be judged' (Turner 2010: 51).

The popularity and the growing media presence and significance of lifestyle makeover programmes are not only an integral part of the 'late-modern makeover or improvement culture' (Christensen 2010: 125), but also a result of the global process of 'mediatization of everyday life' (Christensen 2010: 127) and the globally circulated discourses 'on the importance of individual choice as crucial to the meaning of life' (Christensen 2010: 127): 'in this respect, mediatization means that television not only presents different aspects of everyday life and ways of improving it; it also creates the impression that everyday life means a daily, individual responsibility for practicing an aesthetic, self-reflective attitude, and readiness for recurrent change and innovation' (Christensen 2010: 127).

Mediatization of everyday life does not only turn individual lifestyles into entertainment but also serves as a motivational factor for the audience to create new

lifestyles or imitate the mediated ones. The ‘sympathetic viewing’ (Christensen 2010: 126) stimulated by makeover TV ensures the audience’s emotional involvement in what is happening on the show, which makes it possible for such programmes to construct narratives of high discursive potential. For example, Russian makeover TV in general and the *‘Fashion Verdict’* in particular are claimed to suggest ‘a model of the ideal female citizen’ (Kazakevich 2016: 57) within the neotraditionalist and neoliberal discourses on citizenship: ‘within the makeover, the whole set of practices, action, and discourses helps to create a woman with new improved and updated features who is now able to perform her social, cultural, political and gender duties better’ (Kazakevich 2016: 64).

In contemporary mediated neoliberal culture, the image of an ideal citizen is interwoven with that of an ideal consumer. Thus, in the *‘Fashion Verdict’*, the image of an ideal female citizen merges with the image of an ideal consumer of fashion, and the programme audiences are treated primarily as consumers (Rajagopalan 2010) engaged in ‘a lifestyle politics, where makeover television’s disciplining agenda for consumers is matched by the exercise of a sartorial citizenship’ on the part of the audience (Rajagopalan 2010: 100).

This idea of symbolic media citizenship translated by makeover TV is consistent with another significant feature of the *‘Fashion Verdict’* as a media phenomenon: namely, the programme’s potential for constructing and maintaining a traditionalist discourse on sex, gender and sexuality within the boundaries of the state-imposed heteronormativity in Russia. A popular show broadcast in primetime on the most important state-owned TV channel, the images which the *‘Fashion Verdict’* mediates both reflect and support current societal trends in attitudes to sex, gender and sexuality.

Each episode of the *‘Fashion Verdict’* evolves around the defendant being helped to balance a professional career and a successful personal life as mother and/or partner. On the one hand, the programme demonstrates an appropriate way to strike the right balance between professional fulfilment and personal happiness, thus supporting the post-Soviet quasi-patriarchal gender order and the state-sustained traditionalist conservative gender discourse aimed at infringing women’s rights and undermining gender equality.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, it encourages women to strive for more, especially in terms of material comforts and achievements, thus reflecting the new post-Soviet lifestyles, such as ‘glamour’ (*glamur*), and new gendered identities of a career woman and a fully-supported housewife, who is normally out of employment and is provided for by her husband or partner. In the current section of the thesis chapter, I investigate the relations between the interplay of traditionalist conservative and neoliberal ‘glamour’ gender discourses and transgressive non-heteronormative gendered bodily performances in the *‘Fashion Verdict’*. Through the multimodal discourse analysis of the brand gestures of Alexandre Vassiliev I define whether the transgressive performances of the TV programme celebrity host sustain or challenge the hegemonic heteronormative discourses.

Although the popular TV presenter has never made a public coming-out,¹¹⁹ Alexandre Vassiliev’s flamboyant outfits, camp mannerisms and intonations do not leave much room for doubts about his non-heteronormative sexuality. On the makeover show, he represents a

¹¹⁸ On State Duma’s decriminalisation of domestic violence in January 2017 see, for example, ‘Putin approves legal change that decriminalises some domestic violence’, by *The Guardian*, published on 7/02/2017, available from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/07/putin-approves-change-to-law-decriminalising-domestic-violence>, accessed 30/04/2020

¹¹⁹ In general, coming-outs are an alien concept among contemporary Russian celebrities due to the overall homophobic societal trends.

stereotypical image of the spiritual, aestheticized, soulful and artistic homosexuality (Baer 2009: 116), an image which is traditionally viewed as positive in Russian culture: an artistic gay male is bound to help a woman look beautiful and to instruct her on how to attract male attention – an ability quite fitting to the purpose of the show. Vassiliev's extralinguistic behavior characterizes him as a person of a non-stereotypical type of masculinity: his facial expressions are varied, diverse, vivid and somewhat feminine; he never misses a chance to do a little flirtatious dance when there is a live music performance during the show. Vassiliev's idiosyncrasies result in him being perceived as an artistic aesthete, a connoisseur of fine arts and fashion, not necessarily recognized as a man of 'non-traditional' sexuality, but definitely viewed as different from a stereotypical Russian male and thus representing 'non-traditional' masculinity. Vassiliev's professional achievements, his recognition and his high position in society, as well as his connections with Russia and the West,¹²⁰ put him above the Russian 'Section 28' law and enable him to venture types of behavior which could easily be interpreted as 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships'. As samples of such non-verbal behaviour, I selected Vassiliev's three transgressive brand gestures, where the gendered gesture is approached as a tool of challenging 'the state ideology of conservatism' (Strukov 2017: 68).

Specific brand gestures used by media personae consistently attract the attention of scholars interested in analysing how the 'brand' gestures unique to a certain celebrity and common gestures used by various political and celebrity figures contribute to the public discourses they are involved in (see Hall et al. 2016, Navaretta 2016, Streeck 2008, Wehling 2009). In the contemporary celebrity and mediatized culture (Hall et al. 2016: 72), TV celebrities such as the Russian TV presenter and fashion historian Alexandre Vassiliev can also be viewed as powerful agents in public discourse.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of gestures for the creation and perception of TV celebrities' brand identities. As rhetorician Robert Hariman put it (1995), 'to become a celebrity, one has to master and distinguish oneself within a rhetoric of gestures – virtually every star has a defining gesture or gestural effect' (cited in Hall et al. 2016: 81). Alexandre Vassiliev's mediated performance demonstrates a wide range of such gestures and gestural effects.

The interpretation of Vassiliev's gestures comprises both their function in the speech discourse of the TV show narrative and their role in constructing an image of non-heteronormative gender and sexuality and in promoting the discourse of heteronormativity. The presenter's bodily and head movements are analysed as linked to the language he uses and to the overall discursive structure of the show. For the purpose of the analysis, three episodes of the programme were selected out of the daily broadcast, and after the close viewing of the three episodes, Vassiliev's brand gestures were identified. The criteria for classifying the gesture as a brand gesture were based on the gesture frequency (repeated throughout the episode and identified in each of the three selected episodes) and the gesture precision (the frequently repeated gesture is easily recognizable due to its consistent invariable presentation).

The overall mission of the makeover program '*Fashion Verdict*' is linked to reinforcing traditional gender norms and promoting the 'correct' type of femininity – the one that would lead the woman to success in her personal life. In view of this, the episodes broadcast just before 8th March, International Women's Day, were chosen for the current analysis.

¹²⁰ Vassiliev has dual citizenship of France and the Russian Federation, and as a professional he is involved in a range of projects in Russia and in Europe.

International Women's Day has been celebrated globally since the early 1900s and is aimed at highlighting the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. Initially, in post-revolutionary Russia, the IWD was about the struggle for women's equality; however, throughout Soviet times and especially after the masculinity and femininity crises of the post-Soviet era, this holiday has evolved into a celebration of traditional stereotypical femininity, a day when women are given flowers and chocolates, paid compliments, and commended on being feminine and beautiful. The *'Fashion Verdict'* episodes broadcast on the last working day prior to this public holiday tend to be especially focused on the issues of femininity and traditional sexuality and gender roles, which makes them particularly relevant to the objective of the research.

Set against the background of the Russian 2013 legislation, the episodes were chosen to reflect the discourse surrounding that year of broadcasting whereby 'anti-gay' propaganda law was being discussed: the year when the 'anti-gay-propaganda' law was being discussed and introduced (2013); the year immediately after that (2014); and the year when the collection of media material for the research on the *'Fashion Verdict'* was started (2017). Thus, the case study includes the following three episodes:

- 1) 7th March 2013, 'The case of the dream girl'.
- 2) 7th March 2014, 'The case of what a woman wants'.
- 3) 7th March 2017, 'The case of a wedding dress that cancelled the wedding'.

The archived episodes were accessed on the official website of *Pervyi Kanal* (<https://www.1tv.ru/>), and the implementation of Vassiliev's gestures was recorded in the form of screengrabs.

4.4.2 Multimodal discourse analysis in the study of gestures and bodily performance

For a deeper insight into the discursive value of a gesture, it is important to develop an understanding of the way in which the gesture is related to the simultaneously developing speech discourse, as well as what type of gesture it is and what discursive functions it serves. Various scholarship in language and communication studies can inform such understanding. For example, Chomsky's work and that of his supporters revealed that gestures and spoken utterances perform equivalent functions in communication and that the development of gesture and spoken language requires the same cognitive activities and abilities (cited in Kendon 2004:76), which effectively makes gestures and speech parts of the same process (Kendon 2004: 76).

In the same way as linguists classify types of verbal utterances according to their implications, structure and discursive meanings, gestures can be classified according to various criteria – their purpose and meaning, their structure, cultural and anthropological attributes. Throughout the twentieth century, various classification schemes have been offered. For instance, Windt's semiotic approach to gesture distinguishes between demonstrative gestures used for pointing at and indicating objects and descriptive gestures (mimic, connotative and symbolic) which are used as a substitute for an object (Kendon 2004: 91). Efron's work investigates the cultural component of gesticulation and offers a detailed and profound classification of gestures from three perspectives: the spatio-temporal perspective on gestures as physical movements; the interlocutional perspective on gestures as a means of maintaining communication and interaction; and the linguistic perspective on gestures as meaningful used in relation to speech (Kendon 2004: 92). Efron develops his

classification further by dividing linguistic gestures into those with discursive and objective meaning, the former conveying a meaning only when used together with speech, while the latter can convey meaning independently. Objective gestures are, in their turn, divided into deictic (pointing) and physiographic (depicting) ones, the latter comprising iconographic gestures standing for an object or a spatial notion and kinetographic gestures referring to a bodily action (cited in Kendon 2004: 93-94). Among iconographic gestures, according to Efron's classification, are distinguished symbolic gestures which "represent either a visual or a logical object of a pictorial or non-pictorial form which has no morphological relationship to the thing represented" (cited in Kendon 2004: 96). The classification suggested by Ekman and Friesen interprets all gestures as either 'emblems' or 'illustrators' (Kendon 2004: 94-98), the former serving as a reference to an object and the latter accompanying speech discourse.

Another detailed and deep classification of gestures is suggested by McNeill (1985), who claims that the widely accepted approach to divide all acts of communication into nonlinguistic, if they cannot be written down, and linguistic, if they can, is "an arbitrary limitation derived from a particular historical evolution" (McNeill 1985: 350). McNeill believes that 'gestures and speech are parts of the same psychological structure and share a computational stage' (McNeill 1985: 350) and in his classification scheme focuses, therefore, on the symbolic expressiveness of a gesture in relation to a simultaneously expressed linguistic meaning. McNeill defines gestures concurrent with speech as referential and discourse-oriented: 'In such gestures the hands function as symbols that are closely connected to the speech channel in terms of both time and semantic and pragmatic function' (McNeill 1985: 350). He differentiates between imagistic and non-imagistic gestures, the former used to display and action, shape, or movement, and the latter – to point or add a rhythmic organisation to speech (Kendon 2004: 99-100). When it comes to the ways in which an imagistic gesture can refer to an object, McNeill singles out iconic gestures that exhibit 'a meaning relevant to the simultaneously expressed linguistic meaning' (McNeill 1985: 354). On a more complex level of relationship between the linguistic meaning and the concurrent gesture McNeill places metaphoric gestures, in which 'the relation to the linguistic meaning is indirect meaning' because 'the signifier part of the symbol is formed so as to present an image of the signified part' (McNeill 1985: 365). The most complex of this type of gesture is defined by McNeill as conduit metaphors, 'iconic depictions of abstract concepts of meaning and language' which exhibit 'a container of substance (e.g., forming a cup shape), whereas simultaneously the linguistic channel refers to an abstract concept (an appearance, content, comprehension, knowledge, language, meaning, art, the soul, etc.)' (McNeill 1985: 357).

In the current chapter, gestures are understood as:

a label for actions that have the features of manifest deliberate expressiveness. They are those actions or those aspects of another's actions that, having these features, tend to be directly perceived as being under the guidance of the observed person's voluntary control and being done for the purposes of expression rather than in the service of some practical aim (Kendon 2004:15).

For the purpose of this analysis, a multi-layer approach to identifying, classifying and analysing gestures was applied. Individual gestures were selected based on frequency and repetition: three gestures were identified in the three episodes of the "*Fashion Verdict*" show as regularly repeated (either identically or in variations) throughout the length of each show. After that, the gestures were classified as:

- Demonstrative or descriptive (Wundt).

- With a discursive of objective meaning (Efron).
- Iconic, metaphoric, conduit metaphors (McNeill) or symbolic (Efron).

Then the gestures were analysed as part of the show narrative and the embodiment of non-heteronormative sexuality and gender performance.

4.4.3 The discursive value of celebrity brand gesture in transgressive sexuality performance

Alexandre Vassiliev's gesture and bodily performance in the makeover show 'Fashion Sentence' reveals a wide variety of gestures and bodily movements. The camera frequently focuses on the close-up of the fashion judge, so the viewer can follow and discern every detail of his expressive, artistic gestures. These gestures present a variety of discursive types, including deictic gestures such as a slow waving of the hand and arm when pointing at an object or addressing a person. Another type of gesture frequently applied by the presenter is speech discourse-organising gestures, e.g. raising hands into the air when announcing the topic of the episode or drawing his hands close to his chest when addressing the studio audience.

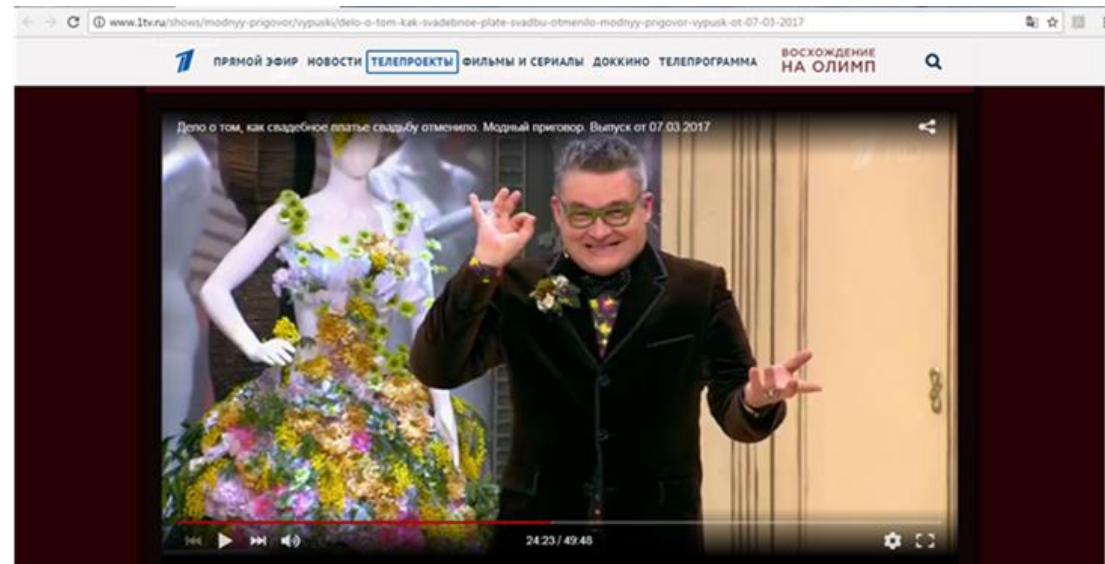
The first brand gesture chosen for analysis is a mixed, multi-purpose type gesture that consists in drawing the thumb and the index finger of the right hand in the shape of the international 'OK' sign, lifting the right hand up to the eye level and then moving the hand slowly towards the large screen hanging in the studio which is used to broadcast videos during the show (see images 4.4.1-4.4.3). From the point of view of its functions, this gesture is simultaneously:

- Deictic and demonstrative, as it is used to point at the screen.
- Iconic, as its shape looks similar to a monocle or spyglass.
- Metaphoric, as it symbolises the act of looking at something closely and carefully.
- Speech discourse-oriented, as by using this gesture Vassiliev monitors and regulates the plot of the show episode. The gesture is used to interrupt the verbal narrative of the communication between the presenters and the participants with a video, i.e. visual piece.

In Alexandre Vassiliev's implementation, the international symbolic 'OK' gesture is transformed into a pointing metaphoric gesture used to discursively regulate the narrative of the show, and this transformation itself is a result and embodiment of transgression. The gesture which a Russian viewer would expect in the context of pointing at a screen and signalling that one should watch something very carefully would be either the gesture of raising the index finger in the direction of the gaze (which can be considered impolite, but is a common, widely used gesture); or raising one hand with the palm held straight and open, with the back of the hand moving towards the object or person to look at; or holding a pointer in a hand and raising it towards the screen. By joining his fingers in an imitation of a monocle or a spyglass, Vassiliev adds a theatrical element to his gesture, while also making a historical reference to the times when monocles and spyglasses were commonly used for discerning remote views and objects. It is important to note that the transgression in the case of this gesture is twofold: a culturally accepted and contextually typical deictic gesture is substituted by the 'brand' gesture of the presenter; and at the same time the international 'OK' sign is reinterpreted, with its function and discursive meaning completely altered by Vassiliev.

Images 4.4.1-4.4.3 (top to bottom): Screenshots from 'Fashion Sentence' episodes of 7th March 2013, 2014 and 2017, demonstrating the implementation of the 'monocle/OK' gesture

Source: <http://www.1tv.ru/shows/modnyy-prigovor>, accessed 30/08/2017



The second brand gesture observed in all the three show episodes and noticed to be frequently used by Alexandre Vassiliev as another ‘brand’ gesture of the TV celebrity is a discourse-oriented beat, i.e. a gesture used to rhythmically organize spoken discourse and to accentuate significant bits of information communicated in speech. This gesture consists in the left or right index finger being raised, and it is similar to the international sign meaning ‘attention’ or ‘warning’ (see images 4.4.4-4.4.6).

Images 4.4.4-4.4.6: Screengrabs demonstrating the implementation of the raised index finger beat-gesture

Source: <http://www.1tv.ru/shows/modnyy-prigovor>, accessed 20/03/2018



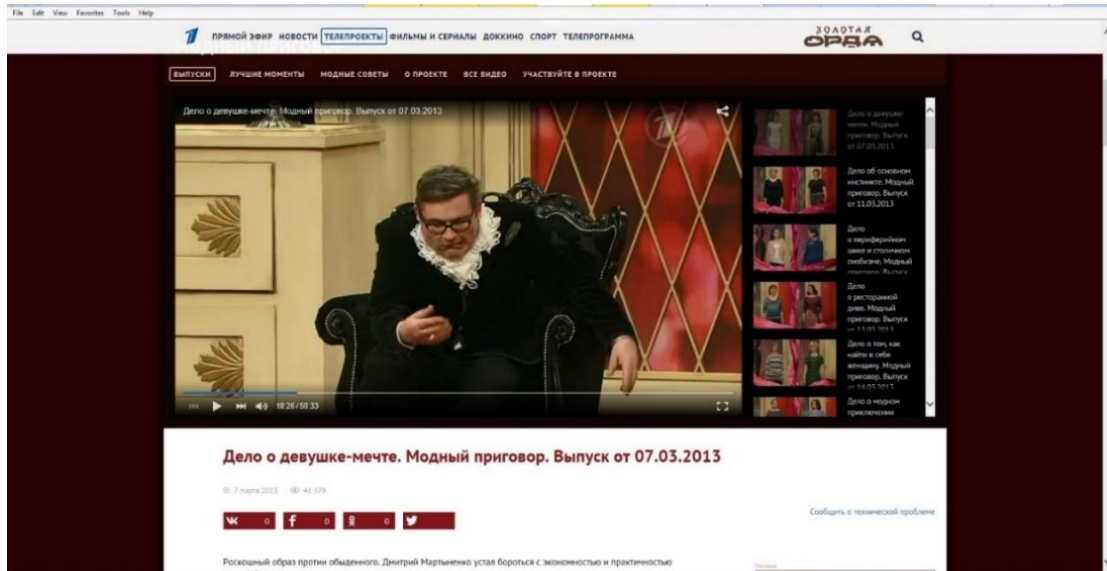


By using this gesture as a beat that organises spoken discourse, Vassiliev emphasizes important parts of verbally expressed information (e.g. introducing a new section of the show). The implementation of this gesture produces two main effects: on the one hand, this helps create the image of a strict judge, a patriarchal figure who is about to give instructions to the carefully watching and listening audience. On the other hand, the exquisite implementation of the gesture allows Vassiliev to demonstrate his non-heteronormative masculinity – not the stereotypical brutal one, but that of an almost feminine, gentle, stylish, artistic man. The fashion judge raises his finger into the air and the audience in the studio and beyond can observe the large finger rings he is wearing and admire the gracefulness of the gesture. This brand gesture of Vassiliev’s demonstrates how two seemingly opposite discursive meanings can be blended in a celebrity’s gesticulation. The transgressive gender and sexuality performance of a non-heteronormative male presenter at the same time serves to mediate him as a patriarchal figure that possesses discursive power to regulate or inform the gender and sexuality performance of the makeover show participants and the target audience, e.g. Russian women.

The third example of how Vassiliev uses his brand gestures as part of his non-heteronormative gender and sexuality performance is various individual symbolic gestures referring to a woman’s body. For example, in the 2013 episode, when discussing the defendant’s habit of giving spare change to beggars, Vassiliev proclaims that only buskers deserve being helped out whereas ordinary beggars do not. To illustrate his point, he exclaims: ‘But she [an old female beggar] does not sing or anything, she just begs!’ and imitates the bodily movements of an elderly woman shaking due to her old age and disability (see image 4.4.7). In this example, Vassiliev does not only make fun of the defendant’s beliefs and behaviour but also, in a classist and neoliberalist way, mocks poverty and lack of social privilege, thus promoting the ideology of ‘*glamour*’.

Images 4.4.7: A screenshot of a scene from the 7th March 2013 episode;
Vassiliev imitating an old female beggar whose stretched arm and hand are shaking

Source: <https://www.1tv.ru/shows/modnyy-prigovor/vypuski/delo-o-devushke-mechte-modnyy-prigovor-vypusk-ot-07-03-2013> , accessed 20/03/2018

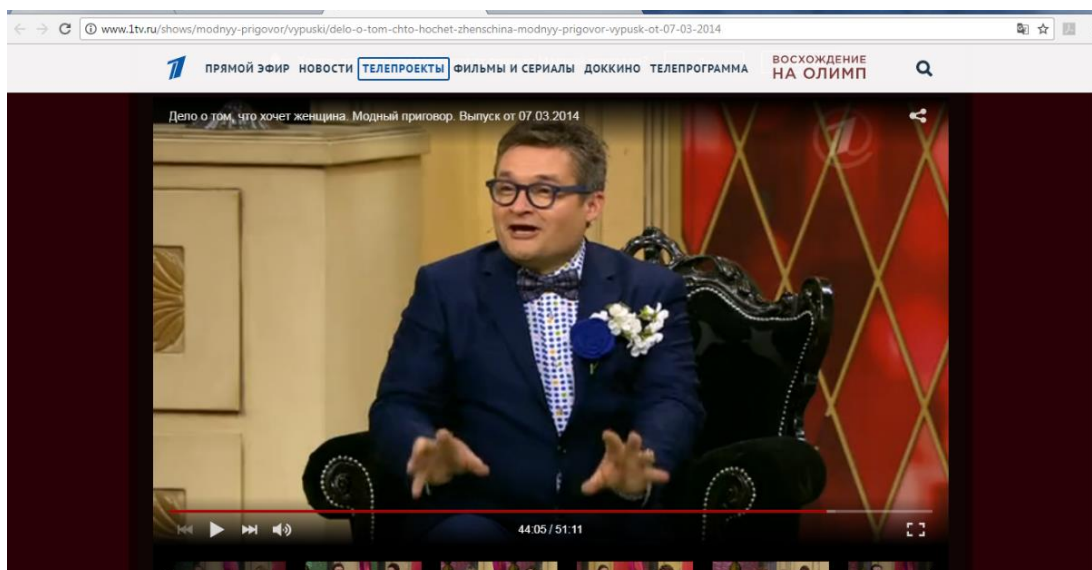


In the 2014 episode, Alexandre Vassiliev comments on the sexually attractive looks of the defendant by using a gesture imitating the shape of a woman's breasts, folding both his hands in the shape of cups, and thrusting them ahead. He then comments on her having long legs by thrusting his palms up and down (see images 4.4.8-4.4.9). The gesture is accompanied by ambiguous criticism of the defendant's figure. Vassiliev comments on the woman's build saying that it is very unusual as her legs are very long while the torso is unusually short: 'You have a very interesting build: you have got breasts and straight under them – legs'. The comment and the gesture serve the purpose of objectifying the woman and, in a broader sense, of regulating feminine body by prescribing physical standards of what is normal and what is unusual.

Images 4.4.8-4.4.9: Screenshots of a scene from the 2014 episode

Vassiliev to the defendant: ‘You have a very interesting build: you have got breasts and straight under them – legs’

Source: <http://www.1tv.ru/shows/modnyy-prigovor/vypuski/delo-o-tom-cto-hochet-zhenschina-modnyy-prigovor-vypusk-ot-07-03-2014> , accessed 30/08/2017



In the episode of 7th March 2014, in the closing scene when one of the two suggested outfit sets is usually voted for by the studio audience, Vassiliev announces that the defendant will receive the more attractive outfits prepared by the program stylists without any voting because the whole show crew is impressed by her ‘two complete higher educations’ (*dva zakonchennykh vysshykh obrazovaniia*). While saying these words, Vassiliev thrusts his hands ahead towards the defendant’s chest, both his hands folded in the shape of a woman’s breasts (see image 4.4.10).

Image 4.4.10: Screenshot from a scene of the 2014 episode

Vassiliev to the defendant: ‘Your two complete higher educations’

Source: <http://www.1tv.ru/shows/modnyy-prigovor/vypuski/delo-o-tom-chto-hochet-zhenschina-modnyy-prigovor-vypusk-ot-07-03-2014>, accessed 28/08/2017



It is clear from this gesture that the fashion judge is using a pun here and is referring to the defendant’s bosom rather than her level of education: in the Russian language, the noun ‘*obrazovanie*’ stands both for ‘education’ and ‘formation’. The expression ‘higher education’ (*vysshee obrazovaniye*) is sometimes used to refer to a woman who has attractive big breasts. By thrusting both his hands forward as if trying to grab the defendant’s breasts Vassiliev performs an act of transgression: he challenges the accepted norms of behavior and his gesture can be interpreted as borderline sexual harassment. However, the discursive complexity of this gesture eliminates its interpretation as a sexual harassment attack but rather confirms and reiterates Vassiliev’s position on the show as an embodiment of non-heteronormative and therefore non-threatening masculinity.

The reference to a female body implemented by Vassiliev in the 2017 episode is more of a comic nature. When the plaintiff expresses regret about his partner’s outfits being too revealing – her bottom shows here and her legs there, Vassiliev retorts: ‘And where would you like it [the defendant’s body] to be? Her bottom here [points at his chest] and her legs – here [draws his hands and arms apart, imitating legs growing out of the woman’s ears]?’ (see images 4.4.11-4.4.12).

Although on the level of speech discourse Vassiliev is participating in the interaction with the plaintiff who objectifies the defendant by discussing her body critically and in detail, Vassiliev’s comic gesture references to the defendant’s body desexualize it.

By using desexualizing comic gestures of reference to a female body the fashion judge does reduce the defendant to an object of the male gaze and male desire, but Vassiliev’s own non-heteronormative performance of a homosexual man signals that his gaze is not that of a sex predator. There is no desire and his gestures are therefore harmless to the defendant. Vassiliev’s transgressive gesture objectifies the defendant’s body, but at the same time desexualizes it. By doing so, the fashion judge interrupts the show’s narrative and turns the discussion of the defendant’s beauty into a joke. This does not challenge the program’s overall

discourse on heteronormativity and prescribed gender and sexuality norms; on the contrary, the role of a woman as a pleasant object of male gaze is confirmed.

Images 4.4.11-4.412: Screenshots of a scene from the 2017 episode

Vassiliev to the plaintiff: 'And where would you like it to be? Her bottom here and her legs – here?

Source: <http://www.1tv.ru/shows/modnyy-prigovor/vypuski/delo-o-tom-kak-svadebnoe-plate-svadbu-otmenilo-modnyy-prigovor-vypusk-ot-07-03-2017>, accessed 30/08/2017



4.4.4 Camp visibility in makeover TV as a transgressive performance of masculinity

The connection between the fashion industry and the non-heteronormative sexuality of male professionals involved is a common stereotype, but it is not unjustified as it reflects the historical conditions of homosexual men's existence in European societies and cultures. Due to the specific gay (or camp) sensibility, 'gay men have always played a leading role in the

male (as well as, of course, the female) fashion industry' (Dyer 2002: 63). The everyday lived experiences of gay men have always been about surviving in a hostile, homophobic and potentially violent aggressive environment. The survival techniques involved 'knowing how to manipulate clothes, mannerisms and lifestyle so as to be able to pass for straight', but nevertheless to make sure that those who can read the secret signals will be able to read the non-heteronormative men as gay (Dyer 2002: 63). The complex societal discourses on homosexuality and the innate reliance of gay culture on visibility contributed to the emergence of the queer culture of camp – one of the arguably most widespread and easily recognisable types of queer visibility and queer gender performances.

The transgressive gender performance in Alexandre Vassiliev's gestures is discursively related to the culture of camp – a non-masculine expression of masculinity (Halperin 2012: 69). Following Dyer (1977: 41), I interpret the term 'camp' as defining 'a relationship between activities, individuals, situations *and* gayness'. Although not every individual that can be considered to have a camp personality or a camp behaviour would turn out to be gay or of non-heteronormative sexuality, the link with gayness is established by the audiences who perceive that individual as camp and as possessing a gay sensibility. In other words, camp does not exist as an objective phenomenon but is rather inferred by the receptive audience through a queer reading of a person or an artefact. As I demonstrate further in this section, the transgressive gendered performance of Alexandre Vassiliev possesses the four attributes pertinent to camp: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour (Dyer 1977: 41). Being a fashion historian and a host of a TV show on fashion and style, aestheticism is particularly significant for Vassiliev's transgressive performance. According to Dyer (1977: 42), 'camp is aesthetic in three inter-related ways: as a view of art; a view of life; and as a practical tendency in things or persons', and Alexandre Vassiliev's performance is camp at the level of personality and idiosyncrasies of verbal and non-verbal discourses; at the level of the media celebrity's overall lifestyle and persona; and at the level of Vassiliev's artistic and 'model' performance in the form of personal fashion, outfits and accessories (i.e. not only does the TV host possess a large collection of European costume and outfits but he also wears unique collectable items of fashion in each of his appearances on TV).

This unique status of a camp media celebrity brings Alexandre Vassiliev remarkably close to the notion of a gay icon:

a widely known and disseminated visual image of a real person who is taken to be representative of the social category homosexual and to be in some way or other valued for it. From this follow the two elements that make a given person come to be considered a gay icon: visibility and representativeness (Dyer 2009: 16).

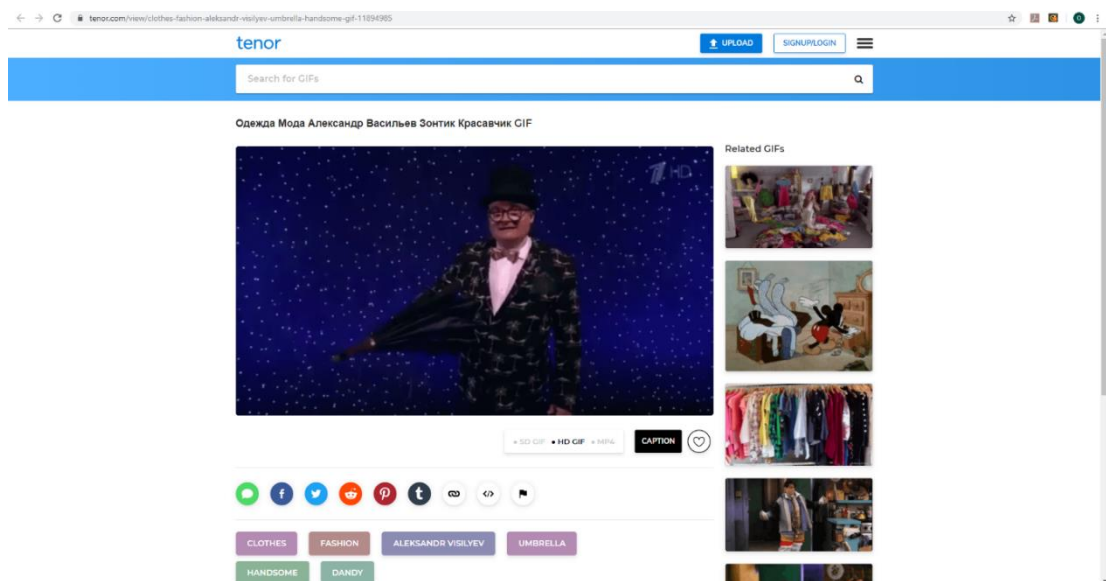
On the one hand, Vassiliev's media persona can be and is read as an embodiment of non-heteronormative masculinity. However, Vassiliev does not pursue visibility as a non-heteronormative man (he has not publicly come out as gay), nor does he tend to be exclusively read as a representative of the LGBTQ community. As demonstrated by the comment sections on Vassiliev's professional accounts on Instagram and Facebook, he is perceived by his followers, fans, and audiences as an unusually artistic person rather than a gay man. As I observed during the pilot fieldwork in Russia in 2017-2018, when a visual gendered performance of Alexandre Vassiliev is shown to LGBTQ media audiences, some participants failed to recognise him as a gay man (as one participant put it, the camp gender performance might simply be his unique personal idiosyncrasies; another said that labelling someone who is not publicly out as gay only because they are feminine is wrong and

disrespectful) and most of the participants made it clear they do not consider Vassiliev as part of the LGBTQ community.

The societal acceptance of transgressive gendered performances like that of Alexandre Vassiliev's can also be explained through the phenomenon of carnivalization pertinent to all European cultures (Bakhtin 1984). The purpose of a European carnival being to invent a second world and a second life outside officialdom' (Bakhtin 1984: 6), this event united people seeking to break free from religious and societal restrictions through laughter and comicality. Offering temporary liberation from the existing established societal order, carnivals 'marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibition' (Bakhtin 1984: 10). Although Vassiliev's extralinguistic behaviour characterises him as a person of a non-stereotypical type of masculinity, his carnivalizing use of humour, irony, sarcasm, and comedy makes his non-heteronormative masculinity not only acceptable but highly regarded, respected, and loved. Vassiliev's fans seem to admire the media celebrity precisely due to his unique fashion choices, verbal, and non-verbal behaviour, to the point of creating mash-up videos of his various TV performances and GIFs (see image 4.4.13).

Image 4.4.13. A screengrab of a GIF with an extract from Alexandre Vassiliev's participation in a Channel One entertainment programme, with the keywords 'Clothes, fashion, Alexandre Vassiliev, umbrella, beauty'

Source: <https://tenor.com/view/clothes-fashion-aleksandr-visilyev-umbrella-handsome-gif-11894985>, accessed 27/11/2019



The example of societal acceptance of transgressive gendered performances like Vassiliev's demonstrates how the intersection of the categories of class and sexuality produces positive discourses on homosexuality in contemporary Russian media. It is Vassiliev's achievements, his recognition and his high position in society, as well as his connections with Russia and the West that put him above the 'anti-gay propaganda' law and enables him to venture types of behaviour which could easily be interpreted as 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships'.

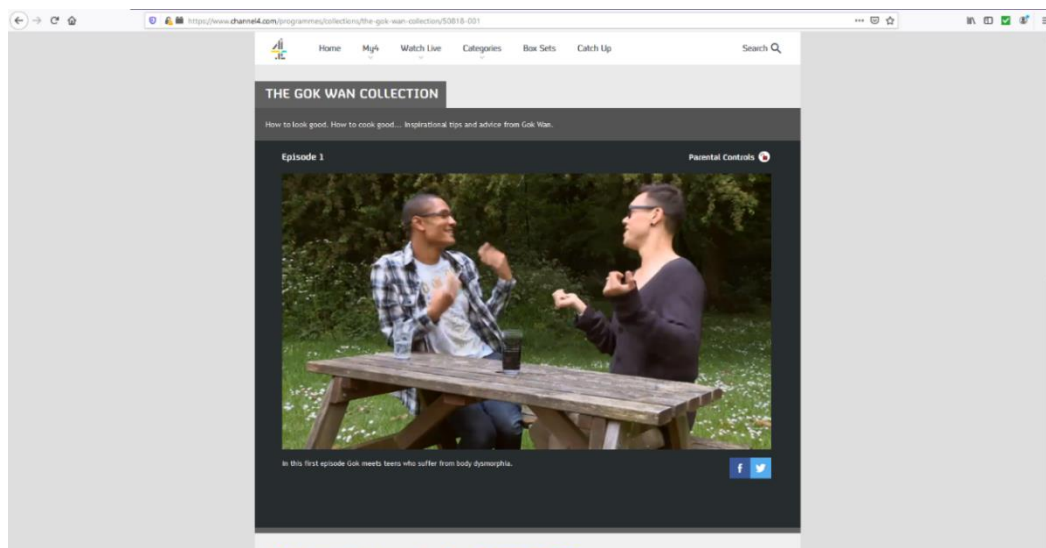
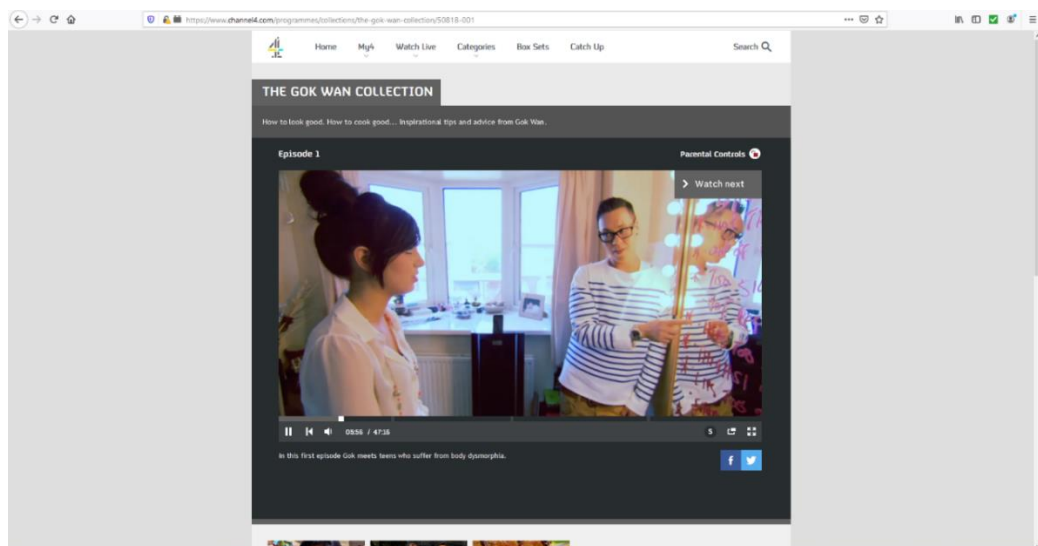
The case of Alexandre Vassiliev also confirms the inclusion of Russian entertainment TV into the global TV trends through the use of western TV programme formats: the employment of openly (and stereotypically) gay male TV presenters as makeover show hosts

is not a unique feature of the *'Fashion Verdict'* but rather a global media trend, which should not be confused with human rights and activist discourses of gay visibility (Kadir and Tidy 2013, Kolehmainen and Mäkinen 2011, Lovelock 2018). In such programs as *'How to Look Good Naked'* or *'Queer Eye'*, gay presenters such as Gok Wan (see images 4.4.14-4.4.15) or the Fab Five (see image 4.4.16-4.4.17) implement makeover and transformation for heteronormative programme participants, and it is the othering of the homosexual host that makes his queer gaze legitimate and acceptable: 'although the usage of gay characters destabilizes prevailing conceptions of gender and sexuality, it can also participate in fortifying normative understandings of sexuality and gender. Also, in the context of reality television shows, (sub)cultural capital associated with only certain kinds of gay characters advances gay visibility in television (Kolehmainen and Mäkinen 2011: 225).

Images 4.4.14-4.4.15. Screengrabs of the UK Channel 4 TV programme 'Gok's Teens' featuring Gok Wan – openly gay media celebrity, presenter for popular TV shows 'How to look good naked' and How to look good. How to cook good

Source:

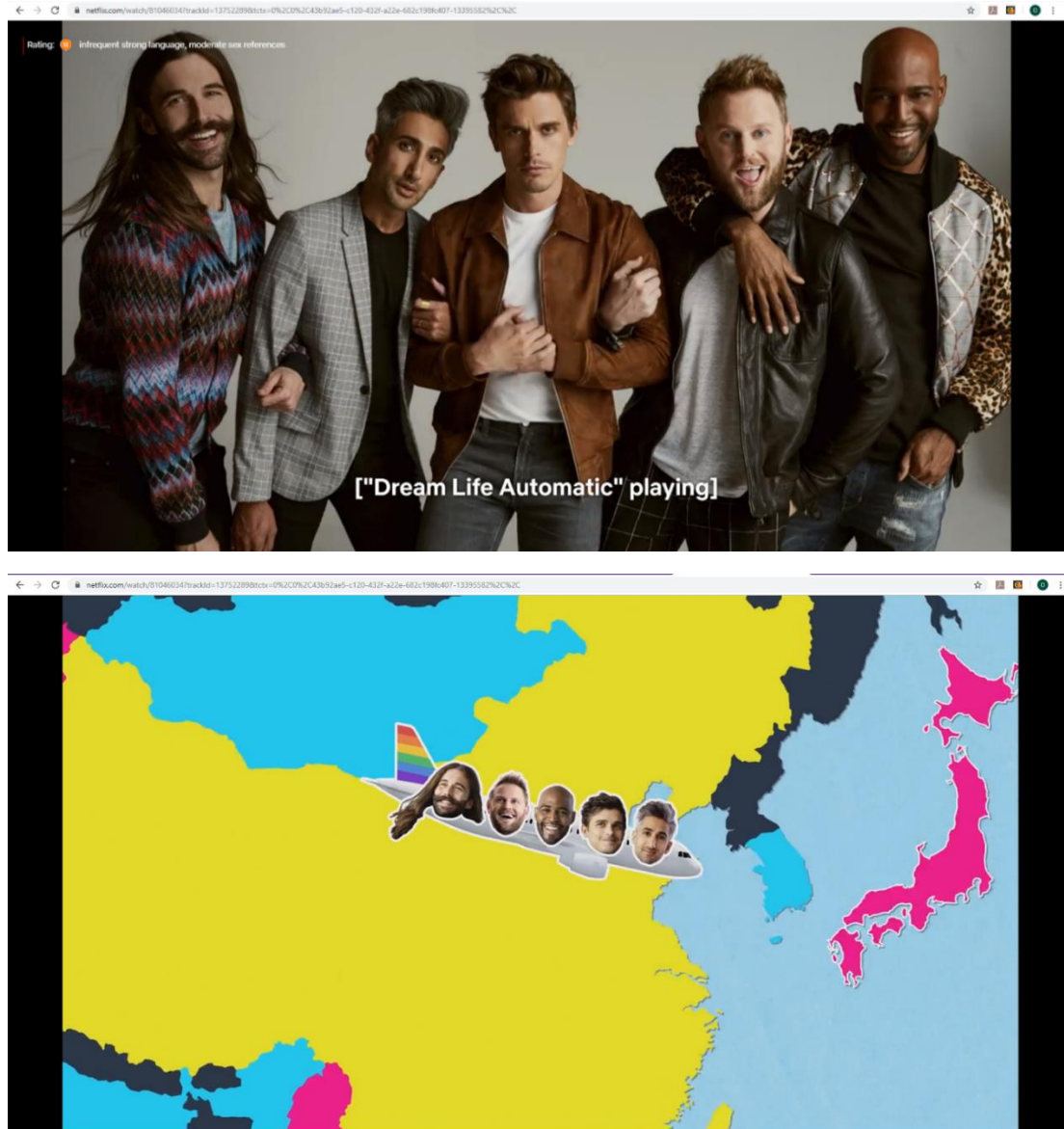
<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/collections/the-gok-wan-collection/50818-001>, accessed 26/22/2019



Images 4.4.16-4.4.17. Screengrabs of the TV programme *'Queer Eye'*, featuring the so-called Fab Five makeover experts – openly gay media celebrities and *'Queer Eye'* presenters Antoni Porowski, Tan France, Karamo Brown, Bobby Berk and Jonathan Van Ness

Source:

<https://www.netflix.com/watch/81046034?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C43b92ae5-c120-432f-a22e-682c198fc407-13395582%2C%2C>, accessed 26/11/2019



On the *'Fashion Verdict'* show, the stereotypical camp non-heteronormative sexuality performance of Alexandre Vassiliev helps him celebrate the traditional Russian femininity: he knows best how to make a woman look stylish and sexy, but his own gaze is not of sexual nature at all, and Vassiliev is, therefore, free to demonstrate transgressive verbal and non-verbal behavior, e.g. to use transgressive non-heteronormative gestures.

The analysis presented above reveals that the key discursive value of gendered gesture implemented as part of non-heteronormative gender and sexuality performance is that of transgression. The transgression in this case takes place on several levels:

- 1) As a transgression and discursive reinvention of already existing commonly used gestures (e.g. the 'OK/monocle' metaphoric gesture by Vassiliev).
- 2) As a transgression of 'traditional' gender norms through gesture (e.g. the raised index finger gesture performed with feminine gracefulness and demonstrating exquisite ornate finger rings).
- 3) As a transgression of socially accepted norms of gendered behaviour (e.g. the breast grabbing gesture).

The case study demonstrates the importance of transgressive non-heteronormative brand gestures in the mediation of 'non-traditional' sexuality and gender performance, as well as in sustaining the societally prescribed 'traditional' sexuality and gender discourses within the context of a makeover TV show.

4.5 Conclusion

When conducting my analysis into the visual communication of NHM in Russian media, I depart both from the current scholarship on Russian visual culture, which tends to approach Russian visuality through a western prism of radical selectivity (Efimova and Manovich 1993) and to passionately focus on the Russian avant-garde, the Soviet aesthetics and the visual display of communism (Condee 1995), as well as from the contemporary studies on the visibility of LGBTQ individuals in Russian public discourses (e.g. Persson 2015, Edenborg 2017 and 2019, Buyantueva 2018, Underwood 2011, Stella 2007 and 2012, Baker 2017, Davidson and McDonald 2018), which frame the phenomenon of NHM as a political concept and which do not cover the phenomena of queer and LGBTQ cultural resistance, or the transgressive queer discourses of Russian fashion and art.¹²¹ For a multimodal discourse analysis of the visual communicative strategies applied in Russian media for portraying non-heteronormative men, I bring together the images of mediated non-heteronormative masculine subjects used by news media to initiate and develop discourses on human rights, 'war on terror', and sexual harassment, as well as examples of transgressive sexuality performance mediated as part of discourses on fashion and stereotypical, 'traditional' concepts of masculinity and femininity. By combining these diverse samples of visual media context I bridge the gaps both in the scholarship on Russian visual culture, contributing to studies into queer visuality in Russia, as well as in the scholarship on Russian news media, reiterating the complexity of discourses on non-heteronormativity in Russian news media and thereby revealing the mechanism of the discursive shifts in the mediation of non-heteronormative subjects.

The findings presented in this final chapter of the thesis demonstrate how the visual strategies of communication NHM differ depending on the type of the media outlet. In Russian news media, non-heteronormative men who are open about their sexuality and

¹²¹ See, for example, the Russian LGBT film festival 'Side-by-Side' (*Bok-o-Bok*; <https://www.bok-o-bok.ru/default.asp?lan=1>) which has been running annually since 2008 and has been a most influential event in Russian public discourses on LGBTQ issues. Other LGBTQ-related events take place regularly, too: e.g., annual queer arts festivals 'Queer Fest' (<https://queerfest.ru/en/>; Saint Petersburg) and 'Open Art Festival' (<http://openart.moscow/en/festival/>; Moscow), or the recent 'Queer Biennale' in Saint Petersburg ('Queer compost, techno-folk and a declaration of love for cervix: all you need to know about the first Russian queer biennale'; O-zine, https://o-zine.ru/queerbiennale/?fbclid=IwAR3XCpZI3vxBPfJzP8NwiBYzNXuIW84VMRnXRNqJw0zcAOC7qe_Wa9OibM).

identify as members of LGBTQ communities are mediated as desexualised and politicised subjects, whereas the visual images of anonymised non-heteronormative men are oversexualised and fetishised. When depicted as victims of harassment, crime, or torture, both the anonymous and openly gay men are also visualised in the discursive framework of victimhood and martyrdom, which introduces the themes of empathy, compassion, and protection.

The multimodal discourse analysis of the transgressive bodily performance of NHM in the case of makeover TV show host Alexandre Vassiliev revealed that in the context of entertainment TV and under the condition of the media discourses not challenging but sustaining the hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity, visual representations of both queer identity and queer bodies are possible. The gendered performances of the 'Fashion Verdict' host are the focal point of the makeover programme. Not only does Vassiliev receive a considerable amount of the prime-time broadcast to express his personal views on the fashion, style, lifestyles of the programme participants and audiences, but his facial expressions, gestures and bodily movements also constitute a significant part of the video content broadcast during the show episode. Through the camera being consistently focused on Vassiliev's facial expressions, bodily movements and gestures, the camp masculinity of the 'Fashion Verdict' presenter is represented as socially acceptable and even admirable.

The analysis of visual communication of non-heteronormative masculinities in Russian news and entertainment media also completes the findings made during the analysis of verbally expressed discourses on homosexual identities, which were explored in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. The findings of the current chapter show that in the visual communication on NHM intersection of the categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class is also important. It is the contextualised nature of the mediated categories of race, ethnicity, and class (Hall 1973) that defines whether the mediated non-heteronormative men are presented as 'civilised, white, western' or 'other'. Thus, the orientalised and objectified non-heteronormative sexuality of Muslim Chechen men prompts an objectification and oversexualisation of the images of those men, while the whiteness and the high social status of Xavier Jugelé (national hero of France) and Alexandre Vassiliev (international media celebrity), for example, place them above the anti-LGBTQ discourses on heteronormativity and allow for highly positive verbal and visual media representations of these non-heteronormative men.

Last but not least, the interconnection of the Russian media discourse on homosexuality with discourses on race, ethnicity and class demonstrates that discursive strategies of mediating and communicating non-heteronormative masculinities in Russia are defined not in the top-down way as imposed from the Kremlin but are informed by the current trends in domestic and global public discourses. This finding complicates discussions on the restrictive value of the Russian 'Section 28' law in terms of media discourses on LGBTQ-related topics, and further problematises the binary opposition of 'progressive' western media and Russian media 'lagging behind' and promoting exclusively Kremlin-imposed agendas.

Thesis conclusions

This study investigated the variety of verbal and visual discursive strategies applied by contemporary Russian media for the communication of NHM. I began working on this project with a pilot study which dealt with print media texts on LGBTQ-related themes published between 2012 and 2014, before and after the passing of the 'traditional sexuality' legislation. At that time Russian media discourses on LGBTQ issues were dominated by socio-political debates on LGBTQ-rights in Russia and beyond, with media outlets being divided into those which supported the Russian 'Section 28' legislation, those which opposed it and those whose position was in between.

By the end of this research project in 2020, I was dealing with a collected media database too large to process within the current thesis framework. Initially planning to investigate portrayals of non-heteronormative and non-cisgender people, as well as perceptions of the current media discourses by Russian media professionals and LGBTQ media audiences, the large amount of the data obtained during the project only allowed me to focus on a limited number of media cases involving NHM. The choice of masculinity as the subject of this research (rather than women or non-binary people or the whole spectre of LGBTQ identities) was driven and justified by the overall tendency of scholarship on Russian sexualities to focus on NHM, especially in the context of state-sustained homophobia (e.g. Sperling 2015). Thus, this thesis offers an insight only into one aspect of the growing volume of mediated portrayals of non-heteronormative people which has been propelled by the Russian 'Section 28' law.

With most current scholarship on Russian media still focusing on the analysis of the top-down discourses of state-promoted homophobia and the impact of the Kremlin's conservative policies on Russian media and on Russian LGBTQ individuals, this thesis introduces for the first time in the fields of Russian media and sexuality studies an analysis of diverse and complex portrayals of non-heteronormative men within discourses created and sustained by media outlets in response to domestic and transnational media events and not in accordance with the Kremlin's policies. In this respect, the current thesis offers a breakthrough insight into the explosive and prolific media discourses on non-heteronormativity.

The starting point of this research was a body of scholarly literature that approaches Russian media discourses around non-heteronormativity as an enquiry into the Kremlin's policies regarding LGBTQ activists and common LGBTQ citizens of Russia. These works often use media content produced by Russian outlets as evidence of state-promoted homophobia in Russia and as proof of symbolic and physical violence against LGBTQ people in Russia (e.g. Brock and Edenborg 2021, Edenborg 2017, Kondakov 2017 and 2019, Lukinmaa 2016, Wiedlack 2020, Wilkinson 2020). Although such scholarship offers invaluable observations on the socio-political discourses around LGBTQ issues, it does not facilitate an understanding of what kind of mechanisms of the media industry are involved in the production of media content on NHM, nor does it reveal the existence of other discourses on non-heteronormativity which are outside of human rights or LGBTQ rights perspectives and outside of identity and visibility politics.

This is coupled with a lack of existing empirical work examining how contemporary Russian media initiate or reflect the cultural discursive shifts around NHM that have been strengthening since 2013. Oppression in society is known to lead to resistance (Heckert and Cleminson 2011), and the 2013 'traditional sexuality' legislation, which aimed at restricting

the work of Russian media, as well as at reducing the activities of oppositional LGBTQ-rights activists, has led not only to an increase in media coverage of LGBTQ issues but also, as I demonstrated in Chapters 2-4 of this thesis, to the emergence of empathetic and compassionate discourses on NHM. Even though some scholars investigate Russian media portrayals of LGBTQ people from the perspective of discourses of martyrdom and victimhood (Wiedlack 2017), the actual process of creation of positive discourses of sympathy and protection intersecting with discourses on non-heteronormative men as martyrs and victims is still an under-researched topic. The research presented in the current thesis fills this lacuna by drawing on the vast empirical data which represents these new evolving media discourses, and which was captured in real-time development through daily minute recording.

The methodology of media data sampling through minute daily recording of media coverage and the combination of critical discourse and multimodal discourse analyses which I employed in this thesis enabled me to arrive at a set of crucial findings. First, it allowed me to demonstrate the highly complex nature of the discursive field of Russian media, where multiple discourses intersect and compete and where there is no single, simplistic, definitive discourse on NHM (this topic tends to be mediated as part of other, wider, multiple discourses, e.g. 'war on terror', human rights, global anti-harassment movement). As I indicate in the analysis of the media cases comprising the bulk of this research, there are many factors defining the emergence and development of discourses on NHM (not only censorship and self-censorship but also audiences' preferences, the influence of social media, the global/western media trends). The Kremlin's policies towards LGBTQ people is only one of those factors, which points out that approaching a study on masculine non-heteronormativity around the discursive axes of 'Kremlin vs gays' would invariably lead to a one-sided understanding of the actual discourses.

The analysis of the media cases presented in Chapters 2-3 reveals how the ambiguity of the Russian 'Section 28' law in terms of the nomination of non-heteronormative sexuality is consistent with the diverse verbal strategies of naming and referencing of non-heteronormative men which are applied in Russian online news media. Since the 'traditional sexuality' law bans not the promotion of homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbianism, or transgenderism as such, but the of vaguely defined 'non-traditional' aspirations and orientation, it, in fact, provides Russian news media with the freedom of choice of which lexical tools to employ when covering a media case related to NHM.

Thus, problematising the scholarly trend of approaching Russian media from the perspective of pro-Kremlin vs anti-Kremlin dichotomy, this thesis demonstrates that the division of Russian media outlets into a binary opposition according to their stance on the Kremlin's policies contradicts the empirical evidence of operational mechanisms applied by media outlets. I argue that a classification of outlets based on the outlet's role in agenda-setting (i.e. in the shaping up and promotion of a particular discourse) is more relevant and better reflects the direction of actual media discourses. As it is shown through the analysis of media cases of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign, the killing of a gay police officer and same-sex sexual harassment, various media outlets play different roles in developing new discourses. Some outlets, which are the first to respond to a media event or which initiate completely new discourses (e.g. through a publication of an investigative report) act as discourse triggers (or discourse setters); some outlets act as discourse developers, and some – as discourse spinners (followers). Although this study did not set as an objective to introduce a completely new classification of all Russian media outlets, the thesis findings reveal that in

the context of digitalisation of the media industry the terms 'oppositional' or 'anti-Kremlin' are becoming problematic, and this terminology, therefore, should probably be renegotiated.

In terms of digitalisation of the Russian media industry and the impact of participatory media on Russian online news media outlets, the findings of this thesis highlight that, similar to other transnational media, Russian media outlets tend to generate and sustain new media discourses under the influence of global and local trends on social media. Thus, the 'Slutsky-gate' media case evolved as a response to the global (the #MeToo movement) and local (e.g. the #IAmNotAfraidToTell) hashtag campaigns against sexual harassment and sexual violence. The investigative report of *Novaya Gazeta* into anti-LGBTQ purges in Chechnya drew on the information about the unlawful detainment and killings which was being spread through social media accounts of Chechen men. These examples prove how important the bottom-up perspective is for contemporary Russian media, and the socio-political consequences of the media cases studied in Chapters 2 and 3 (a global coverage of the Chechen case since 2017, multiple petitions and protests, political pressure on the Kremlin; an unprecedented media boycott of Slutsky and the State Duma in 2018) show that these bottom-up media discourses or resistance and circumvention are aimed to influence the political elites.

The discourse analysis of the media cases presented in Chapters 2-4 demonstrated that Russian media do not only respond to global media events but they are fully included in transnational media trends and agenda and should be analysed within, and not in opposition to, 'western' discursive media trends. These findings also complicate the dichotomy of the pro-LGBTQ West vs anti-LGBTQ Russia: it is the inclusion of Russian outlets into transnational media agendas, as well as the westernisation of discourses on NHM in Russian media that enable the emergence of positive portrayals of non-heteronormative men. One way in which the findings of this thesis problematise the Russia vs West dichotomy is through the analysis of the case of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ violence, which demonstrated how the intersection of multiple identities leads to complex media discourses on NHM in the context of a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multireligious society. Another example of this problematisation is the intersection of discourses on non-heteronormativity with discourses on European/western fashion: in the context of the makeover TV show *Fashion Verdict*, the body of the non-heteronormative fashion historian and TV presenter Vassiliev is fetishised as the body of a privileged celebrity, which leads to the creation of a positive portrayal of a non-heteronormative man on prime-time television.

The qualitative analysis of a discursive shift like the one that has evolved since 2013 around the mediation of non-heteronormative men in Russian media would not have been feasible if not for the choice of the effective methodology of media data sampling and processing. It is the minute real-time recording of media data for capturing the evolving discourse on NHM right in the making that allowed me to register and explore the exact moments of when a completely new discourse is introduced into the media landscape. This method also enabled me to obtain conclusive data on how media outlets apply a range of verbal and visual strategies of communicating NHM, how these strategies vary across outlets and how they evolve through time. A comprehensive discourse analysis of the verbal strategies of nomination and reference of NHM and of confessional personal narratives of non-heteronormative masculine subjects demonstrates that contemporary Russian media are at the stage of developing a verbal vocabulary to portray and discuss non-heteronormativity of the individuals in focus. For example, throughout its coverage of the Chechen anti-LGBTQ campaign case in 2017, *Novaya Gazeta* evolved from the use of medicalised term 'homosexualist' to the use of a more inclusive referential terms

'homosexual'. The analysis of 'Slutsky-gate' showed how media outlets introduce into public discourses a new language, new terms which then shape and direct public debates on the corresponding issues (e.g. the context-specific Anglophone borrowing '*kharassment*' used when speaking about sexual harassment, instead of the broader Russian term '*domogatel'stva*').

The findings presented in this thesis also reveal a search for a visual vocabulary for communication of non-heteronormativity of mediated subjects taking place in Russian media. The multimodal analysis of photographic images of non-heteronormative men used as part of online news coverage and the analysis of a selection of transgressive brand gestures of a non-heteronormative TV presenter illustrate how the visual strategies of communication of NHM differ between online news media or entertainment TV. In Russian news media, non-heteronormative men who are open about their sexuality and identify as members of LGBTQ communities tend to be visually portrayed as desexualised and politicised subjects, whereas the visual images of anonymised non-heteronormative men can be oversexualised and fetishised. When depicted as victims of harassment, crime, or torture, both the anonymous and openly gay men are also visualised in the discursive framework of victimhood and martyrdom, which introduces the themes of empathy, compassion, and protection. In the context of prime-time television, the transgressive camp masculinity of the non-heteronormative celebrity is constructed as a focal point of the makeover programme and is used for sustaining discourses on hegemonic heteronormativity, where the male gaze of a non-heteronormative man serves to promote patriarchal stereotypes on femininity.

The findings concerning the search for verbal and visual vocabularies of communication of NHM problematise discussions about contemporary Russian media discourses as invariably sustaining state-promoted homophobia. I suggest that approaching a study into Russian media discourses on NHM within the frameworks of identity and visibility politics and within the context of western identification terms such as 'gay', 'lesbian', 'LGBT', can potentially exclude the rich diversity of Russian media discourses on non-heteronormativity from the scope of the research. I argue that in contemporary Russia the absence of visibility can be perceived not only as a limitation but potentially as a source of empowerment or freedom, a new way for non-heteronormative people to exist without attempting a risky act of coming-out and without labelling themselves as part of the Stonewall-inspired LGBTQ community.

Thus, this study focuses on NHM rather than on 'gay' or 'homosexual' identity, which takes the enquiry outside of the frameworks of identity politics and political visibility. Contemporary Russia has not developed a gay rights movement of a similar calibre as western movements of this kind (e.g. Gay Liberation Front, Act Up etc.). This does not mean, however, that creation of such a movement is a realistic or desired way for Russian non-heteronormative, non-cisgender people. In the 21st century, with the criticism of identity politics (e.g. Nicholson and Seidman 1995, Dunn 1998), with the younger generations opting for new ways of talking about their gender and sexuality (e.g. using such terms as 'queer' or 'non-binary'), the imposing of rigid sexual identities seems outdated. With the recent trend for decolonisation of LGBTQ discourses (e.g. Pullen 2012), to impose a westernised 'gay' identity and ideas on 'how to be gay' (Halperin 2012) on non-heteronormative men of Inner Russia or North Caucasus seems an unproductive way of approaching this topic. This is sustained by the belief that western identity categories should be used with caution when applied to Russian communities and social groups: expressions of same-sex desire, homosexual behaviour, engagement in same-sex relationships do not equal 'gay' as a political

identity. The use of the term 'non-heteronormative masculinities' as a key concept of this research allows identifying and investigating discourses on NHM which go beyond the non-inclusive, non-diverse discourse of identity politics.

To sum up, I would like to reiterate the key points of this research and to highlight the possible ways in which the future direction of such research can turn. I would also like to outline possible directions for further research on NHM in contemporary Russian media. The findings of this thesis contribute to the scholarship on Russian sexuality by demonstrating the limitations of the concepts of identity and visibility when applied to the Russian context. The analysis of prolific verbal and visual discourses on non-heteronormativity within the context of 'traditional sexuality' legislation prove that there are alternative ways for social minorities to exist, survive and develop outside the framework of visibility and identity representation.

Using the category of 'non-heteronormativity' as a key concept of this study, I suggest an alternative approach to investigating contemporary Russian sexualities. By defining the mediated masculine subjects in the focus of this analysis not as gay, homosexual or queer I underline the complexity of socio-political and media discourses on what is referred to in the Russian 'Section 28' law as 'non-traditional sexual relations'. The ambiguity of the term 'non-traditional sexuality' results in the co-existence of multiple ways for denoting the phenomenon of homosexuality or same-sex relationships. With the situation around LGBTQ-rights in Russia where political visibility and openness about one's sexuality can potentially lead to the status of victimhood, very often what we can infer from the media discourses on these issues is that the men in question are probably, potentially, likely non-heterosexual: unless the mediated men are publicly open about their sexual orientation, there is no way of knowing whether they are gay, bisexual, bi-curious or queer, and these multiple options of interpretation permeate verbal discourses around NHM in Russian media. Through this contribution to scholarship on Russian sexualities, I argue that a decolonised research vocabulary not reliant on the western concepts of LGBT and queer identities and that a more inclusive approach to studying Russian non-heteronormativity are pertinent.

Throughout the body of this thesis, I also demonstrate the significance of the use of specific and accurate terminology when referring to the 2013 legislation which served as the driving factor for the growth of media discourses on NHM. References to the 2013 legislation as an 'anti-gay-propaganda' or 'propaganda' law distort the actual discourses around NHM in Russia. Although the impact of the law on LGBTQ-rights activism has indeed been considerable (Buyantueva 2018, Kondakov 2014), which is in line with the overall oppressive policies towards human rights and oppositional protest activism in the RF, the 2013 law does not actually ban the existence of gay people or LGBTQ individuals in general, nor does it refer to 'propaganda' in its Anglophone meaning of the word. Underlining the essence of the 2013 legislation serving a combination of purposes not directly related to LGBTQ identities (to protect of minors against harmful information; to further restrict the work of the media; to gain further control of oppositional protest movements such as LGBTQ-rights group; to sustain the promotion of conservative family values popular among the electorate), I suggest that the terms 'traditional sexuality' or Russian 'Section 28' law would be more appropriate and would help avoid misconceptions about contemporary Russian discourses on non-heteronormativity.

When it comes to this thesis' contribution to the field of media studies, the key aspects here are the focus of the study on communication strategies and the choice of the media outlets for data sampling and analysis. By opting for the term 'communicating' rather than 'constructing' NHM, I point out that this research does not look at the perceptions of

mediated portrayals by media audiences and at the mental images of NHM that media audiences infer from the analysed bulk of media texts. The fact that the thesis focuses solely on the media strategies of initiating discourses and of creating media portrayals of NHM that allows me to capture evolving discourses in the making, to reveal how the media mechanisms work. I suggest that such a focus, coupled with the methodology of minute day-by-day recording of discursive changes, is a productive and promising method of unravelling discourses in real-time development.

The focus on Moscow-centric, mainstream kinds of media outlets enabled me to obtain consistent and conclusive empirical findings. However, further directions of research should probably include regional (e.g. North Caucasus, Tatarstan), local and hyperlocal Russian media outlets, which would allow a more nuanced understanding of the overall complexity and diversity of Russian media discourses on NHM. Another trajectory of further research could include Russophone outlets produced by western media (e.g. the *BBC Russian Service*, the newspaper *Pulse UK*), or western media that operate in languages other than Russian and which are accessed by Russian LGBTQ people (e.g. the online portals *pinknews.co.uk*, *pridemediacom.com*).

What had to be left beyond the scope of this study due to the timeline and thematic constraints is the growing reliance of Russian LGBTQ audiences on western media outlets producing thematic content. Younger generations of media consumers, who rely more and more on digital media for news and entertainment, tend to have a working knowledge of foreign languages, which allows them to watch TV series on the Internet in English or other European languages, to read and translate informative educational articles, to familiarise themselves with global news on the LGBTQ agenda. Thanks to these transnational media connections, Russian LGBTQ people can self-organise to travel abroad for various LGBTQ-related events (from a same-sex marriage ceremony to attending a LGBTQ-film festival), LGBTQ pride parades being one of the most popular options. Russian columns and walking groups can be seen at pride parades in New York, Paris, Helsinki, Madrid – whichever destination attracts self-organised groups of activists or non-activists. Thus, in the summer of 2019, with the help of social media platforms and with the support of the portal *parniplus.com*, the LGBTQ-rights initiative 'RainbowRU', which I co-founded in London in 2017, was able to invite LGBTQ visitors from Russia (both activists and non-activists) to participate in the first walking group for Russian speaking LGBTQ people as part of the *Pride in London* (see closing image). Similarly to how in the era of digitalisation media outlets can use resistance and circumvention strategies to work around restrictive legislation, oppressed social groups can use transnational new media tools to circumvent restrictive social policies.

Closing image.

A photo showing the first *Pride in London* walking group comprising Russian speaking LGBTQ-people, both UK residents and participants who travelled from the RF for the pride parade. The London-based activist group *RainbowRU* demonstrates their connection to Russia by carrying Russian flags, some of which have words 'Queer Russia with love' written on them.

Source: the author's personal archive. The photo was taken on 6 July 2019.



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