



Russia

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Russia's enormous size, straddling eastern Europe and northern Asia, its relative poverty, and its often violent history have all left their mark on the forms of same-sex love and gender diversity found within its borders. Moreover, the many nations and ethnic groups in the Russian Federation have diverse traditions regarding these issues. A cultural crossroads between Asia and Europe, Russia has a heritage of varied influences and stark confrontations in regard to its patterns of same-sex love.

Early Rus'

The eastern Slavic tribes gathered under the prince of Kiev accepted Christianity in 988, following contact with Byzantium. In the eventual schism between Rome and Constantinople, Rus' (as it came to be known) was an outpost of Orthodox Christianity.

Its earliest records (chronicles and religious texts) leave only a few hints about unconventional love. Lives of paired saints, such as Boris and Gleb, were celebrated as examples of devotion and love between pious warriors. The Christian tradition also gave to Orthodox Russians the ceremonies of same-sex union (known in Russian as *pobratimstvo*, "making brothers," and *posestrimstvo*, "making sisters") that enabled ordinary folk to emulate such saintly couples.

Through Byzantine Orthodoxy, however, Russians also received a negative view of all sexual activity, with a variety of penalties (exclusion from communion, fasting, prostrations) that were generally as harsh for adultery and masturbation as they were for same-sex acts.

Muscovy--A Gay Paradise?

Kievan development was interrupted in the thirteenth century by Mongol invasion and domination. In response, Russians migrated northward from steppe to forest and founded new towns. By the fifteenth century Mongol domination ended, and Moscow became the center of a northern Russian homeland, Muscovy. More is known about the social life of Muscovy than of Kiev as more written evidence has survived for the former. Contact and conflict with Western Europeans increased dramatically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Simon Karlinsky writes that "the Muscovite period may have been the era of the greatest visibility and tolerance for male homosexuality that the world had seen since the days of Ancient Greece and Rome." It is true that there were no laws against same-sex acts in Russia until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It would, however, be a mistake to think of Muscovy as a gay paradise in a supposed historical top-ten of such times and places.

While Muscovite manly behavior apparently included plenty of scope for sex between men, there is much evidence that "sodomy" had a negative cultural value. Equally suspected were cross-dressing and mannish behavior in women. Lesbian sexual relations, well hidden and sparsely recorded, were mistrusted too.

Social historians have long relied on foreigners' reports of what they saw in Muscovy. These foreigners wrote vividly about the widespread practice of sodomy or "unnatural vice" between men and boys, between adult men, and between men and animals, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Muscovy.

Yet European visitors carried a complex array of negative Western Christian and secular views about male-male sex with them to Moscow, and their reports were written to appeal to a home audience holding those values too. What is more, these visitors' reports were part of a cultural trend in which Western Europe began to imagine Eastern Europe as a place that was Christian but only barely "civilized." These stories of sodomy in Muscovy may well have been accurate, but a certain degree of exaggeration to emphasize Muscovy's "primitive" and "barbaric" character cannot be easily dismissed.

Many of the claims that Russia's tsars and subjects engaged in same-sex relations are based on propagandistic sources that tell us more about the symbolic meaning of sodomy than about actual same-sex love in Muscovite society. These writings were often produced as part of the clan-based struggles for power during the chaos created by Ivan the Terrible (ruled 1533-1584) and the dynastic breakdown that lasted until the Romanovs assumed the throne in 1613.

These stories of sodomitical relations often mix them with allegations of other forms of deviance, such as practicing witchcraft, association with wandering minstrels (condemned by Orthodoxy), or desecration of holy sites and lax views of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

The source for Ivan the Terrible's alleged sexual involvement with his henchman Fedor Basmanov was an anti-Ivan letter written by a disgruntled prince who defected to Poland. This story (which is impossible to confirm or deny on available evidence) was later embellished in the historical novel of A. K. Tolstoy (*Prince Serebriany*, 1862) and in the film masterpiece, *Ivan the Terrible (Part II)*, made in 1945 by Sergei M. Eisenstein. These embellishments are thus the product of later historical eras and tell us little about Muscovy.

When Western-looking Tsar Dmitry (ruled 1605-1606) was overthrown, his corpse was dragged through Moscow by the genitals and displayed with the mutilated body of his reputed lover, Petr Basmanov. In the political symbolism of Muscovy, love between men was not easily tolerated. Instead, sodomy carried negative associations with other forms of deviance, and was invoked to damage reputations.

Further evidence that sexual and gender diversity were not always so lightly regarded comes from religious documents. A number of sixteenth-century lists of sins and penances compiled for clergy hearing confessions included "men wearing women's clothing, or women men's [clothing]" as a sinful act. One list assigned 150 prostrations per day for seven weeks as the required penance.

Sermons too mentioned the use of women's powder and finery by men seeking to attract other men as an abomination; they also attacked shaving as a way of attracting other men.

Frequently, penitential lists--most of which assumed the confessing party was an adult man--mentioned sexual acts with young men as sins to be discovered in confession; the youthful male was seen as a fair substitute for a woman. Between women, sexual manipulations (usually described as masturbation) were also routinely included on such lists. Less often, women's use of men's clothing would be mentioned.

In the structure of penitential manuals, same-sex sexual sins were not associated with cross-dressing in any systematic way, suggesting that Muscovites did not closely link gender transgression with same-sex activity, except perhaps where young men were concerned.

In the Muscovite period the homosocial nature of Russian society expanded. Monasteries and convents proliferated, and the clerical hierarchy was well aware of the temptations to same-sex acts fostered inside

them. Religious authorities warned community leaders to guard against intimate contacts between women in convents and between men in monasteries, and apparently there were routines of surveillance to monitor behavior. No research has, however, been conducted on the queer dimension of these single-sex environments.

Similarly, as commercial bathhouses appeared for the first time in Moscow in the seventeenth century, the state decreed that the sexes should be separated for the sake of public decency. At least on the men's side of commercial baths, youths were employed to scrub clients' backs, and likely also engaged in paid and unpaid sexual relations with them.

The military was another significantly homosocial environment, one where men were normally removed from their home villages and taken into virtual lifetime service. Again, no research into the queer implications of this durable same-sex formation has been undertaken. Nevertheless, the traditional reverence for paired warrior-saints, the ritual of "making brothers," and the fact that Peter the Great (reigned 1689-1725) banned sodomy in the army and navy (in 1716) all suggest that male same-sex love was not an unknown feature of military service.

The sexes were also (in theory at least) segregated in the tsar's court. Both tsar and tsarina had same-sex "companions of the bedchamber," who slept in the same room and even the same bed with them. Sources on these personages seem to insist that some of them were married, perhaps in an attempt to emphasize their respectability.

Women and men at court spent much of their time engaged in sex-segregated activities: noblewomen sewed together with the tsarina, while hunting and falconry were masculine pursuits. Again, the opportunities for particular friendships and physical intimacy inherent in these social structures deserve more study with a queer eye.

Imperial Russia: Hostility and Homosexuality

Karlinsky correctly points to the increased Russian awareness of hostility to same-sex sexuality that came with Muscovy's turn to the West in the early eighteenth century. A slow but determined process of Westernization initiated by Peter the Great transformed the state into a major European power, the Russian Empire, with a modern army capable of occupying Berlin in 1760 and repelling Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812.

St. Petersburg, founded in 1703, served as Peter's "window on the West," force-feeding the new Imperial elite Western "civilization." Aristocrats and gentry absorbed new manners, including the mixing of the sexes, and a new sense that marital relations could be a source of personal fulfillment. These developments contributed to the elite's ideas about appropriate masculinity in particular.

Peter's 1716 military ban on sodomy was intended to begin this transformation where he needed to create "new men" first, in the army and navy. A similar ban was proposed for civilians in a draft penal code of 1754, but was not finally enacted until 1835. This law (which lasted until 1917) was apparently a response to the reports of sodomy in boys' boarding schools, in an era when the state needed another kind of "new man," the pious, conservative yet educated bureaucrat. Yet the growth of cities, and their increasing sophistication, allowed the development of alternatives to the masculinity prescribed by the state.

In St. Petersburg and more slowly in Moscow, a subculture of male homosexuality had evolved by the end of the nineteenth century. One sarcastic critic called it "the little homosexual world." This world was based on a geography of specific cruising territories, on a common fund of rituals, dress and language, and on networks of mutual support.

The most visible features of the little homosexual world owed much to the routines of male prostitution.

Streets and public gardens in the center of both capitals gained notoriety as places where men who offered men sex for cash were available. Those who purchased their services were often called "aunties" (*tetki*), an adaptation of the French and German street-slang "tante."

Aunties and male prostitutes recognized each other through a concealed dance of sustained eye contact, strolling, and apparently casual conversation (asking for a light for a cigarette was typical). Some aunties and men who sold sex wore provocatively colored outfits or make-up; the red necktie was said to be a homosexual signal in St. Petersburg.

Many of these cruising sites were near public conveniences that offered opportunities for prostitutes to display their attributes to potential clients. Men selling sex exploited the masculine aura provided by their student, civil, or military uniforms (Imperial Russia was a society replete with uniforms for all kinds of occupations). There was even a slang term for the manly homosexual who preferred such butch men: "woman-hater" (*zhenonenavistnik*).

The bathhouses of Russia's cities were another important site in the homosexual world. In comparison to earlier eras, when sex between youthful attendants and their clients was organized according to relatively egalitarian peasant customs, by the 1890s bathhouse homosexual prostitution was a business not unlike work in heterosexual brothels.

Managers appear to have cultivated particular male bath attendants to earn money as sex workers both on the premises and off. Earnings were no longer pooled among the attendants, peasant-fashion, but channeled through a manager who distributed work among attendants. Bathhouse managers were also aware that affluent homosexual men resorted to private cabinets in baths for sex and profited from this arrangement.

Blackmailers mined the reputation of bathhouses as places for homosexual encounters, either by leading their victims there and then issuing threats and demands, or by mentioning the baths in the claims they made to authorities. (Incidentally, extortionists victimizing Petersburg homosexuals feature often in Russian criminological literature; blackmail was far from unknown to Russian street toughs, police, and homosexuals at this time.)

Of course, male homosexual life in late Imperial Russia was not confined only to this world of public sex that seemed to consist of apparently loveless encounters and presumed economic exploitation. Karlinsky convincingly demonstrates in his extensive descriptions of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Russia's gay culture that its artists and writers brought male and female same-sex love into the public realm in bold and radical fashion.

The achievements of Mikhail Kuzmin, whose novella *Wings* is the first modern coming-out story with a happy ending (1906), and whose diaries (1905-1934) constitute one of the most moving documents of homosexual life in the twentieth century, could have been possible only through his interaction with the little homosexual world.

Similarly the hidden world of love between men was a source of inspiration for Peter Tchaikovsky, and only with Alexander Poznansky's detailed studies of his life and death do we have a clear picture of the composer's involvement in this universe. To dismiss this visible subculture of male homosexuality as a "culture of the toilet," an embarrassment, is to ignore the influence that concealed desire and its possibilities for realization had on gay male Russians who made contributions to the "high" culture of the Imperial era.

Lesbian Russia before 1917

Women who loved women evidently existed well before the late nineteenth century in Russia, although the

traces they left are slight. Muscovite penitential lists and other religious documents show that the Church was aware of the possibility of sexual attraction between women, but to date no individual stories of such love have been unearthed in the archives.

Historians have speculated that the empress Catherine the Great (ruled 1762-1795) may have had a lesbian relationship with Princess Catherine Dashkova, the director of Russia's Academy of Sciences in the late eighteenth century, but the slim evidence suggests that the legend reflects male historians' discomfort with strong women.

Karlinsky mentions the activities of the late Imperial generation of publishers, poets, and prose writers who contributed a lesbian presence to Russia's mainstream culture. Yet women without connections to cultural elites also experienced lesbian desire, and by the end of the Imperial era various experts noticed and described them.

The world of heterosexual prostitution in pre-revolutionary Russia was one place where the lower-class lesbian (and sometimes, her affluent female customers) might be found. Until 1917 brothels were licensed in Russian towns, and women's same-sex relationships were sometimes sheltered in these peculiar institutions.

A St. Petersburg gentlewoman, Julia Ostrovleva, was described by her psychiatrist in 1882 as enjoying dressing up as a man and paying visits to brothels, where "she spent a great deal of money on women." In a criminal case, a young prostitute testified that one of her colleagues had a romantic involvement with another sex-worker in a brothel. "[T]hey became what we call in public houses *koshki* [female cats]"--slang for women prostitutes who were lovers.

Some brothel owners may have encouraged liaisons between their prostitutes, thinking that it prevented them from moving on or becoming too intimate with male clients. Older prostitutes were sometimes observed mentoring younger girls, teaching them how to conduct themselves and becoming attached in the process. The officially sanctioned brothel was, for most prostitutes, a harsh and squalid environment, and same-sex relations were perhaps a method of mutual protection for the women who found themselves there.

Upper- and middle-class families tolerated tomboyish daughters, indulging their taste for boys' clothing and games. Most families seemed to expect such women to settle down in late adolescence and get married. Yet not all these women-loving women did.

One young woman of gentle birth, "Z," was sent by her parents to a psychiatrist in 1898 because she refused to get married. Her parents evidently were counting on the improvement to the family fortunes a marriage would bring. Z told her doctor about "our circle": "women such as her, that is, who love women, are found not at all infrequently . . . [but] form a kind of particular world. Such women recognize each other by manners, expressions of the eyes, mimicry and so on."

The "particular world" of the pre-revolutionary Russian lesbian was a world of covert "circles," of special friendships conducted in private rather than paraded in public like the male homosexual subculture.

The Russian authors who wrote about lesbian love described it without mentioning "our circle" or any social context. Lidia Zinovieva-Annibal's *Thirty-three Monsters* (1907), the first literary work in Russian with a lesbian theme, had a decadent, cushioned indoor setting with little realistic depiction of the social lives of its lesbian protagonists.

Nevertheless, by the time of the Revolution, lesbian writing was an established part of avant-garde salon culture, and certain poets, notably Sophia Parnok and Marina Tsvetaeva, were giving voice to same-sex feelings among women.

Gender Dissent before the Revolution

Both men and women in Russia occasionally departed from standard gender roles, and found various ways to express their gender dissent. When discovered, their disguises and desires were traditionally described as hermaphroditic. Later in the twentieth century, such gender crossing was regarded as a sign of homosexuality (by the 1910s, a medical condition).

Full cross-dressing was also observed, not always closely tied to same-sex desire, but rarely distinguished by Russian medical experts from homosexuality until quite late in the twentieth century.

Russia's foremost lexicographer collected a range of words from peasants and townsmen in the 1830s and 1840s to describe the mannish woman and the effeminate man. Women "resembling a man in their appearance, movements, voice" or "by structure, by body formation," were called *muzhlanka*, *borodulia*, *suparen'* and other terms. Men who "luxuriate [or] take women's manners" could be described using the verb *devulit'sia*. The nouns *babatia*, *babulia* (derived from the peasant word for a woman, *baba*) could also be applied to softer, feminine men.

Such words were viewed as far more insulting than the terms used to define the masculine woman. Women with masculine traits were regarded in a more positive light than their effeminate male counterparts. Rural Russians seemed to understand unconventional gender as a feature of hermaphroditism (which was widely enough observed in domestic animals): if someone behaved like the opposite sex, his or her physical sex was perhaps mixed as well.

The "passing woman" who dressed as a man was not always a lesbian, but appeared frequently in Russian history and in the medical literature on lesbianism. Catherine the Great's transvestite capers on horseback (described in her memoirs) were undoubtedly a means to escape the surveillance of her mother-in-law, Elizabeth I. Natalia Durova's lengthy impersonation of an officer of the Hussars during the Napoleonic Wars occurred with the later connivance of the authorities and satisfied a restless and energetic woman's taste for adventure.

Later Imperial, and early Soviet, case histories of lesbians often described women who impersonated men for sustained time periods. Sexual attraction to women may not have been the only reason for these remarkable transformations; some "passing women" were clearly attracted to the military life, or to aspects of masculine life such as mobility and entrepreneurship that were far less accessible to women.

The Revolution and Same-sex Love

By 1914 modern Russia had one of the most articulate gay and lesbian cultures in the Western world, but the tsarist government was not responsible for fostering that culture. It emerged spontaneously from Russian society and cannot be plausibly linked to any particular political current.

Nicholas II (ruled 1894-1917) was a devoted family man but utterly out of his depth in his determination to rule the Empire autocratically. His many uncles and cousins (some of them gay or bisexual) intrigued against him and contributed, along with the Romanov women, to the collapse of the dynasty with their collective political incompetence.

Undermining the democratic reforms of 1905, the Romanovs stifled the emergence of competent leadership in the Duma, the country's first parliament (1906-1917). The crisis of World War I destroyed the monarchy and then the provisional liberal-democratic order that replaced it in February 1917. The Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 proclaimed the world's first socialist state, but that state was founded on blood and terror (in a civil war from 1918 to 1921) rather than the traditions of European parliamentary social democracy.

Nevertheless, the early Bolsheviks and their allies in the Soviet state apparatus eagerly pursued the goal of modernization. As in so many other regimes and states, the modernization of approaches to sexuality had both positive and negative consequences for sexual and gender dissent.

In the first criminal code they composed after the revolution (1922), the Bolsheviks decriminalized sodomy. They did so because they were intent on secularizing and medicalizing the language of sexual crime. Old Testament concepts like "sodomy," "fornication," and "feminine honor" were purged from the law. In their place came a modernized, gender-neutral language to describe a sexual revolution.

Henceforth, the sexual inviolability of all young persons was to be protected by the state, and the maximum self-determination was offered to both adult men and women: freedom to marry and divorce without having to explain why, freedom to engage in harmless consensual sexual relations without the interference of a moralizing higher authority.

Homosexual relations were not explicitly welcomed by the Bolsheviks and raised to an equal status with heterosexuality. Yet they were regarded in principle as no great vice. The majority of Bolsheviks perhaps subscribed to the view that homosexuality was a medical condition, probably (if they read the popular sex advice tracts that they sponsored) a hormonal anomaly, and perhaps one day science would be able to control or even eradicate it. In the meantime, the legal persecution of homosexuals found in Britain and Germany was seen as irrational, reactionary, and bourgeois.

Nowhere was the indulgent Soviet view of homosexuality so vividly expressed as in medical circles. Soviet psychiatrists enthusiastically studied lesbians who came to their clinics for advice and sometimes for cures. The psychiatric profession in the 1920s did not always believe that same-sex love between women was inherently a problem. Some medics, perhaps a majority, thought the most humane and politically acceptable approach was to help lesbians to accept their desires so that they could be fulfilled as lesbians in socially non-disruptive ways.

Many aspects of the "typical lesbian personality" (in the stereotype shared by these doctors) were positive traits for the new Soviet woman: her active, tough, can-do attitude, her disregard for feminine fripperies, her will to study and do paid work. "Masculinization" carried positive political messages. Privately, some of the Soviet Union's leading psychiatrists even declared that marriage between two women ought to be recognized by the state.

Yet other medical authorities worried that the lesbian was a problem, that her refusal to have babies was socially disruptive, and that masculinization was a vulgar parody of the Soviet regime's proclaimed emancipation of women. Nevertheless, the tough, "masculinized" woman remained a feature of the Soviet social landscape, and many women-loving women undoubtedly took cover in this politically "safe" costume.

Soviet Russia's cities recovered fairly quickly in the 1920s from the devastation of seven years of war, revolution, and civil war. The male homosexual subculture reconstituted itself as parks, public toilets, and boulevards began to function again as meeting places for men-loving men. In the partially privatized economy of the 1920s some bars, cafes, and bathhouses welcomed homosexual clients, but the exuberant public face of the subculture did not return. (Mikhail Kuzmin's diary for the 1920s retains its queer eye, but the aging poet's activities were evidently more directed toward scraping together a living than flaunting a homosexual persona.)

Police surveillance of pleasure-spots was fairly constant, not so much because of a fear of public homosexuality as worries about heterosexual prostitution, which also flourished in many of the same locations. Soviet authorities devoted much effort to monitoring and studying women's prostitution in the 1920s, yet their records say nothing about the "little homosexual world." It is nevertheless very likely that the same police, welfare officials, and women's organizers who studied the heterosexual underworld of

Soviet Russia's cities encountered male homosexuals and male prostitution simultaneously.

Stalinism: A "Great Retreat" from Bolshevism?

There is a very politicized argument between the historians who view Josef Stalin's violent and transformative reign (1929-1953) as the realization of the Marxist program laid down by the first leader of the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin (died January 1924), and those historians who argue that Lenin's and Stalin's intentions were fundamentally different.

Revelations from government archives since 1991 have tended to weaken the claims of the second group of historians: we now know more about Lenin's taste for terror and intrigue and about the evolution of secret policing and political confinement under his rule. The mechanisms and habits of Soviet state violence had Leninist foundations; however the *scale* of this violence was grotesquely expanded under Stalin. More categories of people were targeted as Stalin sought to "sculpt" the population to play its role in his vision of a modern, industrialized power that could stand up to the capitalist West and the Nazi regime in Germany.

In sexual politics, Stalin's "great retreat" from Bolshevism has long seemed like a major rupture with the settled policies of Lenin's government. Instead of a sexual revolution allowing the maximum personal autonomy, Stalin's new policies limited life-choices for women (by banning abortion in 1936) and made divorce more difficult and expensive.

The 1933-1934 decision to make sodomy a crime once again seems part of the same reversal: facing a major war with Germany, the state sought to promote heterosexuality to lift the declining birth rate. Many Western homosexuals in the 1930s, and many since that time, have seen Stalin's sodomy ban in this light.

There were, however, also domestic, internal impulses that led to the sodomy ban of 1933, and some of these can even be traced to the "liberal" policies of the pre-Stalin sexual and political order. As part of the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), fairly ambitious and humane projects were designed to eliminate the scourges of prostitution and begging. "Socially anomalous" individuals were to be taken by welfare officials to special workshops and agricultural colonies to be retrained and re-deployed in factory jobs.

In the early years, these retraining schemes were relatively chaotic, but they grew harsher as the crisis atmosphere of the Five-Year Plan era developed, and as violence against the population increased. By 1932 prostitutes were simply rounded up by the police and shipped off to farming prison camps outside the biggest cities. (Moscow and Leningrad each had their own camps for "social anomalies.")

The police who arrested these women were aware of the existence of male prostitutes and their customers haunting the same places. The secret police proposed a ban on sodomy in mid-1933, including heightened penalties for male prostitution. The mention of "sodomy as a profession" was ultimately dropped from the published law, but the striking focus on male prostitution in the secret police reading of the problem indicates that they worried about economic deviance as much as sexual perversion.

What had begun as a way of reducing economic marginalization and giving women factory skills, apparently ended in the Stalinist goal of urban social cleansing. Gulag sentences for both female prostitutes and male homosexuals (whether prostitutes or not) were now a distinct possibility.

Until KGB and other archives are opened to public scrutiny, we will not be able to know precisely how many men suffered as a result of the 1933-1934 anti-sodomy law. The few surviving Moscow city court records from the 1930s to the 1950s show that despite this draconian law, the police were unsuccessful in eliminating the male homosexual subculture from Russia's capital. Even at the height of the Great Terror at the end of the 1930s men were still congregating to meet each other for sexual and emotional intimacies in notorious cruising spots like the boulevard and public toilets at Nikitskie Gate in the center of Moscow. Given the ferocity of state terror, this persistent homosexual presence constitutes a remarkable form of

social disobedience.

After Stalin: The Gulag and the Clinic

We usually think of Nikita Khrushchev, the man who ruled the Soviet Union after Stalin's death in 1953, as a "liberal" whose policy of de-Stalinization did much to humanize Soviet life, preparing the ground for Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika. Yet Khrushchev's crude homophobia and bullying of cultural and intellectual leaders were also a feature of his ambiguous years in office.

He initiated reforms that undid some of the Stalinist sexual conservatism: abortion was decriminalized in 1955, and a housing boom made privacy and a sex life more accessible for millions. Despite a comprehensive review of thousands of Stalin-era laws, the ban on male homosexuality remained in place, for undisclosed reasons.

Khrushchev dismantled the Gulag camps, releasing some 2.5 million people (about three-quarters of whom were men) into Soviet society. Life inside the Gulag had been characterized by a brutal sexual culture. In men's camps rape and sexual humiliation were widespread and exploited by authorities and powerful prisoners as a means of keeping the majority in line by stigmatizing a small minority who were forced into the receptive role in anal intercourse.

It seems likely that in Khrushchev's blunt imagination the best way to prevent the sexual behavior of the camps from "infecting" Soviet society was to retain the anti-sodomy ban. Of course, male homosexual cruising territories continued to operate and expand as Soviet cities grew during the post-Stalin decades, and the anti-sodomy law did little to limit the subculture's growth. About 1,000 men per year were imprisoned as a result of the legislation during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Despite his anti-intellectual instincts, Khrushchev did begin a process of liberalization in the sciences, and the re-birth of Soviet sexology as a sub-discipline of psychiatry (after decades of suppression) was one modest result of this trend. Soviet psychiatrists began new work on the lesbian but unfortunately without a trace of the humane approaches displayed by their predecessors in the 1920s, whose works were virtually ignored.

Instead, psychiatrists sought to cure the lesbian of her "perversion" and convert her to "normal" relations by a combination of libido-deadening drugs and talk therapy. A major study of the 1950s and 1960s was initiated in Soviet Kazakhstan, drawing its subjects from a former Gulag camp for women. It offered only a modest "success rate" with its drug-and-persuasion regime, but one of its authors continued to promote this "cure" when he moved to Leningrad in the 1970s and convinced the city health department to fund a sexological clinic under his direction.

As with Gulag men, it appears that the authorities hoped to contain the spread of Gulag women's sexual culture, but with medical measures. By the late Soviet years the medical treatment of lesbians had solidified into a routine. If girls or women were "outed," they were given compulsory psychiatric treatment, made to report to medical authorities on a periodic basis, and (as psychiatric outpatients) were denied certain forms of employment or a driver's license.

The massive expansion of the late Soviet scientific establishment allowed for pockets of experimentation in the realm of gender issues. This experimental license took place within a traditional, paternalistic framework of doctor-patient relations. The surgical re-assignment of gender was attempted and made routine from the 1960s into the 1980s under endocrinologist Aron Belkin, director of the Moscow Center of Psychiatric Endocrinology. (Belkin was recently hailed as the "father of Russian transsexuals" in an online obituary after his death on April 29, 2003.)

Belkin was also a leading exponent of Soviet medical routines for the surgical and hormonal "correction" of

intersexual babies and adults. Changing the sex of Soviet citizens involved not only complex medical procedures, but also a nightmare of paperwork to appease totalitarian bureaucrats and give patients completely new civic identities that concealed their gender transitions.

Belkin's work, and the medical literature produced by his school of gender specialists, reveals no awareness of the experiments of early Soviet surgeons and endocrine specialists in these areas. There were "crude operations" to effect changes of sex in humans in 1928 in Moscow (later condemned) and attempts to "clarify" the sex in hermaphrodites as early as 1925.

After Communism

Russian life changed drastically with the accession of the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev (in power 1985-1991). The end of the Soviet Union (which collapsed in the second half of 1991) and the eventual rise of the Russian Federation under Boris Yeltsin (who served as President, 1991-1999) brought greater freedom but also staggering economic decline. "Transitional economics" (from state socialism to unfettered capitalism) have impoverished the majority of Russians, leading to a demographic implosion. In 2002 the government released statistics showing that the population of Russia had been declining by 800,000 annually as a result of illness, alcoholism, and poverty linked to the "transition."

The political evolution from authoritarian one-party rule to a still-unsettled "democracy" initially led to some very positive developments for same-sex desiring Russians. After some unpublicized debate inside the Soviet system, and pressure from the Council of Europe after 1991, Boris Yeltsin decriminalized sodomy in 1993.

From 1989, Russian gays and lesbians began to organize support and lobbying groups, often with the financial backing of American and European organizations. These groups had little impact on the eventual decision to decriminalize sodomy, but they did attract wide media attention, publicizing queer issues and demands. Their health campaigning succeeded in keeping the AIDS/HIV issue from being entirely dominated by the doctor-knows-best outlook of the Russian medical establishment. Russia's lesbian and gay activists also began organizing social venues, magazines and periodicals, and contact clubs for people isolated in the remoter regions of the country.

The high water mark of this activity was perhaps 1996, when a national lobbying organization, Triangle, opened an advice and cultural center with a library in Moscow, held a national conference attended by more than 125 delegates, and called for the re-election of Yeltsin in that year's presidential poll. A British study showed that 20 community organizations were running in various cities throughout Russia. A number of local and national queer periodicals were appearing, and the quality of some was as good as anything in the mainstream press.

The wider culture was also opening to homoerotic and transgender themes, with Roman Viktiuk's drag-production of Jean Genet's *The Maids* taking Moscow audiences by storm, and pop singers such as Boris Moiseev and Sergei Pankin recapitulating the entire history of glam-rock and gender-bending camp in their video releases.

Since that optimistic time community activism has declined almost to nothing, and no gay or lesbian periodicals or magazines are commercially published and distributed in Russia. The longest-running gay man's review, *1/10*, ceased publication in 2001, apparently the victim of a Moscow city "anti-pornography" drive. Triangle closed its doors in 1997 when its European funding ran out. A major lesbian and gay archive, "GenderDok," was transferred from Moscow where it was harassed by police and civic authorities, to Homodok in the Netherlands.

Many activists of the 1990s generation have either emigrated or abandoned community politics, some for business ventures. The single most significant development in queer life observable in President Vladimir

Putin's Russia has been the rise of large gay nightclubs, bars, cafes, and gay-specific saunas (as opposed to traditional bathhouses) in Moscow and to a lesser extent St. Petersburg. For affluent gay men in the country's richest cities, the commercial scene offers a glimpse of the high life in Amsterdam or San Francisco, but without the infrastructure of community to nourish solidarity or to protect people from unsafe sex.

The only alternative to the commercial scene has been a "mini-boom" in queer academic book publishing. Fueled by intelligentsia curiosity about sexuality in general, and a fashionable lurch toward post-modern theory, there has been a stampede to translate and publish the works of Genet, Burroughs, Foucault, and Wittig. A small number of scholars and authors outside the academy have written books for this audience on queer themes, with titles like "The Other Love," "The Other Petersburg," and "Russian Amazons." The liberal intelligentsia of Moscow and St. Petersburg is catching up on a century of queer studies.

Russian politics took a homophobic detour in 2002 during a little-noticed debate on sex crime legislation in the Duma. While a package of amendments to the law (including a rise in the age of consent to 16, and new penalties for internet pornographers) were introduced and discussed, a member of parliament with ties to the Kremlin tabled a bill to re-criminalize consensual male homosexuality. A colleague from a competing party offered his own draft legislation to outlaw all lesbian relations. Although they were not enacted into law, these proposals were hailed by religious leaders, Soviet-minded doctors, and other conservative forces who view the population decline as the gravest issue facing Russia, and blame a "women's birth strike" and sexual perversion for "the desecration of the national gene pool."

In July 2003, the Russian military issued a decree formally banning homosexuals (along with alcoholics and drug addicts) from serving even as conscripts. This homophobic move was entirely facilitated by the Duma debate on homosexuality in 2002.

Nevertheless, officialdom may have realized that it had cracked down too hard on queer self-organization, and risked looking illiberal to Western public opinion. In 2002 Moscow city authorities granted official registration to a queer community group publishing a website in Russian and English (www.gay.ru). The "Together" group announced plans to establish an advice and counseling center and to publish a national queer newsmagazine.

[Recent Developments

The climate for glbtq Russians has become increasingly hostile during the reign of Vladimir Putin and his associate Dmitry Medvedev (Putin assumed power in 1999; was elected president in 2000 and re-elected in 2004; in 2008, prohibited by the constitution from running for a third four-year term, Putin was succeeded by his hand-picked candidate Medvedev, who served until 2012; in 2012, Putin was elected to a six-year term). During these years, fewer public figures came out, and activists who tried to speak up for human rights increasingly faced repression, arrest, and violence.

Permits for pride parades were routinely denied. In 2007, for example, after Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov denounced glbtq rallies as "satanic" and once again turned down a request to hold a parade, a group of activists attempted to deliver him a petition that called for respect for the right of freedom of assembly and that was signed by 50 Members of the European Parliament. Some 30 of the protesters were arrested before they could reach the mayor's office. Three were subsequently charged with disobeying the police. When the other activists were released after several hours in custody, they were set upon and attacked by Neo-Nazi toughs and an Orthodox priest.

The other protesters fared no better. Skinheads and members of the Orthodox Church pelted them with eggs and stones, then beat some of them. Among the victims were German Member of Parliament Volker Beck, Member of the European Parliament Marco Capatto of Italy, and British glbtq rights activist Peter Tatchell.

Tatchell stated to Luke Harding of *The Guardian*, "The police stood there while people knocked me to the ground and kicked me. Four or five neo-Nazis attacked me. The police watched. At a certain point the police then arrested me and let my neo-Nazi attackers walk free." He added that officers taunted the protesters in the police van, saying, "We are going to have some fun with you at the police station."

A Russian--identified only as Alexey--still bloodied from the attack, told Harding, "This is a scary place, a pretty scary country if you are gay. But we won't give up until they allow us our rights."

Despite repeatedly being cited by the European Court on Human Rights for violating the European Convention on Human Rights by denying freedom of association to glbtq citizens, in 2012 Moscow authorities enacted a hundred-year ban on gay pride parades.

Since Putin resumed the presidency following his election in 2012, conditions have notably worsened, leading some observers to declare that a pogrom against homosexuals is now underway in Russia in which homosexuals are scapegoated for the failures of the Putin administration, as the Russian economy continues to struggle and Russian influence abroad continues to wane.

Thomas Grove and Steve Gutterman of Reuters have pointed out that "[m]any Russian men like to be seen as a 'muzhik'--which literally means 'peasant' but now connotes a tough, single-minded man with conservative ideals who dominates his household. . . . Such men have been part of Putin's power base since he was first elected president in 2000."

In 2012, laws prohibiting "homosexual propaganda" began being adopted by regional parliaments. The vague laws prohibit almost any statement or action that could be interpreted as favorable to homosexuality were first adopted in Arkhangelsk and Ryazan and St. Petersburg and then spread to the national Duma.

The adoption of such laws were a reaction to demands by gay activists, particularly in St. Petersburg and Moscow, for equal rights, and to agitation from Russia's vehemently homophobic Orthodox Church to vilify gay people.

Under St. Petersburg's law, which passed the legislature on a vote of 29 to 5, "public actions directed at the propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality and transgenderism among minors" will be punishable with fines of up to \$17,000. The law defines propaganda of homosexuality as "the targeted and uncontrolled dissemination of generally accessible information capable of harming the health and moral and spiritual development of minors," particularly that which could create "a distorted impression" of "marital relations."

Igor Kochetkov, the head of the Russian L.G.B.T. Network, a rights group based in St. Petersburg, called the premise of the law "absurd." He added, prophetically, "This is a law that can be used, and will be used, to conduct searches of organizations and prevent public actions. . . . Most importantly, it will be used for official propaganda. Officially homosexuality will be considered illegal, something incorrect and something that cannot be discussed with children. It will create a negative atmosphere in society around gays and lesbians as well as our organizations."

Although International human rights groups and Western governments had urged legislators not to pass the St. Petersburg law, the federal government quickly embraced it. In June 2013, it was passed almost unanimously in the Duma.

Emboldened by support from the highest level, anti-glbtq individuals and groups became even more brazen in their physical attacks on gay people, sometimes posting videos of their assaults on the Internet, apparently with little fear that it could land them in legal trouble.

After the savage torture, murder, and mutilation of a young man in Volgograd in May 2013, investigators

stated that the crime was motivated by homophobia; nevertheless, reported Ellen Barry of the *New York Times*, prominent Russian glbtq rights activist Nikolai Alekseyev fears that the crime "will be investigated as one caused by a trivial row, and the homophobic motive will gradually disappear from all the documents."

Inspector Andrei Gapchenko of Volgograd acknowledged that the victim had been targeted because he was gay but described homophobic crime as unusual in his city. Actual statistics are impossible to come by, however, because, as Alekseyev stated to Grove and Gutterman, "As a rule, all these crimes are categorized as something ordinary--they argued over a bottle of vodka, or there was 'personal animosity.' The real motive of hate is not mentioned."

In addition, say activists, many crimes to unreported because victims are afraid to come forward or consider it futile to do so.

Russian activists said that the homophobic vigilantism was directly attributable to the new laws against "homosexual propaganda." Alec Luhn reported in *The Guardian* that "the legislation has emboldened rightwing groups who use social media to 'ambush' gay people, luring them to meetings and then humiliating them on camera--sometimes pouring urine on them. These groups often act against gay teenagers, several of whom told the *Guardian* that rising homophobia and vigilante activity force them to lead lives of secrecy."

Igor Kochetkov, head of the Russian LGBT network, said the new laws "have essentially legalised violence against LGBT people, because these groups of hooligans justify their actions with these laws. With this legislation, the government said that, yes, gays and lesbians are not valued as a social group."

In a series of interviews with young homosexuals, the *Guardian* found that because of widespread fear their relationships are nearly always clandestine and abuse is commonplace. In addition to vigilante violence, they fear negative reactions from family and friends. In the Russian provinces, homosexuality is the love that dare not even whisper its name.

Yuri Agheshchev, the coordinator of the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods, which has been responsible for violent attacks on participants in glbtq rallies, had the temerity to claim, "We're a peaceful people, but we will stand tall to defend our children adequately."

Putin has also used the welfare of children and families as a rationale for other anti-gay laws, including one that forbids the adoption of Russian children by anyone in countries with marriage equality. He also favors a law calling for the removal of Russian children from their own homes if their parents are deemed to be gay or lesbian.

Tellingly, anti-gay extremists from the United States have been welcomed in Russia as parliamentarians consider anti-gay laws. Among them are Brian Brown of the National Organization for Marriage and Scott Lively of Mass Resistance. The fraudulent study by sociologist Mark Regnerus that alleges that children of same-sex parents do less well than children of heterosexual parents has also been cited by defenders of the anti-gay laws.

Sochi Olympics

When Sochi was selected as the host city of the 2014 Winter Games, defeating bids from Salzburg, Austria, and Pyeongchang, South Korea, Russia was granted the right to host an Olympics for the first time since the 1980 Summer Olympics were held in Moscow. The 1980s Olympics were boycotted by the United States and some of its allies because of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The Sochi Olympics would be an opportunity, it was thought, to exhibit the progress of the Russian people toward a more open and democratic society.

In fact, however, the Sochi Olympics have so far only highlighted the homophobia of the Russian Federation.

Since the federal law prohibiting "gay propaganda" applies to foreigners as well as to Russians, after its passage there was immediate concern in the glbtq and ally communities about the safety of queer athletes and sports fans at the Sochi Games. This concern was heightened by the fact that Russian officials had unceremoniously rejected the application to establish a Pride House at the Olympics.

Moreover, with news of the escalating violence and brutal oppression directed toward glbtq citizen in Russia, the prospect of the Sochi Olympics became increasingly unappealing to many Westerners. Not only were they concerned about the safety of tourists at the Games, but they recognized that the Sochi Games offered an opportunity to protest the oppression of gay people in Russia.

In a *New York Times* op-ed, playwright, actor, and activist Harvey Fierstein asserted that Russian president Vladimir Putin had "declared war on homosexuals." After detailing the deplorable conditions for glbtq people in Russia, including the increase in violence directed toward people suspected of being gay, he forcefully called for a boycott of the Winter Games.

Other activists followed with calls of boycotts of Russian products, such as vodka, and proposals to move the Games from Russia.

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Kozak tried to downplay the risks and sounded a familiar note, stating, "No one should have any concern whatsoever. People can get on with their private lives, and spread their respective advantages and attractions among adults. The main thing is that this does not touch children." Subsequently, however, Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko declared that anyone at Sochi in any capacity would be "held accountable" for "propagandizing" about glbtq rights in any way.

Putin issued a decree banning protests for the duration of the Olympic Games even as he assured Olympic officials that all would be welcome at the Games.

Many athletes objected to a boycott and pointed, rather naïvely, to the gold-medal performances by African-American track star Jesse Owens at the 1936 Games in Berlin and suggested that if glbtq athletes at Sochi also won medals, prejudice would somehow be overcome. History tells us the opposite: although Owens's victories were impressive individual achievements, they had negligible effect on the showcasing on Germany during the Games and none on German policy.

Some people opined that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) should ban Russia from the 2014 Games--whether or not they were held in Sochi--for violating Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter, which provides for the exclusion of countries that infringe upon human rights.

However, the IOC showed no willingness to tackle this issue. Chairman Jean-Claude Killy of France stated, "The IOC doesn't really have the right to discuss the laws in the country where the Olympic Games are organized. As long as the Olympic Charter is respected, we are satisfied, and that is the case."

In fact, in the past the IOC has banned countries including the Republic of South Africa Rhodesia (for their discriminatory racial policies) and Afghanistan (for its denial of rights to women).

Seeing no sign of any support from the IOC, advocates for glbtq rights have called upon corporate sponsors of the Sochi Games either to withdraw their support or to use the opportunity to speak up for equal rights.]

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