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Slawistische  
Forschungen  
und Texte

**25**

THE DISCOURSE  
ON GENDER IDENTITY  
IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

An Introduction with a Case Study  
in Russian Gender Linguistics



Dennis Scheller-Boltz

Olms

# westostpassagen

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# The Discourse on Gender Identity in Contemporary Russia

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*“The monograph investigates the discourse on transgender and queer identities in present-day Russia and offers a valuable contribution to Slavic Queer Linguistics and Slavic Studies in general. The book is an interdisciplinary study that brings together Linguistics, Gender Studies, Queer Studies, and, to a certain degree, Political Science and Cultural Anthropology. Such an interdisciplinary approach is difficult to apply in the context of Russian linguistics, which for the most part remains heteronormative and traditionalist when it comes to gender identity and gender expression. This is why Scheller-Boltz’s analysis of the discourse on Conchita Wurst in Putin’s Russia fills an important gap in Russian Queer Linguistics.”*

*(Alexander Pershái, European Humanities University, Vilnius, Lithuania)*

*“This monograph presents an intriguing and in-depth analysis of the highly complex and problematic issue of straight and queer Russian identities and the tensions between the two in a nation caught between eastern traditionalism and western modernism. The work explores the ever-changing and interconnected concepts of gender, sexuality and national identity through the reception of 2014 Eurovision Song Contest self-proclaimed queer Austrian victor Conchita Wurst by both the Russian public and media. While the volume may also be regarded as a seminal introduction to Russian queer linguistics its findings are those which can be applied to other disciplines concerned with issues of gender, sexuality, and nationality. A multifaceted work in terms of appeal Scheller-Boltz’s book is a must-read for those interested in perceptions of gender and sexuality in modern-day Russia, Slavonic queer linguistics as well as the reception and impact of western popular culture on eastern societies.”*

*(John Francis Eason III, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada)*



## **Preface and Acknowledgement**

This volume represents the full results of a scientific project which was approved by the Tyrolean Science Fund (TWF) for the year 2015. It is based on a series of papers and talks which have already been published or presented on this topic over the past three years. Not until now, however, has it been possible for me to present the complete material that has been collected and investigated to analyse my current research interest and to present the full extent of my research and findings. So, this volume provides me with the opportunity to bring together all my material and to present the final results of my current research project. It is dedicated to the question of the interconnection between gender, sexual, and national identity. Specifically, I address the question of how the construction of gender and sexual identities influence the construction of national identity and in what ways these identity concepts are intimately connected.

My research project focuses on Russian discourse on identity:

First, it analyses the developments in the recent past and, in particular, the latest socio-political circumstances and trends in the Russian Federation which provide much useful and interesting material for us to examine the interconnection between these different identity concepts. In other words, and to be more precise, the project focuses on the current discourse on gender, sexual, and national identity in Russia which delivers authentic and illustrative and, hence, extremely topical material that exemplifies clearly that gender, sexual, and national identity are closely interconnected and influence one another directly. This is a phenomenon which can be characterised as typical for Russia in recent years and which has noticeably dominated Russian discourse, especially before and during the Winter Olympics in 2014.

Second, the project aims at analysing Russia's ongoing identity crisis. It is very interesting for Russicists – and Slavicists in general – to study how this identity crisis is articulated in Russia and, furthermore, what kind of measures and steps are taken – this also concerns the Russian media – to strengthen and to rebuild Russia's identity. In this context, one has to explore the role that gender and sexual identities play here and to what

extent the concepts of gender and sexuality impact Russia's national identity.

Third, my analysis of discourse on gender, sexuality, and nation has, of course, a decided focus on Russian society. However, Russian discourse delivers very informative and highly revealing material that can also, of course, be applied to other societies and cultures. In this context, it should be pointed out that the analysis of gender, sexuality, and nation is in and of itself a very popular topic irrespective of the discipline. For this reason, the material to be analysed for my research topic provides meaningful scientific findings that can be directly transferred to and implemented in other non-Slavonic disciplines. Hence, the expected results enrich gender and queer linguistic research not only in Slavonic (linguistic) studies but also in other linguistic and non-linguistic disciplines.

\* \* \*

This volume would never have come into existence if I had not had people on my side who actively and professionally supported me and stood by me with words and deeds:

I am deeply indebted to Alla Viktorovna Kirilina and I have to express my gratitude to her for her immense interest in my project, for our discussions, for her absolutely helpful remarks as well as for her always available ear, and for the research possibilities she offered me in Moscow.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Wirth Institute and the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies of the University of Alberta, especially to Joseph Patrouch and Waclaw Osadnik, for supporting my research project, for the possibilities to present and discuss its main aspects and my research questions, for useful impulses, and for offering me brilliant research opportunities.

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My gratitude goes to Imke Mendoza who has made this project and, consequently, this volume possible, not least because of the inspiration I got at her conference in Salzburg in 2014.

The Tyrolean Science Fund (TWF) I have to thank for having approved my research project, for its financial support, and, in particular, for its trust in the feasibility, the necessity as well as in the significance and relevance of my project.

Thank you to Ann Coady and Sonja Koroliov for critical proof-reading.

A very big thank-you goes to Alexander Persháí and John Francis Eason who took their time to review the manuscript of this book. I highly appreciate their feedback and useful comments and I am very grateful for their interest in this research project and, mainly, in this book.

My heartfelt gratitude to Dorothea for always helping me with technical questions and for having a professional eye as to layout and text design.

Thank you to Kerstin Sörensen for creating a painting for the cover of this book.

Last but not least I must thank from the bottom of my heart the editors of this book series as well as the publishing house Georg Olms for their cooperation and support, but, in particular, for including the current monograph in their series.

My special thank-you goes to Stefan for your absolutely indescribable and never-ending understanding, for your time and spare time, for the discussions with you and your critical remarks, for supporting gender and queer research as well as my ideas and visions, and, last but not least, for your belief in this publication.

Thank you so much to you all!

\* \* \*

Parts of this monograph are based on contributions which have been published previously in other books, journals, or volumes. However, it is not only necessary to include and reproduce parts of them in order to guarantee a profound and complete study, but it is also important to elaborate upon them. Facts and interpretations may change from time to time, our stance on some phenomena can also undergo changes, new circumstances can change our lives and, consequently, our perception as well as our research findings. Consequently, you will not find a simple reproduction and compilation of my work, but an updated and self-contained study of the construction and interconnection of gender, sexual, and national identity in Russia. Therefore, some research findings may differ more or less from how I presented and wrote about them in previously published contributions. Yet, the parts or chapters which are based on previously published work or on research findings which I described in a different way in other publications are explicitly marked by myself (the author) by giving the full information on the quotation.

Dennis Scheller-Boltz  
In June 2017

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## Introduction

### *1 On the Significance of Conchita Wurst in Russian Discourse*

Any analysis of identity in political discourse must begin with the acknowledgement that identity is a phenomenon which arises in discourse and which can be used by opposing sides as a tool in the struggle for power. The act of declaring what one is and what one is not is not simply a statement of membership in a certain group. It is a device used to regulate one's own behaviour, to manipulate the behaviour of others, and to exclude or marginalise those who refuse to adapt their behaviour accordingly. It is important to note that this process is never finished. Ironically, identity requires an ongoing confrontation with other identities in order to serve its function in the struggle for power. Therefore, discourse will almost automatically produce instances which challenge or reaffirm the identities of those participating in the discourse. One such instance in the Russian discourse on gender and identity was the victory of Austria's Conchita Wurst at the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest in Denmark's Copenhagen.

How could Conchita Wurst – “the bearded woman” (*borodataia zhenshchina*), the man in a dress (*muzhik v iubke*), the transvestite, the artist of an undefined or even undefinable gender – inhabit such a central place in the discourse of a country thousands of kilometres away? After all, she (or he?) was only the winner of a song contest, wasn't s/he?

The debate about Conchita Wurst must be seen in the larger context of Russia's ongoing identity crisis. This identity crisis has been discussed and analysed in Russian studies in full detail from different perspectives (e.g. Baer 2009, Chandler 2013, Nohejl et al. 2013, Riabov 2007, Riabov/Riabova 2008, Sperling 2015).<sup>1</sup> However, new and decisive discursive moments continue to appear and merit discussion because they redynamise the Russian discourse on identity.

One of those crucial discursive moments was the appearance of Conchita Wurst and her victory at the Eurovision Song Contest in Denmark

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<sup>1</sup> See also the analyses made by Nohejl et al. (2011, 2010).

2014. To those familiar with Russian politics and society, it was not surprising that fierce debates on both, gender identity and non-heteronormative lifestyles erupted again and intensified immediately after the media-event in Copenhagen. These debates tied in with other events which had caused a big uproar in the Russian – and international – media during previous years:

In 2012, for example, there had been a controversial appeal to traditional gender roles and stereotypical, that means sex-based gender ideas. At the time, politicians and the Russian Orthodox Church pushed for a new family norm promoting a family model with an average of three children (*trekhdetnaia sem'ia*) (cf. URL 1, 2). This drastic step was not only meant to raise the – allegedly declining – birth rate. It was also intended to regulate gender roles and to maintain traditional gender ideas. Scholars agree that this socio-political measure was one of the most significant and most important steps in recent years to regulate gender identity *per se*.

In June 2013, President Vladimir Putin signed the so-called *propaganda law* which bans the public distribution of information about “non-traditional” sexual relations and prevents Gay Prides as well as public queer activities (Jefferson Lenskyj 2014). This controversial law caused quite a stir internationally, mainly because it was seen as an infringement upon human rights, in particular the freedom of speech (Kondakov 2014, 2012a, Sapper/ Weichsel 2013). In the Russian context, however, the law meant much more. Its intention is to regulate sexual identity which obviously includes sexual desire and behaviour, within a – as Judith Butler (1991) calls it – “heterosexual matrix”. Evidently, this law was a further dramatic step to deny identity diversity and to curtail one’s right to define one’s own identity. Instead, it added to the increasing pressure to regulate gender identity based on the concept of heteronormativity.

The recent political decision to ban people with a trans-identity because of an alleged mental disorder from passing the driving license and from driving at all stands in line with these political interventions and can only be interpreted as another effort to encroach upon sexuality (cf. URL 3, 4, see also Kondakov n.d.).

One may find this surprising but these legislative activities are only one facet of current Russian identity politics. The recent media coverage has made it evident that the Russian Federation constantly attempts to maintain and to demonstrate its power and its international influence. The

annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation with all the political measures, conflicts, and crises that have followed from this action as well as the involvement of Russia in the conflict in Syria are the latest incidents that attest to the fact that Russia is trying to rebuild a national identity based on power and superiority. In this context, it is no accident that the Russian president appears in public stylising himself over and over again as a real man, as a so-called *nastoiashchii muzhik* (Sperling 2015). It is also no coincidence that the news coverage and the presentation of Vladimir Putin in the media mostly overemphasise his machismo and his – allegedly – manly behaviour.

Putin's self-staging as a strong and decisive leader as well as the patriarchal and protective head of the Russian nation go hand in hand with his identity politics. In the end, the construction of his identity and his public appearances confirm the general power and superiority of Russia in the eyes of his audience. In addition, the current *Putin cult* (*kul't lichnosti Putina*) that is highly noticeable and widespread in contemporary Russia must be interpreted as the active acceptance of the recent identity politics and, in turn, as the passive reconstruction of the required identities which shows, on the one hand, the support for Vladimir Putin and his policies and, on the other hand, the power and belief the president receives from the Russian people. In this social and socio-political context or – more adequately – in this tense situation, Conchita Wurst entered the Russian discourse on gender and sexual identity.

Much has been said about the nature of the Eurovision Song Contest (cf. Cassidy 2014, Motschenbacher 2013, 2012). Yet, it is clear that from its early beginnings in a Europe which had only recently overcome the ravages of war it has always been a political event, too. On the night of May 10, 2014, Conchita Wurst showed her awareness of this political dimension when she shouted: "We are unstoppable!" (cf. URL 5). Not only did she express her support for people with a trans-identity and for people with a non-heteronormative identity in general. She also underlined her conviction that those sharing her belief in tolerance, respect, and peace within and beyond Europe would prevail in the struggle against authoritarianism, discrimination, and hatred. With her words, she addressed all people in Europe who were in front of the television watching and listening to her speech. As a consequence, one can conclude: Conchita Wurst used

the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 as a platform in order to appeal to respect.

For a large part of the Russian population, the victory of Conchita Wurst came as a blow. It was hard for them to imagine that the majority of Europe (and even a substantial fraction of the Russian televoters) had voted for someone who – in “hir” (cf. King 2014) existence – is such a controversial and ambiguous character. To them, it was difficult to understand that Russia’s Tolmachevy Sisters (*Sestry Tolmachevy*), these “pure”, “innocent”, and “lovely” beauties, as Vladimir Zhirinovskii described them in the television show *Priamoi éfir* broadcast on May 10, 2014 on the Russian television channel *Rossiiia 1*, only took the seventh place in the end (cf. URL 6). Immediately after the music competition, Vladimir Zhirinovskii blamed (Western) Europe for disclosing so bluntly its decadence and perversity. In his opinion, Conchita Wurst was the direct medium through which Europe – in this situation mainly understood as the European Union – showed its true colours, its main values, its current state, and its future. Zhirinovskii declared “the end of Europe” and drew the picture of “the West” as a decadent space. It was absolutely out of the question to him that Conchita Wurst heralds the apocalypse of Europe. As a consequence, one can conclude: The Eurovision Song Contest in 2014 was used in Russia at first glance as a platform in order to appeal to “normalcy”.

The victory of Conchita Wurst at the Eurovision Song Contest was used for propaganda purposes in Russia, to bring ideological ideas forward and, according to the current socio-political course, to plead for a conservative view of society, gender, and the role of the individual in general. However, this is not the only interesting aspect of the debate. In contrast to previous debates, the Russian society played a meaningful and perhaps even the leading role this time. Its enormous reaction to Conchita Wurst must be characterised as crucial and revealing because it demonstrates clearly its stance on gender and sexual identity as well as the general perception and, as a result of this, a measure of the acceptance or non-acceptance of identity diversity and queerness among the Russians. These reactions have dominated and continued to influence the Russian discourse on gender and sexuality for a long time. In addition, they reflect the current discourse on identity and diversity and, for this reason, shed a light on the ways in which gender and society are conceptualised.



Another fact which proves that the debate on gender and sexuality ran markedly differently after Conchita Wurst had entered the Russian discourse is the obvious “polydimensionality” (Scheller-Boltz 2015b) and the revealing interthematic and transtematic connections which the debate assumed: not only was this specificity a key characteristic of the debate at the time; it has also influenced the debate for years to come. In this context, it has to be mentioned that identity was not only the mere subject of the debate, but it has also served as an instrument which was directly used in order to establish and stabilise, and, mainly, to evaluate ideologies of identities and to discuss and to evaluate neighbouring topics. This means that the debate on gender and sexuality affected debates on other identity concepts, in particular – and certainly due to the current political situation – the debate on national identity.

In summary, Conchita Wurst stirred up the debates on identity in many ways so that the discourse on identity was distinguished by both, a specific complexity as well as an interthematic and interdiscursive dimension.

I want to mention at this point that the discussion on gender and sexuality is by no means a *novum* in Russia and has always taken place in Russian society, although this discussion mostly took place behind closed doors, which means rather in private circles than in public. This changed with Conchita Wurst. It was her presence in the Russian media that brought a lot of gender- and identity-related aspects and topics to the surface. A lot of things that were, till then, unexpressed and maybe even taboo, finally reached the surface and were discussed in public. Opinions and ideas were actively put into words and articulated openly. This gave the discourse on identity some completely new dynamics.

In my opinion, it is not really possible to determine exactly when the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian politics in general decided to introduce the agenda item which deals so critically with identity concepts and which established such a strict and rigid regulation of identity. However, one has to acknowledge that this item on the political agenda has obtained more and more priority as time elapses and can be characterised today as one of the most important tasks in Russian politics. The extent of these identity politics becomes increasingly apparent now. The regulation of identity which leads, on the one hand, to a consolidation and expansion of identity (e.g. national identity) and which, on the other hand, curtails and limits the expression of identity (e.g. gender and sexual

identity) has far-reaching consequences for the Russian society and, in turn, for Russian politics (Scheller-Boltz 2015f, Stella/ Nartova 2016).

Identity concepts still play an important role in and for the Russian society. Therefore, the critical analysis and detailed examination of identity concepts continue to be a promising research field which has not been exhausted up to now. This concerns in particular linguistic analyses. Analyses of identities and identity concepts have been conducted so far mainly within Slavonic sociology as well as cultural and literary studies. It has been examined and demonstrated in detail, how identity politics affects Russian society, how social and socio-political backgrounds accompany and stimulate political measures, and how the regulation of identities influence the society structure as well as everyday life. Furthermore, identity politics are embedded in cultural and socio-cultural contexts and are, therefore, discussed against the cultural background with regard to certain circumstances and incidents. The corresponding investigations consider and analyse, of course, the Russian discourse (e.g. Baer 2009, Cook/ Evans 2014, Downing/ Gillett 2011, Erokhina et al. 2009, Franeta 2015, Healey 2001, Kay 2007, Kondakov 2014, Petrova 2013, Pilkington 1996, Rabzhaeva 2005, Ritter 2001, Rotkirch 1996, Scheide 2002, Sozaev 2010, Stella 2015, Štulhofer/ Sandfort 2005, Zdravomyslova et al. 2009). However, an explicit and, in particular, detailed linguistic discourse analysis of the construction and perception of identity concepts in contemporary Russia, especially of gender and sexual identity is missing up to now. Also, the influence of gender and sexuality on national identity as well as the interconnection between these concepts must still be regarded as a marginal research area within linguistics.

This volume attends to the aforementioned research gap and aims at filling and diminishing it with new research findings, especially as to the linguistic construction and perception of gender and sexuality in Russia. Some of these findings may also prove useful and promising for other research areas and research disciplines. Moreover, this volume intends to strengthen Russian gender and queer linguistics and to support the general establishment of this linguistic discipline within Russian studies as this discipline is still hardly visible within Slavonic linguistics.

### *1.1 On the Content of This Volume: Aims, Methods, Results*

This volume focuses on the discourse on gender and sexual identity in contemporary Russia from a linguistic perspective and, above all, on the interconnection between gender, sexuality, and nation, as these concepts seem to be closely interconnected with each other.

As a key figure and as a key moment, I choose the victory of Austrian singer and performer Conchita Wurst at the Eurovision Song Contest in Denmark's Copenhagen in the year 2014. Her performance and speech were a significant discursive moment because they relaunched a heated debate about gender and provided a new and essential stimulus which gave revealing information about the way in which identity is perceived and constructed. The corresponding debates provide informative and interesting linguistic material, which invites us to investigate the linguistic construction of gender identity, gender stereotypes, and gender roles. Conchita Wurst influenced the debates on the concept of man and woman as well as on the meaning of femininity and masculinity for the Russian society. Furthermore, she fuelled the discussion about homosexuality and other sexual identities as well as about homophobia. All of these topics are delicate in today's Russia and provide, as one will see, plenty of conversation material. In addition, the debate reached a new and unprecedented dimension. In the Russian discourse on gender identity, Conchita Wurst is not only an interesting persona who reveals the thinking and the meaning of gender identity in and for the Russian society. She also plays an important role in and for the current discourse on national identity which is highly influenced by notions of femininity, masculinity, and sexual identity, as one will see in this volume.<sup>2</sup>

The appearance of Conchita Wurst was not only followed by political and media reactions and measures. As I have already mentioned above, the Russian society also played an important role which markedly enriched the discourse on identity. The analysis of the reaction of (a part of) the Russian society guarantees a closer look at the opinions of ordinary Russian people. First of all, their verbal acts and utterances, that means their verbal performances which were executed in this context, are meaningful and provide promising examination material. It could be noticed that the appearance of

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<sup>2</sup> A similar investigation has been presented by Persson (2015).

Conchita Wurst suddenly provided the opportunity for the Russian society to address problems, to advance opinions, and, in some respect, to express displeasure, all of which had an important influence on the discourse on identity. Secondly, some non-verbal as well as public, act-based performances of the Russian society reveal its interesting stance on the perception of identity. Consequently, the reactions of the Russian society stimulated and shaped the discourse on identity by its different performances which need to be investigated in more detail. If one only looked at the identity regulating measures initiated by the Russian government and the Orthodox Church, the focus on the topic of identity would be narrowed and the research question would have to be asked differently. Political measures frequently have tactic intentions which makes their evaluation difficult. When examining political and church measures, one has to consider their planned impact on society (all of these measures are shaped by a certain amount of propaganda). In comparison to this, one may hope to find some more authentic material by analysing the reactions of ordinary citizens.

The same can be said about media coverages and newspaper reports. The media in Russia are not always objective sources for they are often influenced by politics.<sup>3</sup> They aim at drawing a picture which goes in line with the current political course. Consequently, its contents are mostly one-sided and prefabricated. The reactions of the society, instead, contain more spontaneous moments and more authentic material. This is not to say that both spheres are separated from each other. Rather, the thoughts and utterances of ordinary people reflect the influence of Russian politics, the Church, and the media which, in turn, try to anticipate, manipulate, and shape public opinion. These considerations justify that the focus of this research project is on the opinions which are part of the Russian mainstream.

For this purpose, my analysis is based on readers' comments gathered from the online issue of the popular *Moskovskii Komsomolets*<sup>4</sup> which date

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, the anchorwoman of the TV-channel *Russia Today*, Liz Wahl, needs to be remembered who resigned during her show because she “personally [...] cannot be part of network funded by the Russian government that whitewashes the actions of Putin” (URL 7). Moreover, see the case of the correspondent Konstantin Goldenzweig who was fired for criticising Vladimir Putin and his politics (URL 8).

<sup>4</sup> The newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets* is a very popular media source for linguistic investigations (cf. e.g. Kirilina 2015).

mainly from the period between May 11, 2014 and July 1, 2014. This period starts immediately after the Austrian singer won the competition on May 10, 2014 and lasts for seven weeks which I consider as the time during which the debate on Conchita Wurst peaked in Russia. In order to underscore certain aspects, to verify some theses and explanations, or to falsify theories, statements, and conclusions, I will add selected readers' comments posted outside this period. Moreover, selected articles, documentations, talk shows, and interviews are used to provide the necessary socio-political backdrop which enables the reader to categorise and evaluate the examination material. Not least, this approach makes it possible to draw attention to potential parallel phenomena as well as to alternative and differing lines of argumentation which may lead to a thematic neutralisation.

The readers' comments will be analysed as to the way in which gender identity is linguistically constructed. To this end, word choice, language usage, and argumentation strategies will be considered. This approach will show how much the political and religious discourse shapes public opinion on gender identity within Russian society. Moreover, the investigation will give an insight into the prevalent idea of man and woman in Russian society as well as into the alleged need to maintain these ideas and the traditional functions of gender.

The decision to analyse readers' comments results from the assumption that this text type is found in a (online) medium to which almost everyone can contribute.<sup>5</sup> Everyone can post a comment and help the discourse evolve. Sociolectal factors, like age (in most cases), gender, social status, social background and so on, cannot hinder a person from taking part in the discourse. Consequently, my analysis has an open approach and is not limited to any specific group.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> You can find the online issue of *Moskovskii Komsomolets* at: <http://www.mk.ru/>.

<sup>6</sup> I am aware of the fact, however, that there are some pertinent factors to be considered here. Namely, one needs to have access to a computer with an internet connection and have the necessary literacy to use it. Plus, even though online media are potentially open to everyone their readership will vary according to content and political line (teenage girls, for instance, will usually not participate in discussions in an online forum for engineers and vice versa, even though they are potentially able to do so).

The discourse which arises in this medium gets a self-perpetuating dynamic, illustrates prominent assumptions as well as perceptions, and reflects specific views of the world and reality. As this discourse is mainly shaped by the dominant discourse, readers' comments must be considered explicitly as a reflection. This online discourse, in turn, feeds the dominant discourse with its substance. Consequently, readers' comments reflect and construct discourse and reality at the same time. The topic of Conchita Wurst is a starting point for a group of people (commenters) who leave their comments on the website and who intend to deal with the same subject and with the reality with which this subject is linked. In this regard, the reactions are brought forward in various ways. On the one hand, there are commenters who relate to the subject directly (comments on Conchita Wurst). On the other hand, there are commenters who relate primarily to comments of other commenters and, consequently, refer only indirectly to the actual subject (comments on comments on Conchita Wurst). As a consequence, the procedure which automatically follows from this leads to a constantly running "process-product-process-(product-process)...-concept" (O'Keeffe 2012: 450).

Of course, the selected material is only a small part of the whole discourse on gender, sexuality, and nationhood as well as on their interdependency. However, a closer examination of the language used in the readers' comments to express and manifest assumptions, ideas, and norms, concerning man, woman, homosexuality, identity, and nation, reveals some interesting information.

Here and in the following, I will use the term *discourse* with reference to Foucault to denote abstract systems of knowledge. In this sense, *discourse* refers to any "group of statements that belong to a single system of formation" (Foucault 1972: 107). It is important here and for my analysis that the discourse contains, according to Foucault (1972), a certain power potential. The discourse contains power and gives power. The result of this is that it is the discourse which establishes a power relation and, according to this, evaluation factors within the society based on the axis of good—bad, acceptable—inacceptable, normal—abnormal, punishable—unpunishable and so on. The discourse legitimates, controls, and justifies at the same time (Foucault 2001). As my analysis focuses on social factors and draws attention to socially constructed identities, it is based furthermore on the principles and methods of the *Critical Discourse Analysis*

introduced by Jäger (2012) and Wodak (1989a, 1989b) which deals critically with power strategies and power relations and focuses especially on the practices of how power is used and instrumentalised in and by society and of how power socially categorises and organises (cf. Bourdieu 1991). In this context, linguistic acts function as social practices and linguistic means attain a social and ideological significance. Consequently, both, produced acts and used means, marginalise and discriminate socially and aim at constructing a reality that is, on the one hand, characterised by power relations and, on the other hand, based on ideological assumptions (Jäger 2005: 55).

The main objective of the current analysis is to question how gender identity is perceived and constructed by Russian society, how this perception and construction is linguistically expressed and performed, and what kind of argumentation strategies are brought forward to justify this perception of identity. As one will see, ideological ideas (ideology) and mythological beliefs (mythology) play a relevant role here which needs to be investigated in more detail. In addition, it is worth examining how the linguistic construction of identity contributes to the actual performance of identity and to what extent the linguistic perception and construction of identity is shaped by discourse and constructs a reality that is assumed as “natural” and “real”. In this context, the (ideologically justified) assumption of the gender binary which is often seen as a natural and biologically determined constellation, – as well as its (ideologically and mythologically argued) function for the Russian society – has to be analysed.

In this context, the interconnection between gender and sexual identity is an interesting factor. The awareness that a society can define strict functions of gender and sexuality and that it may establish a logical connection between gender and sexuality almost inevitably leads us to the question of how society deals with identity and identity diversity. Strategies of marginalising and excluding certain identities are of particular relevance in this analysis. One may assume that the discourse on gender and sexuality is used to marginalise, discriminate, and, consequently to exclude so-called “non-appropriate” identity concepts which do not fit into the general ideas of identity. However, one has to take a closer look at the linguistic mechanisms and strategies that marginalise, discriminate, and exclude identities – this concerns mainly people with a non-heteronormative

identity – from society as well as on the function that language plays in this mechanism. This will provide the necessary understanding of how these individuals are actually excluded from the constructed reality and of how ideological and mythological ideas are used as a justification for this exclusion.

This leads us to the question of national identity. It is interesting to note that gender and sexual identities or, more adequately, gender and sexual concepts are instrumentalised to promote and to (re)build national ideologies and myths, for the concepts of gender and sexuality are markedly involved in the perception, construction, and, above all, in the evaluation of nation and national identity (Riabov 2007, Riabov/ Riabova 2008, Riabova 2002, Riabova/ Tsalko 2011). One will see that the concepts of gender and sexuality do not only influence the perception and the construction of national identity. They also shed a significant light on the concept of space as well as on the understanding and the categorisation of territories in general (Stella/ Nartova 2016). In Russia, the construction and perception of space is mainly based on and defined by a specific worldview, the so-called *Russian linguistic worldview (jazykovaia kartina mira)*. This kind of perspective is based on the so-called *svoe-chuzhoe concept* by which spaces – including nations – are categorised, classified, and evaluated. In the following, the linguistic material from the readers' comments will be analysed in accordance with this theory. I will put forward the question of how “the self” (*svoe*), that means the Russian (national) identity, is constructed and perceived and how the “alien” and the “foreign” (*chuzhoe*), that means the non-Russian identity, is used even to construct “the self”. This approach will give the reader an insight into the current Russian worldview as to identity and society. Furthermore, this approach provides additional information about the linguistic strategies of marginalisation and exclusion because the concept of *svoe* and *chuzhoe* is not only used in a spatial dimension. The concept of “the self” and the concept “the alien” also play a leading role in strict gender and sexual contexts and are used, above all, to marginalise and exclude people in those cases in which the corresponding context is not related to gender, sexual, and national concepts.

Last but not least, this volume contributes to the establishment and to a higher visibility of Russian gender and, in particular, queer studies. Queer studies are currently a very promising research field which has evoked



strong interest during the past few years. However, the queer research and the examination of non-heteronormative identities develop – certainly due to the current socio-political circumstances in Russia – very slowly. Moreover, a lot of works remain hidden: neither do they reach an international audience nor can one speak of their serious dissemination at a national level (Scheller-Boltz 2015d). In addition, most analyses are carried out within sociology and cultural studies (e.g. Gradinari 2015, Kondakov 2014, Soboleva/ Bakhmetjev 2015, Sozaev 2010). Queer linguistic studies are very rare up to now.

This volume, consequently, aims at stimulating queer linguistic research in Russian (and, accordingly, Slavonic) studies. It highlights the significance of queer linguistic questions which need to be investigated in the future.

### *1.2 On the Structure of This Volume*

Part 1 has to be understood as a general introduction to the concept of identity. It provides a detailed overview of identity (with an exclusive focus on gender, sexuality, and nation) in order to make the reader familiar with different identity concepts and identity forms. This seems to be especially important for scholars of Russian and Slavonic studies because identity concepts and identity forms have been considered only marginally in Slavonic research up to this point – if they are integrated into research at all. This concerns, in particular, gender linguistic works. I do not mean to imply that such research does not exist. Yet, it is obvious that the research focus is almost exclusively on men and women as preconceived and uncontested concepts (cf. part 5). Undoubtedly, research based on such approaches and assumptions misses the intended goal of a research discipline that should deal critically with gender and identity. Especially in gender and queer linguistic research, ignoring identity concepts and forms has far-reaching consequences which are actually overseen or even ignored by scholars. It is the main function of the first part to stress the significance of familiarising oneself with different identity concepts and forms. It will become clear that the variety of identities has to be integrated into gender and queer linguistic research in order to guarantee innovative and legitimate research which produces solid and reliable findings.

Part 2 embeds the concept of identity into the Russian context and analyses the role that identity plays in and for Russian society. After a short overview of the meaning of identity in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, I will draw the attention of the reader to the perception and construction of gender, sexual, and national identity in order to highlight their relevance for Russian society. The short outline of the historical development of gender and sexuality will make clear how the perception of gender and sexuality has changed over time and how it influences the thinking of gender and sexuality today. Selected political measures as to the regulation of gender and sexuality are provided. This will give topical information on the current perception of the Russian national identity. In the end, the reader will see how the concepts of gender and sexuality are instrumentalised for constructing a Russian national identity as well as other identities and for making these understandable, reasonable, and persuasive.

Part 3 focuses on Conchita Wurst, the key figure of this analysis. I will draw attention to “hir” (cf. King 2014) role in the Russian discourse on gender, sexual, and national identity. Primarily, I will examine the ways in which gender, sexual, and national identity are discursively constructed. Observing the discourse which arose around Conchita Wurst, I will provide answers to the question of how we can assess the perception of identity in contemporary Russia. First, I will analyse each identity concept separately. I will then illustrate how these identity concepts are interconnected and how they influence each other. This analysis reveals that these identity concepts are used to denote, to evaluate, and to categorise other incidents, concepts, and phenomena which are only distantly related to identity or even not related to them at all. By analysing these aspects in the context of the linguistic Russian worldview, which is based on the conception of the relation between “the self” and “the alien”, one will obtain interesting and innovative information about how identities are stigmatised, marginalised, and discriminated by language use.

Part 4 had first been written as a kind of epilogue. Later on, however, I decided to insert it directly after the third part, because I think it fits in better with the part on discourse analysis than with the last part about issues in queer linguistics. This (very) short chapter is not primarily related to the topic addressed here and, therefore, the focus must be shifted a little bit in order to integrate this chapter into this volume. As one shall see, it provides additional and, moreover, highly revealing information as to the discourse

on Russian national identity. The chapter deals with last year's Eurovision Song Contest in Stockholm where it was – of all countries – Russia and Ukraine that would compete for the victory of this music competition. Directly after Ukraine had been announced the winner, a debate started in Russia's social media, primarily about the new voting system, about the unjustified voting of the national juries which eventually relegated Russia to the third place, and about the fact that the Eurovision Song Contest is – allegedly – a music competition and should not be turned into a political platform. The discussion brings some interesting facts to light which, above all, offers valuable clues with regard to the perception of Russia, to the construction of Russian national identity and, last but not least, to the debate on Russia's place among the leading nations of the world. Consequently, last year's debate about the Eurovision Song Contest reminds us of the discussions in 2014 to some extent as it revives old arguments and opinions. For this part, I have used the *Moskovskii Komsomolets* again and take a look at readers' comments, however, without going into great detail. I only analyse readers' comments which were posted the day after Jamala from Ukraine had won the contest. Hence, this part can give readers only a general idea of the role last year's Eurovision Song Contest played for the discourse on Russian national identity.

Part 5, finally, draws attention to the general importance of improving and consolidating queer linguistic research in Russian and Slavonic Studies. Although queer research has appeared only in recent years and has produced a range of important queer (related) works, it seems premature to speak of the establishment or even of the general acceptance of this discipline. In comparison with other disciplines, Russian queer linguistic research lags behind and needs to receive a stimulus in the future. This volume and the subject with which this volume deals are meant to fill and, at least, to diminish the obvious gap in current linguistic research. Possible research questions in Russian linguistics are provided in order to demonstrate how queer research can be implemented in Russian linguistics and which disciplines need to be or can be analysed in a "queer light". These ideas are mainly based on and deduced from the international queer (linguistic) research which has been developed over the past few decades. The time has come for Russian linguistics to integrate a *poststructuralist* approach and *postgender* ideas to disclose and to question heteronormative structures which are established by and produced throughout language.

Queer linguistic research sheds a different and necessarily new light on language and makes us understand that the “natural” language structures and the “general” language use reflect patriarchal and androcentric concepts of society and thus reproduce their inherent discrimination.

### *1.3 Useful Remarks*

In the main text, all quotations are given in the English original form or in the English translation. Translations are marked by the addition [transl.] and have been produced by myself (the author – DSB) exclusively. The corresponding original quotations and the original text sources are given in notes at the end of a page.

All original text sources that have been gathered from the media and that are included into the examination material and that are, hence, used in this book are provided in a communicative translation. Consequently, mistakes in the source text are ignored. However, all original text sources will also be provided in their original form, including all errors and mistakes made by their authors.

All words in italics in the comments excerpted from online forums have been highlighted by myself (the author – DSB). The used italics underline their relevance for the corresponding analysis part. Furthermore, those lexemes appear in italics which are mentioned in the corresponding part of the analysis.

In order to guarantee the transparency and reader-friendliness of this analysis, I will restrict the use of abbreviations to a minimum. In particular, I will not create abbreviations myself. If abbreviations are used, the reader will find their corresponding full forms in the list of abbreviations at the end of this volume.

It is important to note that the dates provided for comments from online forums refer to the publication date of the corresponding source text (articles) and not to the date on which the comments were originally posted.

I have decided to structure this book in a way which allows readers to read only selected parts of it if they want to focus on specific issues, for example, my conclusions as to the current state of gender and queer linguistics in Slavonic studies. This decision has created a need to repeat certain core issues such as the description of stereotypical ideas about

women and men in contemporary Russia. These repetitions may seem onerous to readers who choose to read this monograph from beginning to end, however, they are an inevitable drawback of the conceptual compromise I had to make in writing this book.

This volume has undergone peer review and critical proof-reading. Nonetheless, it is inevitable that mistakes remain. For all remaining mistakes, for possibly missing or incorrect references, and for potential equivocality contained in this volume, the author personally assumes responsibility.



## Part 1:

### Identity: Concepts, Forms, and Diversity

*I do my own laundry.  
I clean, iron and cook (occasionally).  
I also like to wear make-up and sometimes a short skirt.  
I love my husband and hope to have children.  
I work full-time and I enjoy teaching my students.  
I am a member of a feminist association and  
I have a weakness for shopping and celebrity magazines.  
What does this make me?  
A housewife, narcissist, wife and (potential) mother, worker, feminist, consumer?  
A schizophrenic?  
(Stéphanie Genz 2009: 1)*

#### *1 Introductory Remarks*

Dealing with gender and queer research requires a profound knowledge and an awareness of the concept of identity.<sup>7</sup> This is true regardless of the academic discipline. Whoever dives into the world of identities must be conscious of the fact that they deal with a complex entity which can neither be generalised nor easily defined and staked out. One of the basic tenets held by gender and queer researchers is the idea that identities are constructed concepts which may be or, in some cases, need to be deconstructed. Consequently, gender and queer research starts with the basic premise that identity is a diffuse, multiple and, hence, unstable phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup> Parts of this part have been published in Scheller-Boltz, Dennis 2015: "Identität als polydimensionales Selbst. Zu Verständnis und Konstruktion geschlechtlicher und sexueller Identität in Russland. Eine allgemeine Einführung für Slawist\_inn\_en", in: *Academic Journal of Modern Philology* 4, 2015, 89-120.

Abandoning the idea that identity is a given, a hermetic and fundamentally rigid concept, opens up a space of critical investigation. It enables us to ask questions about the very nature of identity: What is identity? How can identity exist and be expressed? What does identity, in fact, consist of? How many identities can exist?<sup>8</sup> What does identity do and/ or intend to do? What do people do with their own identity as well as with the identities of others? As a consequence, what does identity do and intend to do with people and societies? These questions illustrate clearly the complexity and vagueness of the concept of identity – characteristics which seem to be specific for identity and which are impossible to explain away.

Starting from this idea, we should turn our attention to one of the fundamental dimensions of identity: gender. Traditional thinking starts with the assumption that there are only two gender identities: man and woman. These identities are immutable. You are either a man *or* a woman. Moreover, each identity comes with a monolithic set of characteristics. The quotation from Genz (2009: 1) at the beginning of this part questions this idea. Using her own example, Genz underlines the diverse and at times paradoxical dimensions of her own identity, many of which are in clear opposition to traditional gender identities. Considering her statement, one must ask: is it really justified or true to argue that there are only two gender identities? And can one lump together all women and all men because of allegedly common features?

In light of these questions, it would be difficult to defend the proposition that a view of gender which offers only two hermetic and inherently self-consistent gender identities which are exclusively located on the one or on the other side of a binary – male—female – gender axis provides a possible and useful approach to investigate gender- and queer-related linguistic material scientifically.

First of all, assuming that there are two fixed gender identities leads in the wrong direction and misses the point of gender and queer linguistic research. Secondly, to assume the existence of a binary gender axis with two hermetic gender identities on each side seriously questions one's willingness to deal with the basic tenets of one's own research approach. Consequently, one accepts the risk of one's own biases shaping the results

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<sup>8</sup> See Kirilina (2015) for some interesting details as to the number of different identity concepts.



of one's own research. Prefabricated ideas and superficially established stereotypes are not questioned at all but confirmed and passed on forever. This would be a sad standstill, considering that gender and, particularly, queer linguistics offers a way out of this academic dead-end. It is especially of interest to question, to analyse and, finally, to know how many identities currently exist. Kirilina (2015) mentions, for example, that there seems to be more than fifty different gender identities.

The idea that identity is diverse, variable, and fluid is ubiquitous and accepted in Russian sociological studies (sociology) (e.g. Baer 2011, 2009, Franeta 2015, Healey 2013, 2010, 2001, Kon 2010, 2009, 2007, 2005, 2003, 1999, 1998, 1995, 1989, Kondakov 2014, Sapper/ Weichsel 2013, Sozaev 2010, Štulhofer/ Sandfort 2005), cultural studies (e.g. Cook/ Evans 2014, Zdravomyslova et al. 2009), and literary studies (literature) (e.g. Zink 2015). One can find a wide and absolutely diverse range of works which focus on identity. They illustrate the complexity of identity and, moreover, its relevance for and its influence on society. However, and this must be stressed, Russian gender and queer linguistic research – as far as one can speak of Russian queer linguistic research so far – has neglected the fluidity of identity up to this point. In doing so, gender and queer linguists have ignored the fact that identity diversity and different concepts of identity have an enormous influence on linguistic structures and on language use as well as on language in general. Furthermore, they have often ignored that language has an influence on identity and on the idea of identity and that language reflects directly predominant assumptions about identity within a certain society (Weedon 1996).

Russian gender linguistics is still mainly based on the assumption that there are only two strictly divided gender identities (e.g. Krongauz 2015, but cf. Scheller-Boltz 2015a, 2015d, 2015g). This rigid gender binary has led to a certain superficiality in Russian gender research characterised by simplistic generalisations and overhasty research conclusions. Moreover, this conservatism has hindered the evolution of research. This has had far-reaching consequences for queer linguistic studies which are not really established in Slavonic linguistics up to now.

## *2 Investigating Identity: Aims and Questions*

This part serves as a general introduction to the wide and complex field of identity. It has been written especially and explicitly for Russian and Slavonic linguists. On the international level, the field has evolved enormously over the past two decades. Therefore, it has become painfully urgent for gender – and queer – linguists in Russian and Slavonic studies to make themselves familiar with different identity forms and concepts in order to include these concepts and forms in gender and queer linguistic studies in the future. The following overview of different forms and concepts of identity with their corresponding specifics and functions will make clear that there are no uniform and hermetic identities and that widening one's focus is inevitable in linguistics if one wants to deliver an appropriate and profound investigation of gender questions.

My goal is for readers to understand that scholars of Russian and Slavonic gender linguistics have to include identity diversity into their research. They have to do so because their concept of identity influences the way they approach and analyse gender linguistic questions. Gender linguistic research leads to more promising and revealing results if one rejects strict categories. This may provide a welcome stimulus to linguistic research which can finally pave the way for the establishment of queer linguistics.

## *3 On the Polydimensionality, Complexity, and Ambiguity of Identity*

What is identity? Traditionally, identity has been perceived as a rigid, immutable, and uniform entity. Describing it is almost a matter of basic arithmetics: you belong to group X, therefore your looks, sexual identity, behaviour, language, and so on will be X, too. It should have become apparent by now that I do not adhere to this concept of identity as an equation. Such thinking is too simplistic and naïve and does not allow for the actual reality of contemporary society and society structures. In Slavonic gender linguistics, especially Russian gender linguistics, this thinking has led to an enormous research bias. Indeed, one might ask: considering this bias, do research results really reflect reality? Or wouldn't it be more appropriate to say that the results reflect the prefabricated scheme or frame,

the overgeneralised assumptions and stereotypical categorisations dictated by heteronormativity and the worldview of *cis*-identities?

It is true: the so-called “Western” world is at an advantage here. It has known public figures like RuPaul, Dame Edna Everage, Conchita Wurst, Dana International, Andrej Pejić (today: Andreja Pejić), and the genderless Norrie May-Welby for a long time. In Russia, identity concepts and the corresponding postgender ideas which the – allegedly – “new” identities are based on, have become publicly visible only recently. And while, for example, in Poland, another post-Socialist country, politicians like the transsexual Anna Grodzka (cf. URL 9) and the homosexual Robert Biedroń (cf. URL 10) fulfil the function of role models and stand by their identity, Russian politics pushes for traditional gender ideas and gender roles and supports massively the classical gender binary with a seemingly inherent heterosexual orientation. Yet, these policies should not deter us from questioning the suitability of the concepts we choose for scientific investigation and their capacity to help us describe the world we live in.

With this in mind, let us once again ask the question: what is identity? It is difficult to explain and to define what identity exactly is. One deals here with a quite broad and imprecise term. As far as identity is multiple and consists of a lot of different components – from which identity derives its complexity – I propose to characterise *identity* as a “polydimensional self” (Scheller-Boltz 2015b, cf. also Metzeltin/ Wallmann 2010: 70) because identity assumes – simultaneously, sequentially, and/ or depending on the situation – different and sometimes even divergent dimensions. Identity is a conglomerate of specifics, features, dispositions, and behaviour patterns of a person which, in their entirety, determine and express the self of this person. Identity is distinguished by individuality and subjectivity. This indicates the many-sidedness and the existing diversity of the forming and the appearance of identity. Moreover, this view on identity rejects a general unambiguousness and a trans-individual generalisation. Identity as the own self (*self-identity*) or as a group of features and specifics (*self-concept*) determines individually and socially the entire self of a person, their being, behaviour, thinking, and perception. Identity, consequently, is what makes a person recognisable in the first place because it shapes external aspects – e.g. look, style, outward appearance – as well as internal aspects – e.g. feeling, thinking (patterns), worldview, experience –,

visual aspects – e.g. gesture, facial expression – as well as auditive aspects – e.g. voice (Mogge-Grotjahn 2004).

It might seem trivial, but this definition of identity makes it hard or even impossible to speak of identity in a universal or in a personal sense. This has serious implications for research with a focus on gender. Traditionally, women, for example, are defined by the primary sexual characteristics and secondary sex characteristics which are classically or prototypically ascribed to women as well as by “typical” female behaviour and appearance. However, it is one of the important findings of gender studies that categorising a woman or, more adequately, women in this way is not founded in science. Instead, ideological and mythological ideas based on stereotypes and clichéd assumptions which are constantly reestablished have shaped our view of women (Butler 2004a, 2003, 1997, 1991). As a logical consequence, scholars are bound to exclude those women who do not correspond to the classical idea of a woman (not to mention the socio-political repercussions such as exclusion, discrimination, and stigmatisation).

Postmodernism offers a way to avoid the pitfalls of traditional thinking by taking on the diversity of identities which is visible in many places today. From a postmodern perspective, identity is neither stable nor rigid nor a self-contained accumulation of specifics.

As a conceptual category, the postmodern subject is fluid rather than stable, constructed rather than fixed, contested rather than secure, multiple rather than uniform, deconstructed rather than whole (Genz/ Brabon 2009: 107).

Identity is process-related (Hartmann/ Becker 2002: 2f). It is mutable, expandable, and dynamic and is, furthermore, determined by its social and socio-normative context. Consequently, Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002: 7) are right in assuming that every person possesses a wide range of identities (cf. also Weydt 2008: 91-94).

If postmodernism represents plurality and the pluralisation of lifestyles and identities (Villa 2007: 52f), that means

a multiplication of the notion of difference [...], an expansion of difference towards differences, towards a plurality that resists any set identities (Beasley 2005: 24)

then it is justified to say that

woman does not exist in a singular form – neither in an empirical, nor in a theoretical, nor in a political way. The concrete femininities, the specific ways of existence, and the respective meanings of gender are embedded socially too rigidly in diverse contexts such as class/stratum, nation, ethnicity/race, age, sexuality, religion and so on [transl.] (Villa 2007: 55).<sup>9</sup>

Considering postmodern ideas with their focus on plurality, brings the concept of *postgender* into play. The concept of postgender is a deconstructivist approach to thinking identity and stands for the blurring and, finally, the elimination of stable gender identities and rigid gender boundaries (Scheller-Boltz 2015a). The idea of postgender refers, according to Kirilina (2015), to the concept of the new human being, of the new individual. It is universal, for it is neither located in a certain area nor within a specific socio-cultural structure. And as one can definitely see, the universality of postgender is also noticeable within Russian society. One could evoke, for instance, *metrosexuality* as a currently prominent and new facet of masculinity. Walking through Moscow or even smaller Russian cities today, one cannot help but notice people exhibiting the ambiguity and plurality and, consequently, the – conscious or unconscious – deconstruction of masculinity which are the hallmarks of the metrosexual “male” lifestyle. The concept of masculinity is increasingly tinged by signals which represent “softness” and “femininity”. This process shows the actual fragmentation of this – once rigid and strong – identity concept. Advertisements, media, and, in particular, everyday life demonstrate that there is a tendency to abandon the traditional, powerful, and dominant man, who turns into a creature who pays attention to a neat appearance, crosses gender-specific dress and style codes, and shows soft and harmonic characteristics (Kirilina 2015, Klingseis 2015). Although all of these features, specifics, and behaviour patterns are stereotypically associated with women throughout the different socio-cultures up to now, it is evident that, in some

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<sup>9</sup> Original: “Frau [...] gibt es nicht im Singular – weder empirisch, noch theoretisch noch politisch. Dazu sind die konkreten Weiblichkeiten, die spezifischen Existenzweisen und die jeweiligen Bedeutungen des Geschlechts sozial zu sehr verortet in [...] unterschiedlichen Kontexten wie Klasse/Schicht, Nationalstaat; Ethnizität/race, Alter, Sexualität, Religion usw.”

aspects, the former rigid differentiation between man and woman has softened. These observations provide anecdotic evidence at best, yet, they elucidate the need to abandon rigid concepts of gender identity.

In Slavonic linguistics, only a minority of scholars pays attention to postgender identities and to the fragmentation of identity. This minority understands the relevance of the plurality of identities for language and language use (Althaler 2014, Kirilina 2015, Scheller-Boltz 2015a). These scholars are aware of the fact that identities may appear in and throughout language differently and that defining identity entails a high risk that one's definitions may interfere with and encroach upon linguistic analyses. For the majority, gender identities are rigid and stable concepts which show rigid and stable specifics in language. Any divergence is ignored; blurred lines are noticeably left out. This is true for *trans*-identities in particular. However, even *cis*-identities do not appear in language in a uniform way and cannot be generalised linguistically – particularly, if one pays attention to postgender (Motschenbacher 2010). In gender linguistic studies, a more differentiated way of investigation is needed in order not to overgeneralise the linguistic behaviour of a gender identity and in order to pay attention to the polydimensional appearance and the complexity of identity. Post-structuralism may offer some valuable lessons here. Poststructuralism brings reality and language together and shows their direct interconnection. A poststructuralist approach makes meaning variable and everchanging. Thus, final and hermetic definitions become disputable and seem to be escapist and non-real.

### 3.1 Identity Forms and Identity Concepts

Before I start exploring the field of identity in greater detail, I would like to make the reader familiar with two terms that I will use in the following. In this volume, I will differentiate between *identity form* and *identity concept*. The difference between both terms might be very small and may seem unnecessary to some readers. However, I hope that it will facilitate the understanding of the term *identity*.

The terms *identity form* and *identity concept* highlight two different dimensions of the phenomenon of identity. *Identity form* refers to identity in general, independently of possible entities which can possess an identity, whereas the term *identity concept* refers to a concrete entity which

possesses an identity. The comparison may seem banal but I will use it nevertheless to enhance the reader's understanding: when talking about clothes, we can talk about different categories such as trousers or shirts and what distinguishes them: for example, trousers are a lengthy object which consist of a pair of tubes united at one end and which fit the legs of a person whereas a shirt consists of balloon-like piece of cloth with a small opening at the top and a large opening at the bottom and a tube on each side which is meant to fit the torso and arms of a person. Or we can talk about items within a category and what they can or should look like: for example, shirts can be made of cotton and have a blue colour.

Talking about *identity forms* is like talking about different categories of clothing. Identity forms refer to the very nature of identity. As I have pointed out, there is neither a single nor a uniform identity. Identity is always a merger and a combination of identities – or, more adequately in this context: of identity forms. This is why one finds a variety of identity forms which converge in an individual person: *mono-identity*, *bi-identity*, *plural identity* or *multi-identity* (Metzeltin/ Wallmann 2010). All of these identity forms are created by different factors and circumstances which have an enormous influence on the forming of identity. In this context, factors like individualism/ subject (*individual identity*, *personal identity*) and collectivism/ object (*collective identity*) are relevant factors as well as the active adoption and adaptation of identity by oneself (*active identity*) or the passive construction and determination of identity by others (*passive identity*).<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to this, talking about *identity concepts* is like talking about specific items within a category of clothing. Just like one can discuss shirts of a different colour or fabric one can examine the various concepts of gender such as male or female or the characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Consequently, I use the term *identity concept* when I characterise and investigate the specifics and features of a specific identity. In this volume, this concerns identity concepts such as *gender* (*gender identity*), *sexuality* (*sexual identity*), and *nation* (*national identity*). Of course, one can find other identity concepts, for example, *corporate identity* (cf. e.g. Hoffmann 2015, 2005, Klingseis 2015, Rathmayr 2010). These concepts, however, do not play a relevant role here.

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<sup>10</sup> See here in more detail Metzeltin/ Wallmann (2010).

In the following, I will give a short overview on forms of identity. This is important because identity forms have a high influence on identity concepts. Last but not least, it is only possible and meaningful to deal with identities in greater detail if one is knowledgeable of different identity forms and if one is familiar with the role and function which identity forms have for the construction and perception of identity concepts.

### 3.2 *Active and Passive Construction of Identity*

People develop and find their identity consciously and unconsciously. Yet, identity is always the result of a process of adaptation and demarcation which, in turn, results from the situation, the local and social circumstances. Moreover, an identity (feature) can be transient while other identity features may last. By answering questions such as a) who am I?, b) who do I want to be?, c) how do I see myself?, and d) how am I seen and perceived by others?, a person constructs their own self-concept and becomes aware of their own perception of their body (including their sex), their desire (including sexual orientation), their social position (including social tasks), their pattern of thinking and their world view (including formation of opinion) as well as of their behaviour (Wippermann et al. 2009: 73). The self-positioning of a person within society always results from them comparing themselves with their surroundings and from mechanisms of social demarcation, adaptation, and inclusion. This construction of identity which is primarily motivated and promoted by one's own self is called the *active construction of identity*.

In contrast, one speaks of a *passive construction of identity* when external factors determine and influence one's identity. A passive identity is ascribed to individuals by their social environment. Passive identity refers to the identity that people see and realise in other people, and it means the way how people perceive their identity.

This differentiation is important insofar as a person can ascribe themselves an identity which does not have to be accepted, affirmed, or even noticed by their contemporaries. Hence, a person can see themselves in a special way, whereas their environment perceives this person in a different, diverse, or even false way.

The active construction of identity and the passive construction of identity are interdependent. One's own perception and construction of iden-



tity can be influenced by being perceived and categorised by other people. For instance, the general idea of what a man should be like often motivates individuals with a male sex to behave likewise. However, the trend towards metrosexuality has led to a changing idea of man and to a changing perception of masculinity within society. As a consequence, some long-established ideas of masculinities as well as traditional male behaviour patterns have come under critical scrutiny today. Sometimes, these traditional ideas are even rejected and disapproved of.

### 3.3 *Individual and Collective Identity*

The differentiation between individual identity and collective identity is generally relevant, but it is of critical importance to the volume at hand, because the dichotomy *individual—collective* has always played a meaningful role in the history of Socialist countries and continues to do so noticeably. One speaks of *individual identity*, or *personal identity* respectively, when one refers to the identity which an individual ascribes to themselves in order to demarcate themselves from the surroundings and from society. One's individual identity leads to an active valuation, positioning, and definition of oneself. Individual identity is constructed by comparing oneself with one's surroundings. The individual concerned does not pursue an adaptation or inclusion. An adaptation or inclusion takes place only in those cases when the individual is fully able to identify themselves with the identity of the surroundings and sees the need to adopt other identity characteristics so that in the end new identity components penetrate one's identity concept and enrich it. For example, a man can acquire a behaviour and outward appearance which is mainly associated with homosexual persons – as in metrosexuality – without declaring himself as homosexual or even being homosexual.

In contrast, a *collective identity* or *social identity* is a social, group-, or community-related identity. This identity form has, of course, an individual character, too, but it is primarily related and aligned to a certain community (Joseph 2004: 5f., cf. also Niethammer 2000). The construction of a collective identity is also based on a comparison with one's social surroundings, but here the comparison is followed by an intended adaptation to a certain group or community (*in-group identity*) and at the same time by creating a

boundary between oneself and individuals who stand outside of this group or community (*out-group identity*).

The collective or social identity is based on a uniform value system, on a common worldview, and on common aims within a certain group or community, but mainly on the belief in this certain group or community (Tajfel 1982). However, by appreciating the community values, an individual does not only integrate them in order to adopt collective ideas. If a person assumes a collective identity, they also affirm their membership in a certain group or community. As a result, the adoption and construction of a collective identity by a person affirms the corresponding community and its values *per se*.

### *3.4 Identity Diversity and Identity Complexity*

It is false to assume that a person has either an individual or a collective identity. A person is an individual and because of this individuality a person constructs and has an individual identity. However, a person lives within a society and is surrounded by other people and other identities. This has an inevitable impact on the construction of a collective identity, too. The identity of a person consists, consequently, of separate distinct identities or, more adequately, identity features (Marco 2011: 108). Identities can be integrative, that means that single identity dimensions, components, or features coalesce and complement each other. Yet, identities can also be dualistic which means that a person possesses different identities but fails at integrating them which may lead to conflict in that person's life. The identity diversity of a person makes it possible to adopt certain identities differently and, moreover, according to the given situation and circumstances. The construction and performance of one's identity is highly influenced by the social environment and serves as a means of adaptation (integration, acceptance) and demarcation (isolation, protection) (Metzeltin/ Wallmann 2010: 70-77).

When one deals with identity, one has to consider, of course, further factors and contexts which have a relevant influence on the construction and the meaning of identity and which make clear that identity is a more complex entity than one generally assumes. In order to really do justice to the complexity of identity, one must consider not only those global factors and circumstances that I have mentioned above. One must also examine

individual factors like sex, physique, outward appearance, social behaviour, social stratum (class), social role/ function, education/ profession, origin etc., because it is precisely these individual factors and concepts which lead to a more differentiated analysis of identity and, consequently, to reliable results – this is no less necessary and significant for linguistic analyses which focus on identity.

It is, moreover, precisely these factors which make clear that identity dimensions do not have to appear congruently. For example, not in every case does the outward appearance of a person enable us to draw a conclusion about their sex; behaviour patterns of a person are not always a true indication as to their level of education. Certain identity features are expressed differently according to the situation and actual need. However, the identity of a person is so complex that the social environment may focus on those identity features which seem to be significant and have a greater relevance for them but which the person concerned categorises as unnecessary, meaningless, or irrelevant. Thus, a bisexual female lawyer who volunteers at a humane society will never show and will never be able to show her full identity in every situation. The lawyer may consider her sex, sexual orientation, and social volunteering irrelevant when she is in her office. However, her colleagues can stress certain identity features such as sex or sexual orientation and may perceive this woman primarily as a lesbian, for example, even though characteristics like her sexual orientation have no meaning in the context of work.

### *3.5 Identity and the Relevance of Sex*

For most people, the sex of a person is the dominant feature which influences the perception, categorisation, and acceptance of a person. In comparison to sex, other identity features seem to take the back seat. If one takes a closer look at current Slavonic linguistic analyses as to gender and identity, this claim is obviously confirmed: for most scholars, dealing with gender and identity means to deal with men and women in their strictly hermetic and, moreover, heteronormative existence or, more precisely, with the concept of man and the concept of woman.<sup>11</sup> In Slavonic linguistics, the concept of sex – in its traditional binary form – is so dominant that it pre-

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview, cf. Scheller-Boltz (2015a).

determines investigations on identity and displaces other identity concepts which are not less important for linguistic identity research.

In a lot of cultures, it is common practice to focus on the sex of a person and to categorise and to perceive people according to their sex which is in most cases determined shortly after – and sometimes even before – they are born (cf. here Livia/ Hall 1997). According to the distinct sexual characteristics (sex organs) and secondary sex characteristics within the gender binary of man—woman, a person is defined as a man or a woman. The sex of a person determines and accompanies this person for their whole life. It is mostly the category of sex which influences the identity of an individual and which has an enormous impact on the active construction of one's own identity. The biological gender plays a highly important role for a person because everyone agrees that it is obvious. The male—female binary has developed historically and socially within cultures (Laqueur 1992). It serves as a social mechanism of orientation and shows a socio-conventional and socio-cognitive stability by which people are categorised as a man or a woman within a society by means of their outward appearance and their biological gender. For an individual *per se*, being ascribed to a certain gender category is a relevant factor for the self-determination, the self-perception, and, as a consequence, for the construction and performance of their (gender) identity (Goffmann 2001: 107). Consequently, demarcating women as non-men and men as non-women is an act which creates identity and has exclusionary properties (Herma 2003).

In general, the category of sex emerges as a dualistic constellation. It has been propagated by medical scientists for a long time that sex is a binary concept. Moreover, the dualistic character of sex is assumed to be complementary. Sex is solidly embedded within a heterosexual matrix (Butler 1991). The resulting heteronormativity which shapes not only the construction and perception of identities, but which also influences social structures and the structures and organisation of institutions, serves not only as a means to think gender and identity. It intends, in particular, to promote reproduction. Consequently, gender identity is instrumentalised and obviously based on ideological values.

The traditional idea of gender identity has significant consequences for the individual and collective everyday life as well as for the mainstream opinions about what one's own society should be like. It constructs and

reproduces gender stereotypes and prejudice directly and influences behaviour, appearance, or professional life (Herma 2003). By restricting the choice to two options, this matrix forces individuals to pick one of the two gender identities – mostly for life –, to identify with the corresponding gender norms and gender ideals and to determine themselves as heterosexual within the heterosexual matrix (cf. also Rumiantseva 2009, Trautner 2006).

It is important to note that no individual will succeed in embodying ideal masculinity – and femininity respectively – all the time. Hence, this norm and ideal is constantly performed and constructed by the society and the people living in it (Bildn 2006: 50).

“Gender intelligibility” (Butler 1991) is mainly based on the idea of man and woman. Both concepts exist as hermetically closed and isolated ideas which do not seem to overlap at all because of their opposing characteristics. Moreover, there is an obvious power difference between both concepts because the concept of man is regarded primarily as the ideal and perfect concept, whereas the concept of woman is generally seen as somehow flawed: the concept of woman is missing or deficient in those attributes which the concept of man possesses. This assumption leads to the maintenance of gender specific stereotypes and myths which are based, on the one hand, on traditional and long-established identity concepts and, on the other hand, on a biological determinism which highly influences and justifies gender identities. This becomes evident when people justify their outward appearance or behaviour with their sex which makes outward appearance and behaviour an allegedly naturally and biologically given phenomenon. In this context, one can think of sentences beginning with statements such as *As a woman, I would say ...* or *As a man, I would recommend ...* which make performance, behaviour, and opinion biologically determined phenomena.

However, gender is an unstable category of being which bears resemblance to a continuum. Sunderland and Litosseliti are right in assuming that multiplicity, changeability, and continuity are the main features of gender identity because gender identity is never a finished and complete process (Sunderland/ Litosseliti 2002: 7). Yet, in a lot of cultures, this concerns post-Socialist countries, too, genders beyond the gender binary – which underline the multiple and fluid character of gender in the most obvious way – encounter only little acceptance or meet outright rejection.

### 3.6 Sex and Intersex

Intersex as an innate phenomenon or a phenomenon which occurs after birth is the most obvious and well-known incarnation of the so-called *intermediate gender* (e.g. Beasley 2005: 152, Dreger 2000, Groß et al. 2008, Klöppel 2010, Preves 2005). Intersex – sometimes also called *intersexuality* or *hermaphroditism* – is a “mixture of ›male‹ and ›female‹ features which are more or less distinct” (Kroll 2002: 189).<sup>12</sup> As Beasley (2005) states, intersex is a body problem. Intersex persons are situated within the gender binary of man and woman, but, at the same time, they fall out of the gender dichotomy due to their intermediate or double gender. Intersex people are thus forced to constantly construct and reconstruct their identity. Moreover, they are always forced to define and/ or to redefine their gender within a society (Preves 2005). Today, intersex is accepted in a lot of countries. Consequently, intersex people are not forced to undergo surgery in order to artificially construct an unambiguous and intelligible “biological” gender. Nonetheless, the concept of intersex challenges a lot of societies: socially and linguistically (Morland 2013). From a linguistic perspective, it has to be mentioned that forms of address like *Mr* and *Mrs* (Russ. *gospodin*, *gospozha*, Germ. *Herr*, *Frau*, Pol. *Pan*, *Pani*) or pronouns like *he* and *she* (Russ. *on*, *ona*, Germ. *er*, *sie*, Pol. *on*, *ona*, cf. here the genderless Swedish pronoun *hen*) are based exclusively on a binary system in most languages (see part 5, cf. also King 2014). Also, it seems to be still unusual to conceive of gender identities which are located beyond the male—female gender dichotomy. As a consequence, people always make the attempt to locate intersex people on a binary axis and define them as either male or female.<sup>13</sup> This has linguistic – amongst others cognitive – as well as social consequences. The case of Norrie May-Welby from Australia who successfully filed a lawsuit against the Australian authorities in order to get an androgynic gender identity and whose sex is “not specified” (cf. URL 11, 12) anymore is a very prominent and recent example as to gender

<sup>12</sup> Original: “[...] Mischformen von ›männlichen‹ und ›weiblichen‹ Merkmalen, die mehr oder weniger ausgeprägt sein können”.

<sup>13</sup> In Germany, Elisa Barth (Barth et al. 2013) has published a book which contains accounts of intersex persons highlighting this gender identity. The book aims at increasing awareness of gender identities outside the male—female binary in order to strengthen acceptance and tolerance of intersex persons.

diffusion and gender diversity and to the fact that gender is fluid. It shows that “another” gender which means in this context a neuter gender is increasingly accepted in some societies today.

### 3.7 Sex and Trans-Identities

Besides intersex, one can find other identities which are distinguished by an intermediate gender (Hall et al. 2013). *Trans-identities*, for instance, are sometimes categorised as an intermediate gender. One will quickly realise, however, that the concept of *trans* is neither a hermetic nor a definite concept. The field of *trans* is so diverse and diffuse that it is impossible to give a detailed and, finally, definite overview on trans-identities.<sup>14</sup> Above all, it is even more difficult to finally define what a trans-identity actually is for the concept of *trans* is the perfect and prime example of the fluidity, diversity and multiplicity of identity (Groß et al. 2008).

One of the first instances of *trans*-identities which comes to mind is transsexuality. Beasley (2005: 152) writes in this context that intersex is a “body problem”, whereas transsexuality is a “mind problem”. Transsexual people are “in contradiction to their anatomy“ (Kroll 2002: 392). They constantly feel that the gender identity which they experience is at odds with their biological bodies (Beasley 2005: 152). They feel that they were born in the wrong body and desire a body change and, in a lot of cases, a sex reassignment therapy which entails hormone therapy and often a surgical procedure (Barrett 1999, Kroll 2002). As part of this therapy, transsexual people assume the psychological gender identity in everyday life even before the medical procedure of sex reassignment has begun. This period of intermediate gender extends only to the moment when the surgical sex reassignment creates an unambiguous gender and sex specification. However, one should not picture transsexuality as a clear and unambiguous identity. As one will see below, the transsexual identity, too, is polydimensional and blurred and cannot be staked out so easily. What can be said, though, is that transsexual people feel that they have been born in the wrong body and that the body of the opposite sex would be right for them. This psychological or mental factor is one of the main features which distinguish transsexuality from transgender.

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<sup>14</sup> For trans-identities in Russian society, see Kirilina (2015).

The concept of transsexuality reveals the blurred lines between gender and sex. Transsexuality underscores the idea and the belief or draws attention to the fact that sex is not always an inescapable fate as to gender identity. Yet, it is not the only variety of *trans*-identities. For example, the concept of transgender carries a much greater complexity and shows the high level of possible diffusion and multiplicity that identity can actually assume. Investigating transgender identities or just looking at transgender people in everyday life, one will, without doubt, realise that it is not always easy to separate sex and gender identity from each other because drawing a strict and unambiguous line of division between both concepts is not possible as too many diverse criteria would have to be combined to this end. Of course, transgender identities demonstrate that gender identity is highly uncertain, ambiguous, and unreliable (Mehlmann 2006). However, transgender is not only characterised by individual features or based on values which are established within a certain community. Other factors and criteria must be considered, too, when one deals with the concept of transgender. Transgender identities are embedded in a cultural context and have a social significance. That means that the construction and performance of a transgender identity is not only the result of individuality and, consequently, of individual ideas about life, but that the construction and performance of a transgender identity is influenced strongly by socio-cultural circumstances. Certain communities make use of the concept of transgender for special purposes, for example in order to maintain social roles, to guarantee social structures or to keep up social order according to the corresponding cultural ideas and social ideals. Consequently, those factors must be explicitly included in analyses (this also concerns linguistic analyses) on gender as well as on identity in general.

The concept of transgender – which may be interpreted as the prime example of so-called *cross-identities* – is a wide and quite unspecific field which is characterised by a certain complexity, confusion, and equivocality. In general, transgender means that a person has an unambiguous sex (mostly understood as female or male) which, in most cases, is not and will not be surgically removed. Nonetheless, people with a transgender identity do not or only seldom identify themselves with their “naturally given” sex. Some transgender people do not feel like they belong to any specific gender at all. As a consequence, transgender people may assume very specific and controversial gender identities within a society (Connell 2010, Kroll



2002). One speaks of transgender or people with a transgender identity when one refers to people who are, due to no matter what reason, not able to define and to locate themselves within the male—female binary or who do not want to be categorised according to the – male—female – gender binary (Kollektiv & Steine 2012: 122).

Transgender refers in this case to those who have rejected their gender of social assignment, but refuse to occupy an invisible or conformist place in the men/women gender binary (Beasley 2005: 161f).

Hence, polydimensionality and diffusion are the hallmarks of the concept of transgender.<sup>15</sup> Some intersexual people identify themselves as trans-

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<sup>15</sup> It needs to be stressed here, that, in the field of trans-identities, one must distinguish between *transvestites* and *travesty* artists, including drag queens and drag kings, on the one hand, and transsexuals and people with a transgender-identity, on the other hand. Transvestites and travesty artists assume an identity only for a certain time and in certain situations. They assume an identity especially for the stage, as shown in detail by Beasley (2005: 152). In *travesty*, artists play with gender roles and gender clichés. However, they do not identify themselves with their performed identity. They accept their biological gender and interpret their performance exclusively as an art, as demonstrated in Barrett (1999). *Transvestitism* which sometimes is also called “dress fetishism” (Silva 2013: 88) needs to be distinguished from this. Transvestitism is mostly “erotically motivated” (Kroll 2002: 392) and is expressed by men mostly as a sexual desire in order to gratify their lust by wearing women’s clothes. Genderqueer identities may not be understood as a concept of trans-identity, either (Halberstam 2013, Hall et al. 2013). People call themselves *genderqueer* if they reject (the existence of) the binary concept of man—woman and advocate a gender hybridity which they construct, perform, and live in everyday life by gender mixing, as shown by Connell (2010). This distinction is important in two respects: firstly, a part of the Russian society seems to be unaware of this distinction. This leads to a lumping together of all non-heteronormative persons and artists who perform in a non-heteronormative way. The ban of transsexual people from driving a car or from passing a driving licence in Russia is an example for this confusion. The “banned” group consists of transsexuals, transvestites, exhibitionists, and voyeurs (e.g. online at: <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/russland-transsexuelle-sollen-keinen-fuehrerschein-mehr-machen-duerfen-a-1012038.html> [last accessed on 1 May 2015]). Secondly, the distinction between the two aforementioned groups is necessary because Conchita Wurst, the main figure in this volume, represents the group of drag queens. She is not a representative of the transsexual or transgender identity. Actually, she does not represent a gay identity on stage, either. It is important to keep this in mind, when analysing the discourse of Conchita Wurst. Last but not least, the distinction is significant because different

gender, for example. People who have an androgynous appearance (outward appearance, clothes, behaviour) or who obviously play with gender ideas – such as Andrej Pejić who in former times, before “hir” surgery, acted like a feMale topmodel – identify themselves publicly as transgender, too. Consequently, one can see that transgender is not a hermetically closed concept. Transgender shows how blurred gender identities and, moreover, gender definitions can be and that gender is more complex than is generally assumed.

A prototypical transgender identity is the concept of the *ladyboy* (see *Kathoeay* below) which is widespread in parts of Asia and Latin America and can be observed recently in other – for example, European – areas, too. The “ladyboy identity” makes clear that gender identities are not divided by strict features or only conceivable as constant opposites in every case. It shows instead that gender identities may be distinguished by an obviously blurred gender crossing because of the possible non-congruency of primary and secondary sex characteristics. Furthermore, it is the variety of transgender identities that illustrates that even the transition from transsexuality to transgender becomes significantly blurred and indistinct, too, so that the boundaries between the single identities are characterised by diffusion *per se*. In this context, I would like to draw the attention of the reader to the pornstar Buck Angel. He was born and raised as a girl but decided someday to live as a man. He is called a transsexual in the media and, moreover, he declares himself a transsexual in some contexts although he has never had genital surgery. This won him the label of “the man with a pussy” (cf. URL 13). However, he “feels and lives like a man” (cf. URL 14). These circumstances make it actually difficult to call him a transsexual or they show at least the difficulty in defining transsexuality. Yet, he has without doubt a trans-identity which, in turn, shows the variety of trans-identities which people can assume (Connell 2010).

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research methods must be chosen and research findings will be different when one dives either into the discourse of drag artists or addresses linguistic questions and issues which concern the linguistic construction of transsexuals or transgender people.

### 3.8 On the Relevance of Sex and the Third Gender

The high relevance of the social or socio-cultural gender and the, consequently, lesser importance of the (natural-biological) sex come to the fore when one considers the so-called *third gender* or *third sex* which is sometimes called the *intermediate gender*, too (cf. Herdt 1994a). People who assign themselves to the third – or intermediate – gender define themselves exclusively according to their social and socio-cultural roles as well as to their function within a society or community. In this case, self-identity is constructed independent of the actual sex. The *third gender* is an ambiguous and complex concept. Moreover, the concept of the third gender is not understood in a uniform way – neither in research nor by the people who ascribe themselves or who can be ascribed to the intermediate gender.

As one – maybe – knows, people with a homosexual identity were regarded as people of the third gender until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs describes the homosexual “urning” as a member of the third gender category because homosexual people supposedly have a female soul in a male body (Setz 2000, Sigusch 2000, cf. also Herdt 1994a, Meer 1994: 137). Recently, India officially announced the acceptance of the third gender. Now, people have the opportunity to identify themselves in documents as transgender, for example, people who belong to the community of the *hijras* (see below, cf. also URL 15). This option also extends to visitors to India who can tick the box “transgender” when filling in their visa application (Kirilina 2015, Scheller-Boltz 2013). As shown by Kirilina (2015), other countries have become sensitive to the topic of gender and identity, too. She mentions that if one applies for a visa at the Austrian embassy in Russia one has to declare one’s sex in the visa application. Here, four possible answers are provided: male, female, not applicable, unknown. As Kirilina states, Russian society is confronted with these new developments. Because of this, it has become more aware of a changing world of identity diversity.

In most cases, it is remarkable that identifying oneself as a member of the third or intermediate gender does not mean that the corresponding person has a (biologically) intersex identity. Persons can identify themselves as members of the third intermediate gender category or, at least, of an unspecified category. As a consequence, the concept of the third gender has a lot in common with the concept of transgender. Quite often, both concepts

also seem to be identical. However, the term *third gender* or *intermediate gender* respectively is today predominantly used with certain identities and communities (Herdt 1994a). People who consider themselves as a member of the third gender or who are assigned to this group by their community adopt, mainly, a social role and function within a society or certain community which does not have to correspond with their actual assigned sex. Their gender identity is determined by social circumstances. In contrast to transsexual people, people of the third gender, usually, do not undergo sex reassignment surgery in order to get the sex which corresponds to their social role. Additionally, we need to stress here that “members of the third gender” do not feel that they have been born in the wrong body and accept their sex as it is. In contrast to a lot of transgender people, people of the third gender usually adopt an unambiguous gender role within the socio-conventionally given gender binary. They do not play with gender ideas and typical gender roles (Herdt 1994c). Moreover, they do not connect their social gender role with any kind of sexual orientation or sexual desire. This can be observed, in contrast, in transgender people who often rebel in public against established systems of beliefs and ideas which they try to overthrow (Bucholtz 1999: 14). While transgender people try to break gender boundaries and allegedly to question exactly delimited gender identities in order to, finally, criticise directly the current gender binary, people of the third gender regard the conventional gender binary as a measure or even as a standard norm for the construction of their gender identity. People of the third sex usually comply with the traditional gender binary. Hence, they see themselves either as a woman or as a man from a social perspective and act according to their role in everyday life.

[E]ven members of these ‘third genders’ cannot but construct their identities through recourse to dominant discourses of gender binarism, i.e. they are usually judged against the gender-binary norm and resort to practices that are associated with maleness and femaleness, but in a gender-incoherent way (Motschenbacher 2010: 9).

However, the concept of the third gender shows clearly blurred lines. This leads, on the one hand, to a diffuse concept. On the other hand, this blurriness makes it difficult to differentiate transgender people from people of the third gender (Herdt 1994a).

The Indian *hijras* are probably the most famous and well-known representatives of the third gender group.<sup>16</sup> By majority, they are male “by nature”, in some cases they are intersexual, however, they live out a female identity in society which is highlighted by their feminine outward appearance, performance, and behaviour. In a few cases, hijras undergo sex reassignment surgery. This demonstrates the actual transformation of a usual homosexual person or a transvestite into a *hijra* (Schröter 2002: 147)<sup>17</sup>.

This operation transforms an impotent man, a “useless creature,” into a powerful person, a *hijra*, who now becomes a vehicle of the power of the Mother Goddess to bless and to curse (Nanda 1994: 383).

Infertile women can assume the identity of a *hijra*, too, for they see themselves – like biologically male hijras – as imperfect and incomplete (Nanda 1994). In society, hijras take a female role which very often resembles a gender stereotypical performance because their

performances do not attempt a realistic imitation of women but rather a burlesque, and the very act of dancing in public is contrary to ordinary feminine behavior (Nanda 1994: 382)

so that hijras often embody an exaggerated idea of a woman.

On the Balkans, in particular in Albania, but also in Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo, one can still encounter – almost exclusively in remote rural areas – the identity of the *sworn virgin* (Alban. *vajzë e betuar*, Bosn. *tobelija* ‘person bound by a vow’, Croat. *zavjetovana djevojka*, Montenegr. *virgjinëshë* or *tybeli* ‘female committed to virginity’, Serb. *muskobanja* ‘manlike woman’, ‘man-woman’ or *ostajnica* ‘she who stays (unmarried)’). A “sworn virgin” is defined as a person whose sex is female by birth but who shows a significant masculine behaviour and lives the role of a man in society (Grémaux 1994, Schröter 2002). This identity is totally accepted by their community (Schröter 2002:

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed overview of the hijra identity, cf. Herdt (1994c), Nanda (1994), Schröter (2002).

<sup>17</sup> Original: “[...] die Transformation eines gewöhnlichen Homosexuellen oder Transvestiten in einen hijra [markiert wird]”.

129). It is predominantly due to social circumstances that force women to take on the role of a sworn virgin. Families with a male successor and inheritor enjoy a much higher standing and appreciation than families without sons. This is why families who have no male offspring decide to raise one of their daughters as a boy in order to have a (albeit non-biological) son. Furthermore, some women choose to live as a man on their own so that

two main types of social males should be distinguished. The first type comprises the biological female person who is raised as a son from infancy or early childhood; the second type embraces the biological female who, later in life, after having been socialized as a woman for many years, reconstructs herself as a “social man” (Grémaux 1994: 244).

A similar identity concept can be found in Polynesia, mainly in Samoa, where the *fa'afafines* ‘like a woman’ (Samoa. *fa'afafine*, Tonga. *fakaleitī*, Tahiti./ Hawaii. *māhū*) live (cf. URL 122). They are biologically male people who are raised and socialised as a girl or a woman respectively because their families do not have enough or even no daughters. Traditionally, women are needed to keep house and to help raise children. Although the *fa'afafines* do explicitly stereotypical female work and take a traditional female role within their community, they are not considered women but exclusively as a third gender. Moreover, they are not regarded as homosexuals, drag queens, or transsexuals, because they can start a family with women, too (Besnier 2003, 1994).

One can also find female husbands, female fathers, and female sons in parts of Africa (Schröter 2002: 115-128). So, the ethnic groups of *Fon*, *Igbo*, and *Nuer* live according to a strict binary gender system (man—woman) with a clearly hierarchical power relation. If a family is in need of a son or a male inheritor, a daughter becomes a *Nhanye* ‘male daughter’ or a *igba ohu* ‘female husband’ and fulfils the role of a traditional man. A similar procedure can be found within the ethnic group of the *Nandi* in Kenya.<sup>18</sup> The *Nuer*, for example, classify infertile women as men as well in order to make it possible for them to marry a woman according to the gender system.

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<sup>18</sup> A detailed overview of gender identities in Africa can be found in Schröter (2002).

As one can see, the “reinterpretation” and the “transformation” of a person’s gender identity as well as their socialisation according to an identity idea which does not correspond to their actual biological gender, but which is obviously based on the predominant gender binary (man → woman, woman → man), have a social function which is highly important for the further maintenance of the corresponding society or community.

However, one can find other cultures and social models in which the social gender identity is not meant to attain a higher value and reputation. The Omani *Khanith* – or *Khaneeth* –, for example, are homosexual men or intersex people with a trans-identity who bear the status and the function of a third gender. Here, it is highly interesting to notice that they ascribe themselves to this identity and make themselves, consequently, a member of this community. While a woman will remain a woman within the Omani society, a man has the choice whether he wants to live as a man with a male gender identity or whether he wants to live and perform as a woman, but then – in the latter case – as a so-called *third gender*.

The Omani society actually differentiates people according to gender binarity. There are women, meaning people without a penis, and men, people with a penis. This distinction is made at birth. In a second phase of differentiating, which takes place at the beginning of puberty at the earliest, men are once more divided into two categories: in those who penetrate and in those who are penetrated. In Oman, a double classification system exists: a dual one which is based exclusively on anatomy, that is the sex of a person [...]. While people with female sexual organs are invariably defined as feminine from a sexual and social point of view, people with a penis have the right to decide whether they want to belong to the male or female gender. This decision can be temporary or definite [transl.] (Schröter 2002: 113).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Original: “Die omanische Gesellschaft differenziert durchaus binär: in Frauen, d. h. Personen ohne Penis, und in Männer, Personen mit Penis. Diese Unterscheidung erfolgt bereits bei der Geburt. Erst in einem zweiten Differenzierungsvorgang, der frühestens mit der Pubertät einsetzt, werden Männer noch einmal in zwei Kategorien eingeteilt: in diejenigen, die penetrieren, und in diejenigen, die penetriert werden. In Oman existiert ein doppeltes Klassifizierungssystem: ein duales, das sich ausschließlich anhand der Anatomie, also des *sex*, orientiert [...]. Während Menschen mit weiblichen Geschlechtsorganen sexuell und sozial unverrückbar weiblich definiert werden, besitzen Menschen mit Penis das Recht, sich temporär oder dauerhaft zwischen dem männlichen und dem weiblichen Geschlecht zu entscheiden.”

A lot of people who belong to the category of the third gender are often cut off from the outside world and live in remote rural or mountain areas in a community with like-minded members, although this is not the rule as proven by the Indian hijras for example. The *travestis* are another identity group in Brazil, but also in other parts of Central and Latin America. The members of their community have male sex characteristics “by nature” but live out a female identity within their community. They decline genital surgery because they do not consider themselves as transsexual (Schröter 2002). Similar identity concepts can be found among the Thai *Kathoey* (*Ladyboy*, *Shemale*), the Mexican *Muxes*, the Indian *Kotis*, and the Pakistani *Khusra* (Nagar 2008).

Last but not least, one should mention that people of the third gender concept are appreciated higher in some cultures and are seen as creatures with special skills and extrasensory power as can be observed among the *Berdache* or *Two Spirits* as well as among the *hijras* (Herdt 1994b, 1994d, Roscoe 1994, Schröter 2002).

#### *4 Sex as a Non-Relevant Gender Category: Some Final Remarks*

This aforerepresented overview on gender and identity shows that the sex of a person seems very often to be the signpost for the perception of people and for the construction of one’s identity. One’s sex has an enormous influence on one’s identity and, consequently, on one’s personality – this concerns both, one’s own active influence as well as the passive influence exerted by one’s community. Most people act – consciously or unconsciously – according to their “biology”, which means according to their sex. Moreover, one justifies one’s reactions, performance, thoughts, and behaviour very often by referring to natural-biological “facts” (e.g. *But I am a woman!*, *This behaviour does not suit a girl!*, *So, as a man, I would say ...*). Consequently, one’s identity seems to be regulated, controlled, and influenced constantly by biological determinism.

However, one’s identity is also a socio-cultural construct which is the immediate result of education and socialisation.<sup>20</sup> Identity is based on

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<sup>20</sup> As to the relation between gender, education, and socialisation in Russia, see, for example, Kliuchko/ Shtyleva (2015).



imitation and reproduction and, moreover, on ideological ideas as well as on a mythological belief in the biological determination and the necessity of a gender classification. Behaviour patterns can never be justified by one's anatomy alone; one's identity is not a natural product which reflects inevitably one's sex. Nevertheless, the majority of people are without doubt convinced that the sex of a person is a highly influential factor for identity and beliefs in the significant relevance of the sex for a society.

With regard to the aforementioned aspect as well as to the fact that sex is actually much less important and significant for one's identity, this overview makes clear that identity is neither a rigid nor a stable entity and, consequently, a much more complex and diffuse category than is usually assumed. Using the example of a number of selected identity concepts, I have illustrated that this especially concerns gender identities. Gender identities are fluid and significantly distinguished by variance and, consequently, by variety. On the one hand, gender identities exist which are located on a man—woman axis although the corresponding assignment to man or woman by an individual or a community does not depend on sex characteristics, that means on biological features (*sex*) but mainly on social and socio-cultural factors for they often fulfil a social function. On the other hand, there are identities with highly blurred lines which intend to break the traditional dichotomy of man and woman. This makes it difficult and in a lot of cases even impossible to categorise people within the traditional gender binary as man or woman. Moreover, those identities destroy or, at least, weaken the concept of heteronormativity and show the concepts of hetero- and homosexuality in another light.

### *5 Identity Forms, Identity Concepts, and Linguistic Analyses*

This raises the question: what has this overview to do with linguistics? Or, more to the point: why is such an overview necessary for a volume on linguistics?

First, one has to keep in mind that this volume explicitly deals with questions pertaining to gender and, in particular, queer linguistics. Dealing with both these research areas requires familiarity with different forms of identity and identity concepts and, moreover, an awareness of the fact that identity is fluid and instable. Identity is by no means a hermetically closed and invariant entity. In this context, one must understand how forms of

identity and identity concepts are intertwined and how relevant they are for the whole identity of a person because they have a strong influence on one's own self and on the external perception of people in general. Therefore, forms of identity and identity concepts must also be explicitly considered when linguists deal with gender and identity topics.

One must not forget that identity has in every sense an impact on language, linguistic structures, and, finally, on how one linguistically constructs one's identity (*active identity*) and on how individual identity is linguistically constructed by one's community (*passive identity*). Here again, identity forms and identity concepts are relevant entities because they markedly navigate people's perception of identities and regulate how one constructs and performs one's identity. Hence, identity forms and identity concepts must not only be included in gender and queer linguistic research. In particular, the question must be examined in linguistic studies to what extent identity forms and concepts influence the linguistic construction of identity. Only if linguists consider different identity forms and identity concepts, they can investigate questions of identity more profoundly and they avoid superficial research findings. It is false or, at least, highly problematic to deal exclusively with men and women within gender linguistics because the concepts of femininity and masculinity are so diffuse and complex (Scheller-Boltz 2015d). This fact makes it impossible and even unjustifiable to lump women and men together in two separate categories. Any woman's speech can exhibit identity markers within a conversation which may disappear totally during another act of communication simply because circumstances have changed (e.g. topic, communication partner, position, sphere (privacy, public), aim etc.). An analysis of male linguistic behaviour can lead to different results depending on the situation – whether he is alone (*individual* and collective identity) or whether he is interacting with members of his community (*collective* and individual identity). Consequently, one cannot draw any conclusions based on general linguistics by assuming or arguing on the basis of biological determinism or natural gender features. An object of study is neither masculine nor feminine only because a man or a woman is the focus of the corresponding research.

Second, regarding man and woman as social or socio-cultural constructs and, furthermore, interpreting masculinity and femininity as performances and imitations, effectively deconstructs the given and tra-

ditionally established concepts of man and woman as a basis for investigating gender linguistic questions. Gender linguistic studies should not focus on the specifics of man and woman. Instead, one should approach gender linguistic topics by considering different discourses on gender and identity. The focus should be more on the way in which people construct a purported femininity and masculinity by adhering to the traditional assumptions about gender which mostly reflect the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1991). As a consequence, our objective should be to reach a kind of meta-level from where the construction of gender can be observed more objectively if we intend to deal with gender linguistic questions. The questions then would not be how do women and men act linguistically, but how do people act linguistically in order to perform and construct femininity or masculinity and, in addition, what kind of factors and circumstances lead to the type of behaviour and intention in question. Such an approach would make it also possible to leave the heterosexual perspective and norm as well as the heteronormative standard behind and to concentrate just on individuals and their manner of acting, interacting, and performing according to traditional and long-time established gender ideas. This would also guarantee the consideration and integration of other “non-traditional” identities. For example, members of the third (intermediate) gender or certain trans-identities often act according to traditional, well-established feminine and masculine ideas and features. However, up until now they have often been excluded from linguistic research as they do not exactly fit into heteronormative ideas or notions of gender. Nevertheless, those identities would shed new light, particularly, on Slavonic gender linguistic questions if they were explicitly considered.

Third, I would like to stress here once more that this volume is explicitly written for Slavacists and Russacists in particular. In this day and age, it is common practice to illuminate identities beyond the “traditional” gender binary in English or German gender linguistic studies as well as in other languages and disciplines and to include those different identities into linguistic research.<sup>21</sup> Russian – and also other Slavonic – gender linguistics, however, focuses mostly on the traditional heteronormative gender binary,

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<sup>21</sup> For a representative overview, see e.g. Bucholtz et al. (1999), Calderón/ Marko (2012), Campbell-Kibler et al. (2002), Canakis et al. (2010), Harrington et al. (2008), Holmes/ Meyerhoff (2003), Hornscheidt (2009, 2008, 2006), Motschenbacher (2013, 2012, 2010), Motschenbacher/ Stegu (2013).

concentrating on man and woman as uniform biologically and naturally predetermined heterosexual identities. Looking at recent Russian gender linguistic research, one cannot help but realise that different identity forms and identity concepts are mostly ignored or, at least, considered only marginally. Gender is not assumed as socially constructed, but as naturally given. The term *gender* is most often used as a synonym for *sex* which means that *gender* is used now more frequently because of its alleged popularity (see here part 5 for more details).<sup>22</sup> Consequently, using the term *gender*, Russicists often have in mind the biological sex of a person so that *gender* refers neither to the social construction of identity nor to the social gender, that means to the gender an individual performs within society. Trans-identities or the concept of the third gender are rarely acknowledged as possibilities of identity. Gender roles which are based on social functions and cultural circumstances and which are obviously irrespective of the sex of a person are not studied within linguistics. The concept of *postgender* and the obviously existing variety of identities are, consequently, mostly ignored and excluded from research (cf. Kirilina 2015). Consequently, this introduction aims at familiarising Russicists with identity forms and identity concepts, which must be taken into greater consideration and included in Slavonic linguistics in the future as well.

There is no denying that, up to now, many researchers have dealt with gender- – and also even queer- – linguistic questions, however, their research often plateaus due to their reliance on antiquated approaches, ideas and assumptions.<sup>23</sup> In addition, it is abundantly clear that many Slavonic gender linguists obviously marginalise and even ignore different identities, certainly, in order to maintain traditional gender ideas and, as a consequence, established research traditions. This is the reason why Slavonic gender linguistics focus primarily on traditional identities, that is to say, on heterosexual men and women as uniform entities, and thus yield results which are mostly a reproduction of what has already been shown to be wrong or insufficient. However, a more innovative approach based on post-structuralist and even deconstructivist ideas as well as on identity variety

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<sup>22</sup> This can be observed in Krongauz (2015).

<sup>23</sup> For a critique as to this research approach within Russian and Slavonic gender linguistics, for pleas for a changing approach to analyses of gender (and queer) linguistic questions and for first poststructuralist approaches to gender and queer linguistics in Russian and Slavonic studies in general, see Scheller-Boltz (2015a).

would promise new findings which would lead to new questions, fields, and methods of research. In addition, Slavonic gender linguistics would not continue to live in the past, as is the case today, but rather by embracing new and current trends, would bring them and their practices up to present international standards.

Fourth, it would seem as though Russian gender linguistics have fallen into something of routine at this point in time. At any rate it appears to have come to a standstill. Neither Russian nor Slavonic queer linguistics has been developed nor established. One definitely finds initial and diffident attempts to develop and to establish queer studies and also queer linguistic research in Russian linguistics. However, most of these queer studies are embedded in a sociological, cultural, or literary context, as one will see in the last part of this monograph. Currently, queer topics are studied particularly with regard to political and socio-political developments. This is probably due to the current political and socio-political climate in the Russian Federation, which obviously limits the rights and the way of living for many “non-traditional” identities (Kondakov 2014, Sapper/ Weichsel 2013). Consequently, dealing with questions of queerness is in any case still a sensitive issue, but, in linguistics, it is most assuredly underdeveloped. Consequently, this volume aims at contributing to the further development and – hopefully some day – to the establishment of Russian queer linguistics and thus should be regarded as an introduction of sorts to Russian and Slavonic queer linguistics. I hope that it will inspire other researchers in this field and help promote the development of queer linguistic research in Slavonic studies.



## Part 2:

### Illusion – Change – Tradition: Identity in Russia

*These all-pervasive abstract beliefs  
about what is right and legitimate,  
and thus most appropriate,  
pervade the discourses of the community;  
both mainstream and marginalized members of a society  
are constrained by dominant ideologies,  
and the identities of both groups are realized in relation to hegemony.  
(Kathleen M. Wood 1999: 52)*

#### *1 Introductory Remarks*

One of the central arguments of this monograph is the understanding that the current state of Russian gender linguistic research reflects the ways in which Russian politics and society have conceptualised gender and identity throughout time. It is clear that the perception of gender and the assessment of identity must change in the future if Russian gender – and, above all, queer – linguistics is to evolve.

In this second part, I am going to argue that concepts of gender and identity are by no means natural givens. They are subject to political and social developments which are often the result of the deliberate application of institutionalised power.

To this end, this part will shed light on what the concept of identity means in Russian society. It will show how forms and concepts of identity are established within Russian society, how identities *per se* have continually been socially and politically reassessed in the course of time, and, finally, how the actual perception of identities has changed in Russia over the years.

As an introduction, I will provide a compact overview of the actual significance of identity in Soviet Russia. This is essential to my topic as a number of myths and stereotypes which have come up in recent years are deeply rooted in the Soviet period. It will be shown how the concepts of individualism and collectivism have been influencing identity policies during the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian period as well as the idea of identity itself. Of course, no discussion of identity would be complete without an examination of the so-called *Russian identity crisis*, with the *Russian male crisis* or, respectively, the *crisis of Russian masculinity* being one of its most prominent manifestations.

After this more general introduction, I will focus, according to the topic of this monograph, on the identity concepts of gender, sexuality, and nation. I will explain how gender identity is conceptualised in Russian society and what measures are taken on the part of politics in order to construct gender concepts, to regulate gender ideas and to uphold a gendered society in general. It will become clear that the perception and the construction of gender identity have a great impact on other identity concepts due to the notion that the concept of gender serves as a prism to construct and assess other identities. One will see that sexuality is mostly constructed on the basis of gender ideas and gender norms. Moreover, the construction and perception of gender identity influence the perception of nation(s) and the construction of national identities. It is very common today to think and to construct nations and spaces through a gender prism. As a consequence, the interconnection between gender and space plays a prominent role in this chapter.

The main aim of this part of the book is not only to illuminate the concepts of gender, sexual, and national identity. It is also my intention to reveal that these identity concepts are tightly linked with each other. This will demonstrate that identity concepts are used to construct other identities and that identity concepts can be used for propagandistic reasons in order to establish ideological ideas and to maintain mythological beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See for the relation between ideology, heterosexuality, and identity in full detail Bucholtz et al. (1999).



## *2 Identity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*

During the Soviet Russian period, the collective played – as is generally known – a highly meaningful role. Collective identity may be characterised as the condition of solidarity within a socio-cultural community. Group solidarity arises from a basis of common interests, ideas, and values which are realised on a collective and individual level. On the collective level, the group experiences and realises uniformity and identity. On an individual level, group members act out their membership in this group (Kurnaeva/Riabov 2006: 240).<sup>25</sup> The collective and individual identities are intimately linked with each other, because the collective shows a high influence on the construction of the individual identity of a person. Individuality also plays a relevant role here, for an individual accepts the values and idea(l)s of their community and in doing so makes an important contribution to maintaining the collective and its identity. However, the individual, that means the personal identity of an individual, played only a marginal and, in particular, a hidden and invisible role in Soviet Russia.

Collective ideas and values may differ according to socio-cultures as to material, social, ethic, religious, educational etc. values, for each socio-culture is based on different value systems. Generally, those accepted values and beliefs are considered as traditional values which are nurtured and fostered through generations and which emanate a normative force. There is a tendency to overgeneralise in this respect. It is assumed that values which are recognised as being characteristic for a certain socio-culture are shared and appreciated by every member of this community and that all members will impart these traditions and traditional idea(l)s to the next generation(s).

Collective values contribute to the formation of a specific and explicitly culture-based perspective of a community (a social programming, if you will) which produces generalisations that constantly gain momentum and are seen as applicable in every sense. As a result, specifics of the community are considered as typical, characteristic, and simply “normal”. Traits of

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<sup>25</sup> Original: “[...] формирующееся на основе общности интересов и ценностей состоянии групповой солидарности, включающее коллективный (осознание и переживание группой своей целостности и тождественности) и индивидуальный (осознание и переживание индивидами своей принадлежности к группе) уровни”.

the community are overemphasised to a point where the illusion of a uniform mass is created. It is expected and even assumed without questioning that a member of the community exhibits the specifics and shows the behaviour and thinking patterns which seem to be so typical for the community. This process generates stereotypes which are seen as natural and specific for a society. Stereotypes are maintained internally, that means by the respective society *per se* (e.g. *(we) Russians* are hospitable), as well as externally, that means by societies from the outside (e.g. *(the) Russians* are hospitable).

The values of a society function as an invisible power component because they have an external effect on a person and on the person's identity and influence the construction and perception of identity. Consequently, it is this set of values that governs the passive identity of a person in a central manner. People are always assessed according to a culture-specific worldview (*kartina mira*) and on the basis of generally assumed traditional values and established beliefs. This external force which affects the individual not only reflects the expectations directed at a person. It also regulates the behaviour of precisely that person. As a consequence, the identity of a person is governed and constructed according to the stereotypical and overgeneralised ideas of their community without the respective person being actively involved in the construction of their identity. Affected by the dominant expectations of society, people adopt – sometimes consciously and in other cases unconsciously – the generally accepted values, ideas, and standards in order to feel accepted as a member of their society, to avoid individual discrimination and exclusion from the society, and to enjoy most or all of its privileges and advantages.

In the Soviet Russian period, identity was associated and definitely linked with collectivism. Individuality and other identity forms, such as plural identities, were negated, denied, or even banned.

Instead of enabling the overall development of one's personality, the socialist model of society reduced individuals to their role as clients and, in the process of bureaucratic standardisation, inhibited the differentiation of a plurality of lifestyles which is based on individual, reflexive norms and values [transl.] (Schmitt 1997: 65).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Original: "Statt allseitige Entfaltung der Persönlichkeit zu ermöglichen, reduzierte das [...] staatssozialistische Gesellschaftsmodell das Individuum auf seine Rolle als

While the collective enjoyed a high standing in the society, there was only little support for and tolerance of individual ideas and opinions. The reason for this was society's role as a collective. In this role, society constantly served the state. It was responsible for bestowing glory and prestige on the state so that Soviet Russia or, in general, the Soviet Union respectively could stylise itself in a positive and, primarily, powerful way to the outside world. The Soviet Russian society represented values, such as patriotism, the will to defend the home country, and freedom. Moreover, ideological ideas, like solidarity, justice, or social responsibility were seen as significant for the existence and continuity of the Soviet Russian collective. These values were primarily established, supported, and maintained in the microstructure of families. The family played a very significant role and was assessed as an overall important unit by the society. The family transmitted values and imparted them through generations (Penn/ Jill 2009, Zdravomyslova et al. 2009).

Work also played a meaningful role because work was absolutely not seen as an individual activity but as an activity which explicitly benefited the whole collective and which was central to the existence and continuity of the collective and, accordingly, of the nation (Chandler 2013, Penn/ Jill 2009, Scheide 2002). This was also the motivation behind the elimination of gender inequality in the labour market. Women did not work because of individual reasons, for example in order to foster personal development and self-realisation. They collaborated in the establishment of socialism and, consequently, in the maintenance of the Soviet Russian collective.

All of these values were connected with certain ideas, expectations, duties, and patterns which did not only maintain these values, but which were also significant for the further existence of the society as a collective. The transmission of both, traditional Soviet Russian values and the idea of the relevance of the collective was the primary task of the Soviet state. The state propagated values mainly through its institutions of education. The media were also intensively used as a medium for propagating ideological ideas and for creating support for political decisions. By doing so, the state was able to govern and to control certain ideas and values (cf. Broszinsky-

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Klient bzw. Klientin und blockierte im Zuge bürokratischer Normierung die Ausdifferenzierung einer – auf individuellen, reflexiven Normen und Wertungen beruhenden – Pluralität von Lebensentwürfen.”

Schwabe 2011: 178f). In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church, the family as well as political or politically motivated institutions and organisations acted in compliance with the political course. They were no less responsible for conveying general values and ideological ideas of the Soviet state. Of course, those circumstances led immediately to a reduction and limitation of individual identity.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the political breakdown at the end of the 1980s, Russia had to deal with radical changes. The privatisation of the Russian economy and the introduction of democracy and of democratic structures for which an appropriate reform process had to be adopted brought a lot of challenges and difficulties for both, the Russian society and politics. The Russian economy entered recession (Sty-kow 2006: esp. 68). Internal political conflicts and wars, like the Chechen wars, caused uncertainty and insecurity in the Russian society (Barylski 1998). However, this era was also marked by a rise of individualism. Russia's link to European and world-wide markets, its connection to European and world-wide institutions, like, for example, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and, finally, its strong convergence with the European Union as well as Russia's general turn to Europe brought new values, new standards, and new possibilities into Russian society (Bastian 2006, cf. also Höhmann/ Schröder 2001). Europe was the goal; Europe was the focus; Europe was the measure and the general standard. In this respect, Russia did not differ from other post-Socialist states, like Serbia or Croatia.<sup>27</sup>

As a consequence, the collective lost its essential meaning. Traditional values, which had been primarily based on former collective ideas, were considered as obsolete and odd now. New social models and diverse models for living arose and were seen as a new and worthwhile possibility for Russian people.

In the late 1990s, the situation changed again. Economic turmoil and social unrest began to cast doubts on the capacity of liberal democracy to create stable conditions for businesses and communities. An increasing number of people started to blame individualism and Western values for

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<sup>27</sup> In both Balkan states, national values were very often distinguished from European values or from values of the European Union. Croatia and Serbia were depicted as backward and underdeveloped, whereas the European Union was characterised as positive with regard to social life, economics, and law (cf. e.g. Rajilić 2015).

the country's problems. In their opinion, negligence of traditional values had provided a fertile ground for corruption and decadence which

is interpreted as the result of a transgression of prescribed norms, and calls for a reform of the society in which "dangerous" homosexuals lurk (Tin 2008: 136).

Only a return to collective moral standards would enable the country to overcome its difficulties.

### *3 Russia's Identity Crisis: Identity Policies and Identity Regulation*

In this context, it is important to note that Russian politicians have identified the loss of Russia's national idea as the root cause for its current social and economic instability. This is why they have directed their efforts at (re)building Russia's national idea and at stabilising its national identity. The quest for an adequate and respected place for the Russian nation within a globalised world forms part of these efforts (Nohejl 2013b, cf. also Persson/ Petersson 2014).

One must interpret the recent political decisions in the context of their national and international implications in order to understand the full extent and effect of this political approach. The protracted economic crisis and the dubious (socio-)political decisions, with which the country has recently shocked the world and which are opposed to the values and guidelines of the European Union, have resulted in enormous international pressure on Russia. The arbitrary application of laws, the violations of human rights, the Crimean crisis, and Russia's latest involvement in the Syrian war as well as Russia's attempt at talking Serbia out of strengthening its relations with the European Union (e.g. URL 16, 17, 18, 123) must be seen as prime examples of how Russia constantly tries to regain power, superiority, and influence, and, in addition, to rebuild its national identity (cf. also Sperling 2015).

The current political strategy seems to be particularly successful from a domestic perspective because Russian people are aware of the enormous pressure on Russia and of the international demands, sanctions, and restrictions which have been imposed on the country. This results in a growing feeling of unease and discontent within the Russian population. In

this situation, the clever public relations tactics used by Russian politicians help to redirect the rage of the Russian people towards “the others”, mainly towards the “West”. The circumstances strengthen the bonds among Russians and increase the hostility and aversion towards “the West”.

Seeking for its national identity, Russia has turned towards its historical roots (Sperling 2015). Today, the country’s politicians rely on old traditional values, appealing to old standards and rather out-dated models. Traditional symbols are used in public and myths are resurrected which testify to “the longing for an ideal world” (Scherrer 2001: 27).<sup>28</sup> This longing is expressed in various forms such as:

a) the general desire to turn back to the Soviet era or, more adequately, to the models, standards, and norms which were generally established during the USSR period (*vozvrashchenie k SSSR*)

Russians lapse into depression and want to return to the USSR.<sup>29</sup>

I want to say that there will be nothing bad if we take all the good things from the USSR, and there were a lot of good things back then. More good things than bad things. [...] We want to go back to normal times. To Andropov, to Brezhnev.<sup>30</sup>

b) the return to the traditional roots of the Russian people (*vozvrashchenie k korniam*)

Fuck the West. It’s time to wake up and to go back to the roots.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Original: “Mythen und Symbole bezeugen die Sehnsucht nach einer heilen Welt, nach Geschichte, Geschichten und angenehmen Orten der Erinnerung.”

<sup>29</sup> Original: “Россияне впали в депрессию и хотят назад в СССР” (URL 19).

<sup>30</sup> Excerpt from an interview with the State Duma Deputy Vadim Solovev in August 2014. Original: “Хочу сказать, что ничего плохого не будет, если мы возьмем все хорошее из СССР, а хорошего там было много. Больше, чем плохого. [...] Хотим вернуться в нормальное время. К Андропову, к Брежневу” (URL 20).

<sup>31</sup> Original: “Нахрен Запад, пора пробуждаться и возвращаться к корням” (URL 21).

c) the wish to (better) return to “Russia’s stormy 1990s” (*Rossia likhikh 90-kh*)<sup>32</sup>

Why can’t we go back to the wild 90s?<sup>33</sup>

Oh... the 90s... what a wonderful period, when our country began to rebuild... when everything was new and recreated... when the legislators of pop fashion became incredibly popular... bands like Ruki Vverkh, Turbomoda, Demo and others...<sup>34</sup>

These myths are linked with certain symbols or symbolic ideas which had a significant meaning for the Russian society and nation in former times. It is remarkable in this context that the symbolic ideas which are currently used to find and re-establish a national idea are basically connected with questions that focus on gender ideas and sexuality. This includes a precise social order, traditional gender roles and ideas as well as a uniform sense of community. These symbols and myths are not only resurrected, maintained, and actively used by politicians although Russian politicians must be seen as the driving force for their reestablishment and maintenance. The Russian Orthodox Church, too, propagates traditional values more than ever because the Church perceives its values and ideas as strongly supported by the current political course.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it is the Russian society itself that

<sup>32</sup> Here, I would like to express my gratitude to professor I. M. Dzialoshinskii for the interesting insights and useful information which he shared with me at the conference “Mezhkul’turnoe obshchenie: kontakty i konflikty” in Moscow in October 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Original: “Почему нельзя возвращаться к “лихим 90-м”?” (URL 22).

<sup>34</sup> Original: “Эх...90-е... замечательная пора, когда только начинало строится наше государство... когда всё было заново и вновь... когда необычайно популярными стали законодатели попсовой моды... гр. Руки Вверх, Турбомода, Демо и другие...” (URL 23).

<sup>35</sup> Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić (2016: 144) demonstrate in their study that the Orthodox Church has an enormous influence in other post-Socialist countries, too, like, for instance, in Serbia. They argue that the Serbian Orthodox Church is no longer only a religious and societal institution, but it also plays an important and leading role in politics. The Serbian Orthodox Church has entered the public space a long time ago and is visibly steering the discourse in Serbia, appealing to traditional and moral values and expressing hostility and intolerance towards sexual minorities as well as towards people and communities who or which do not follow the traditional way of living and thinking.

adopts these politically propagated symbols and clings to certain myths in order to take part in the reestablishment of the Russian identity.

The political strategy to counter a political crisis with a return to traditional values, particularly values concerning gender and sexuality, can be observed in a lot of countries in recent years, in particular, in post-Socialist countries. Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić, for example, observe identical tendencies in Serbia and Greece. Following earlier scientific research in this field and focussing explicitly on the role that queerness plays in times of a political crisis, both researchers arrive at the following conclusion:

Political crisis – a crisis of institutions – in Greece and Serbia has been marked by soaring youth unemployment, the rise of extremist nationalist groups, and intolerance towards minority groups, including the LGBTQ population. Despite the different trajectories of the crisis in Greece and Serbia, local nationalisms found intelligible scapegoats in LGBTQ people, as members of this group have had an international outlook and have often appealed to “Europe” and the “West” for enhanced visibility and rights in their respective local communities (Canakis/ Kersten-Pejanić 2016: 153).

In Russia, Vladimir Putin propagates the idea that only a unification and hermetisation of gender and identity as well as the suppression of identity diversity can guarantee the rebuilding of a uniform national identity. The politics of Vladimir Putin are based on traditional and moral values. Heteronormativity is not only the generally valid concept for gender; it provides also the blueprint for social structures like the family, society as a whole, and, ultimately, the Russian nation. This can be observed in Putin’s socio-political platform which aims at regulating sexuality and sexual desire. In December 2012, the Russian president pushed for a new family norm based on traditional values and gender ideas. He encouraged Russian families to have, at least, an average of three children. The idea was supported not only by politicians, but also by the Russian Orthodox Church. Its public expression illustrated the concept of the family as a setting of reproduction with a traditional allocation of roles embedded in a strict gender binary. The new norm reflected the general belief that there are biologically predetermined stereotypical gender roles.



In June 2013, Vladimir Putin signed the so-called *gay propaganda law* which bans the public distribution<sup>36</sup> of information about non-traditional sexual relations and prevents Gay Prides and other public queer activities (Essig 2014, Jefferson Lenskyj 2014). This law was not only meant to maintain traditional gender stereotypes. Its goal was to regulate sexual desire and behaviour within a predetermined and rigid gender frame, the “heterosexual matrix” as Butler (1991) calls it.

The recent political decision to ban people with a trans-identity because of an alleged mental disorder from passing the driver’s license and from car-driving at all stands in line with previous political interventions and can only be interpreted as a radical addition to the propaganda law (Burmakova 2010, Kondakov n.d., 2014, Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015, Sozaev 2010, cf. also URL 26, 27).

The regulations, which affect people deemed to have “sexual disorders”, also affect fetishists, voyeurs, exhibitionists and transvestites, and were immediately condemned by human rights activists as discriminatory (The Guardian Online, 9 January 2015, URL 28).

The objective of these policies is not only to marginalise homosexual individuals and to regulate sexuality and forms of (sexual) desire (Stella/Nartova 2016). The ban must also be explicitly understood as a further step to encroach upon identity forms beyond the gender dichotomy outside the heterosexual and heteronormative matrix and upon identity in general. As the reader will see below, the concepts of gender and sexuality play an outstanding role for the (re)construction of the Russian national identity.

#### *4 Gender Identity: On the Relevance of Traditional Gender Ideas*

Dealing with gender ideas and gender roles in contemporary Russia and outlining the development that Russian identity policies have undergone is a quite conflicting and ambivalent task; it is not as easy and obvious as it may seem. A superficial analysis of gender relations in the Soviet and post-

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<sup>36</sup> Following the example of Russia, Kazakhstan has thought for many years about introducing a bill that would ban the “propaganda” of homosexuality among minors (URL 24). However, in 2015, the political institutions decided not to take this kind of political steps and rejected the formerly intended bill (URL 25).

Soviet periods might arrive at the conclusion that the end of communism also meant the end of emancipatory policies and a return to more traditional concepts, especially during Putin's presidencies (Menzel 2013, Nohejl 2013a). One would be mistaken, however, to accept official Soviet propaganda at face value. A closer examination of women's and men's roles in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods reveals that there are more parallels and continuities than one might observe at first glance.

Officially, Soviet Russia implemented gender equality and intended to abolish traditional gender ideas. Men and women were declared to be equal. According to communist propaganda, discrimination against women had ended. It was also proclaimed that women enjoyed the same rights as men in the USSR and that, for example, women in Western Europe did not enjoy the same rights as women in Soviet Russia.

However, most scholars agree today that Soviet propaganda did not reflect the everyday reality in the Soviet society. In fact, the division between men and women and ideas about gender which had already existed under the tsars continued to exert its influence under the communist regime. Chiefly, gender equality meant that women had the right and option to work and that this right even extended to trades and industries which were traditionally considered as "men's work". However, in Soviet Russia, the possibility for women to access the labour market was not based on the idea that work can be an instrument of self-realisation or individual autonomy. The *working woman* was a political idea the intention of which was to incorporate women actively into the establishment of socialism. The so-called *women's question* (*zhenskii vopros*) was declared to be solved. After all, if women's rights are equated with the right to work the fact that women work means that gender equality has been achieved.

Yet, this circular reasoning fell short of painting a complete picture of gender relations. At home, the traditional division of labour remained intact for many Russian women. Not only were they working paid jobs, they were also responsible for doing household chores and raising their children. It may seem odd now but official doctrine was peculiarly lopsided at the time. It called for gender equality and improving the situation of women, yet, it always fell short of acknowledging that true equality would have to affect men and their situation, too. As a result, men's status remained untouched. Men were workers and heads of their families. They were neither expected nor asked to keep the house and to take care of their children. Moreover,

women were mainly employed in the service sector. Consequently, they were underrepresented in executive and management positions and thus excluded from positions of power (Zdravomyslova et al. 2009).

Apart from the fact that women were available to the labour market and that politics actively supported women's inclusion in the workforce, one may argue that there was an absence of genuine and substantial indications of (a real) gender equality in Soviet Russia. The Soviet Russian society was constructed along a strict binary gender axis which consisted of two hermetically closed gender centres on each side that, allegedly, did not overlap. Nothing seemed to be between these centres so that the axis was thought to be equilibrated. Both centres – meaning the male centre and the female centre – were assumed to be characterised by different and mutually complementary specifics from which the respective tasks, responsibilities, and duties of men and women were derived. Women were primarily seen and treated as the “weaker sex” and consequently associated with those stereotypes and clichés that are well-known in other socio-cultures, too. These stereotypes relegated women amongst other things to the roles of mothers, child carers, and housewives. Men, in contrast, were considered and treated as the “stronger sex” which is characterised by dominance and superiority. The man was the head of the family, the decision maker, the main breadwinner, a hard worker as well as a powerful and active creature, equipped with energy, strength, and a sense of responsibility, someone who realises innovative and essential plans.

Above all, men were seen as non-women (Riabov/ Riabova 2008). This is a very significant factum because it points us to the deeply rooted heteronormativity which pervaded the Soviet society in spite of its purported progressiveness. Heteronormativity was a highly important concept for approaching and thinking gender and identity in general. The two accepted gender identities – woman and man – were constantly embedded in a heteronormative frame in which attraction was only conceivable between the poles of the gender binary. This heterosexual constellation was never questioned. It was perceived as natural and, hence, as biologically determined. At times – and this may seem peculiar for a society which, officially tried to abolish religion – gender attributes and roles as well as the concept of heteronormativity were justified as parts of God's creation. Consequently, it was upheld that women behave, think, and talk like

women because they are women by nature and that men behave, think, and talk like men because they are men by biology from birth.

As we can see, gender relations in Soviet Russia were characterised by a certain ambivalence which was the result of the tension between official propaganda and real life. Certainly, the purported achievement of gender equality must be called an illusion.

Now, it should be asked whether the end of communism affected these concepts of gender. Which changes or continuities can be observed in the post-Soviet period? Since the early 1990s, the Russian Federation has lived through a period of profound and far-reaching changes as to gender ideas. Recently, an intensive shift in favour of more traditional gender ideas can be observed. Kirilina (2015) speaks of the “trend to the reanimation and strengthening of old patriarchal stereotypes”.

On the surface, the tendency dominates to adopt the old Western pragmatic two-gender-model again, after the “all-human” unisex utopia of the Soviet Union has failed. One cannot dispute the fact that there are “strong” women under the new regime who make “their way to the top”. However, the ideal of the hegemonic macho is still deeply engrained in society, the ideal of the successful “biznesmen” surrounded by female creatures of luxury who, in contrast to him, have to be beautiful and devoted above all and whose activities are limited to consumption [transl.] (Nohejl 2013b: 87).<sup>37</sup>

Women are increasingly removed from the sphere of activity, production, innovation, and creativity. The concept of passive femininity is widely established (Nohejl 2013b). Women’s perception is centred on their outward appearance. Men, in contrast, embody mainly pure dominance and have to demonstrate power. They are recognised by their power, activity, and action (Riabova 2002).

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<sup>37</sup> Original: “Dabei dominiert an der Oberfläche die Tendenz, sich nach den havarierten „allmenschlichen“ Unisex-Utopien der Sowjetzeit wieder verstärkt das pragmatische Zweigeschlechtermodell westlicher Prägung zu eigen zu machen. Zwar gibt es auch unter den neuen gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen unstreitig „starke“ Frauen, die sich ihren „Weg nach oben“ bahnen; doch insgesamt hat sich tief das Ideal vom hegemonialen Macho eingepägt, vom erfolgreichen „biznesmen“, an dessen Seite sich weibliche Luxusgeschöpfe tummeln, die in erster Linie schön und hingabevoll zu sein haben und deren Aktivitäten sich auf den Konsum beschränken.”

This gendered political drama reinscribes patriarchy – the dominance of perceived masculinity over femininity and the relative empowerment of men versus women (Sperling 2015: 7).

Women are primarily perceived visually. [...] A woman is compared to artwork. [...] It is precisely the image of a woman which creates the model of pure beauty. [...] The aesthetics of men is of a different nature. Here, it is the aesthetics of power and superiority, of fight and victory. Men compete against each other in battle, not in beauty pageants. Their handsomeness is dynamic. It appears on the surface in the fight with the enemy – with the warrior or with the bull. This is another kind of art. The woman is attractive, the man is impressive. [...] The woman inspires, the man acts [transl.] (Arutiunova 2002: 483).<sup>38</sup>

In her analysis of stereotypes and stereotypical ideas within Russian society, Kirilina (1999: 73-77, cf. also 2002) affirms this conclusion. Today, the woman is generally thought of as a beautiful creature with soft features and a big heart. Women are wise, emotional, and willing to make sacrifices. They are seen as wives, mothers, and housewives. In contrast to this, men are associated primarily with power. A man works physically, has a strong leaning towards alcohol and is permanently looking for fun.<sup>39</sup>

These traditional gender stereotypes and gender ideas are already taught and conveyed by parents in early childhood (Herma 2003, Kletsina 2009a, 2009b).

In every society, it is expected from children with different genders that they behave differently, communicate differently with each other, so that,

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<sup>38</sup> Original: “Женщины, прежде всего, воспринимаются визуально. [...] Женщина приравнивается к произведению искусства. [...] [И]менно образ женщины формирует модель чистой красоты. [...] Эстетика мужчин имеет другую природу. Это эстетика власти и силы, противоборства и победы. Мужчины участвуют в конкурсах борьбы, а не красоты. Их красота динамична. Она проявляется себя в сражении с противником – воином или быком. Это искусство другого рода. Женщина привлекательна, мужчина импозантен. [...] Женщина вдохновляет, мужчина действует.”

<sup>39</sup> For more detail, cf. also Utrata (2015).

consequently, boys and girls behave differently in every society [transl.] (Kletsina 2009b: 201).<sup>40</sup>

Immediately after birth, children generally learn that they are either a girl or a boy and they learn moreover that all people surrounding them are constantly classified as male or female (Mogge-Grotjahn 2004: 93, cf. also Livia/ Hall 1997). Today, the education of children in Russia is heavily influenced by the belief in biological determinism. As a consequence, any interests of children which are at odds with their “natural” sex are often ignored. This shows that individuality does not always play a relevant role. Most of the time, it is more important to fit collective ideas: girls are given the impression that a person of the female sex must always be *dobraia* ‘well-tempered’, *skromnaia* ‘modest’, *poslushnaia* ‘obedient’, *zabotливаia* ‘careful’, *umeiushchaia sledit’ za svoei vneshnost’iu* ‘interested in her looks’, *prilezhnaia* ‘diligent’, and *trudoliubivaia* ‘hard-working’ (Semenova/ Semenova 2009: 212). In contrast to this, boys must learn to smile at girls’ and women’s weaknesses, to refuse to do women’s work, to demonstrate strength and dominance, and to suppress their feelings. They are considered as strong(-willed), brave, decisive, persistent, goal-oriented, self-dependent, principled, and competent. Consequently, boys are given the impression from an early age that a man must earn much money, aspire to power, and seek to improve his position (Semenova/ Semenova 2009: 213f). Outside of the family home and of school, these gender ideas and gender attributes are emphasised especially in the media and in advertising. It is from the media and advertisements that girls and boys learn how a person of their sex looks like, behaves, speaks, and thinks (Mogge-Grotjahn 2004: 95). As shown by Kirilina (2015), Russian schoolbooks and textbooks or other learning, teaching, and writing materials as well as toys and, in particular, their packaging have a strictly gender-oriented design today. Their appearance is characterised by gender-stereotypical colours, figures, and other illustrations which make children constantly aware of stereotypical gender ideas. Men are drawn as strong, dominant, powerful, cool, and casual creatures; they are conquerors and protectors. Textbooks and schoolbooks for boys are often in blue colour. Cultural representations

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<sup>40</sup> Original: “В любом обществе от разнополых детей ожидают разного поведения и по-разному обращаются с ними, в соответствии с этим в любом обществе мальчики и девочки ведут себя по-разному.”

of girls and women differ strongly from representations of their male counterparts. In the best case, as demonstrated by Kirilina (2015), girls, female adolescents, or women are depicted as naïve, submissive, and shy. The covers of schoolbooks and textbooks for girls are often pink or, at least, shades of red (cf. also Valdrová 2005). In the media, women are mainly pictured as sexual objects. This is confirmed by Sperling (2015: 57):

In Russia, as elsewhere, commercial capitalism commodified and objectified women's bodies in particular. Print and television advertisements began regularly to feature skimpily dressed women, while classified ads for secretarial positions began demanding that applicants submit photos of themselves along with their applications and encouraged only "uninhibited" women to apply. By the end of the decade, women's bodies were a regular feature of public advertising and remained so into the Putin era.

### *5 Masculinity, Heteronormativity, and Biopolitics in Today's Russia*

The return to a patriarchal concept of society with rigid gender roles also implies a return to a traditional gender hierarchy with masculinity at its top. One can observe, indeed, a virtual cult of masculinity in Russia. Masculinity is exaggerated and celebrated in public. The heroic presentation of President Vladimir Putin and his machismo in the media may seem odd to a Western audience; from a Russian perspective, however, Putin's appearances reflect the power of a decidedly masculine nation (cf. Sperling 2015). Although most men do not fit the ideal of the "real man", the concept of hegemonic masculinity has advanced to a point where it has become the prototypical masculine ideal for many males (Coates 2007: 42). The Russian man is neither a woman, nor a child, nor a homosexual (Riabov 2007, Riabov/ Riabova 2008, Riabova/ Tsalko 2011). It is an idea of masculinity based on misogyny and homophobia (Coates 2007: 46-48).

It must be noted that this has not always been the case. The idea of masculinity in contemporary Russia has undergone a significant change since the Russian Federation was founded. It is remarkable that in the early 1990s, men were often associated with stereotypical feminine characteristics and specifics such as dependency, indecisiveness, passivity, or weakness. This kind of attribution is not surprising if one considers the

socio-political context in which it happened. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the position and the value of men within Russian society changed rapidly and, due to the transformation of the political and social system, men had to redefine themselves and find a new role within Russian society. The so-called *demasculinisation* of the Russian man and, consequently, the Russian society in the 1990s, which some scholars called a “crisis of masculinity”, became the focus of research projects which studied the change of masculinity and the “new man” (e.g. Ashwin/ Lytkina 2004, Baer 2009, Maydell 2013, Riabov/ Riabova 2008, Riabova 2002, Riabova/ Tsalko 2011).

During Perestroika and in the first years after Perestroika, the man was blamed for his dependence, childishness as well as for dependence on the state, the society, and the woman [transl.] (Riabova/ Tsalko 2011: 207).<sup>41</sup>

Since the turn of the millennium, however, one can observe the opposite tendency, namely an active *remasculinisation* of the Russian man and the Russian society (Riabov/ Riabova 2008, Riabova/ Tsalko 2011). Once again, societal discourse prioritises the stereotype of the powerful man (*nastoiashchii muzhchina* ‘real man’, *nastoiashchii muzhik* ‘real lad’) which ushers in a return to a more traditional form of masculinity (Baer 2009, Riabova 2002).

I have already mentioned that in contrast to the widely established and propagated ideal of “real” masculinity, men are sometimes drawn as sensitive and, to some extent, weaker and softer creatures. In metropolises such as Moscow or Saint Petersburg, men have opened up to new concepts of masculinity such as *metrosexuality* or so-called *spornosexuality*. Well-groomed, fashionable and in touch with their feelings, they break away from the mainstream idea of the qualities a man should embody. This deviant masculinity can be observed in everyday life, for instance in advertising.

It is in this field of tension between traditionalism and modernity that Russian men must come to terms with their own masculinity. The pull towards a patriarchal model of masculinity is great. While a relevant part of

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<sup>41</sup> Original: “Мужчина перестроечных и первых постперестроечных лет обвинялся в несостоятельности, инфантильности, зависимости от государства, общества и женщины.”



society tries to break with traditional ideas and roles or to approach identity diversity in a different, more tolerant way, politics, the Russian Orthodox Church, and some institutions of education combine their resources in favour of establishing traditional gender values again and of re-masculinising the Russian man and the Russian society.

It is important to note that this patriarchal model of masculinity has important implications for the regulation of the relations between the sexes. Man and woman are concepts infused with rigid norms of sexual desire and sexual attractiveness. In her theory of the heterosexual matrix, Judith Butler (1991) theorises that thinking gender identity in a strict normative, heterosexual way means that people belonging to one centre of the gender axis are only attractive to the members of the opposite centre. As a consequence, heterosexuality is crucial for the existence and the consistency of this binary system. Hence, heterosexuality as the most important component of the gender binary leads to a general heteronormativity which shapes both, the social micro- and macrostructures. As a whole, the Russian society obeys to this normative and heterosexual imperative from which it derives its normalcy (Baer 2009: 9). In this context, the heterosexual gender binary has to be regarded as the starting point or the basis for other organisations and institutions as well as for certain measures and projects, such as partnership, marriage, family (models), school, church, labour market, sports, art, advertising, society, and the nation in general. Heteronormative gender ideas and the gender balance as well as the binary gender axis are maintained by political and socio-political decisions which influence public opinion and the dominant discourse. The aforementioned policies, like the family with three children or the anti-gay laws, highlight their political enforcement.

Thus, a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalized the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption (Butler 2004a: 43).<sup>42</sup>

In Russia, the wide-spread belief in a heterosexual gender binary is mainly justified by a reference to nature *per se*. Moreover, institutions, like the

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. also Butler (2004b: 159).

Church or schools, have an enormous power and exert great influence on thinking and shaping gender and identity whose heterosexual orientation is allegedly given by God because God created Adam and Eve. Heterosexual identity is very often justified by quoting and referring to the Bible and its moral values.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

(Genesis 2:20-25)

This assumption is not only articulated by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow (e.g. URL 29), but it is also stated by parts of the Russian society.

God made people this way. And to confront his will means a grave sin. (URL 30)<sup>43</sup>

And we came into this world only in order to correct God's mistakes. (URL 31)<sup>44</sup>

All of these influences combined exert enormous pressure on people to live up to the stereotype of their respective gender. The insistent appeal of President Vladimir Putin that every family should have an average of three children is motivated by nothing more than the intention to resurrect and to strengthen the traditional gender ideas and to maintain the traditional functions and roles of man and woman within society although the pro-

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<sup>43</sup> Original: “Бог сделал этих людей такими. И идти против его воли самый тяжкий грех.”

<sup>44</sup> Original: “И пришли мы в этот мир лишь для того, чтоб исправлять ошибки бога.”

clamation of this norm is “officially” motivated to raise the birth rate and to give financial support to larger families.

[I]n Vladimir Putin’s Russia, gender issues were raised in connection with family and demographic policies (Temkina/ Zdravomyslova 2014: 262).

In an interview at the plenary meeting of the *Valdai Discussion Club* in 2013, for example, Putin answered the question of Professor Gerhard Mangott from the University of Innsbruck about his intention regarding the anti-gay laws. Besides the fact that Putin negated that there is oppression of sexual minorities in Russia and that members of sexual minorities are punished because of their sexual orientation, he justified the passing of this law by referring to the country’s sinking birth rate and by painting a scenario of extinction.<sup>45</sup> The traditional gender order is thus embedded in the context of reproduction and is exclusively articulated from this perspective. Interestingly, the president’s analysis, which is also regularly featured in the media, is not supported by official statistics. Whatever the future may hold for Russia, demographic catastrophe is clearly not on this nation’s trajectory (cf. URL 32, 33, 34).<sup>46</sup>

### *6 Gender Asymmetry and the Postgender Option*

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the popularity of traditional gender roles and ideas affects the Russian society to the same extent or is shared by all Russians. Indeed, a tendency is visible in contemporary Russia which runs in the opposite direction and which is characterised by a stark opposition to traditional concepts of gender: the “trend to eliminate gender asymmetry” (Kirilina 2015). This tendency seems to be rather unexpected, when one considers the current political and social circum-

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<sup>45</sup> See this part of the interview online at: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8vWZ4MbWdYiSW5SSGdCLTEzX0U/edit?pli=1> [last accessed on 14 November 2015]. For watching the whole plenary meeting see online at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PtsodE-ZkY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PtsodE-ZkY) [last accessed on 14 November 2015].

<sup>46</sup> The same argumentation was presented already in the 1980s. See here e.g. Hauer et al. (1984: 13).

stances. It seems to be quite irreconcilable with the generally propagated traditionalism.<sup>47</sup>

For a long time, playing with gender and identity roles seemed to belong primarily to the world of music, film (e.g. *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Zdravstvuite, ia vasha tëtia* [Hello, I'm your aunt]<sup>48</sup>, *Veselchaki* [Gay birds]<sup>49</sup>)<sup>50</sup>, theatre (e.g. Beijing Opera<sup>51</sup>, ballett<sup>52</sup>), and to the art scene in general. Blurred identity lines, homoerotic elements, or undefinable gender concepts were mainly seen as a feature of artistic expression or as a part of show business. Russian singers, like Valerii Leont'ev, Boris Moiseev, Filipp Kirkorov, and the well-known Verka Serdiuchka as well as more bizarre artists like Sergei Zverev always were and still are seen as eccentric personas and their behaviour and appearance are often denounced as “typical for an artist”. The same applies for international popstars like David Bowie, Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Lady Gaga, RuPaul, Dana International, Elton John and many others. It is evident that an undefinable or extravagant appearance has also fuelled rumours as to the sexual identity of these people.

Under the influence of globalisation, new gender and identity concepts have entered the Russian society and have become increasingly visible in Russia's everyday life. Trans-people or genderqueers are a significant part of today's media and play, for example, an important role for advertising as

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<sup>47</sup> The two contrary tendencies described by Kirilina – the trend to eliminate gender asymmetry and the trend to reanimate old patriarchal stereotypes – can also be observed in other countries, for example, in France. This is illustrated by the Professor of Philosophy Estelle Ferrarese from the University of Strasbourg, online at: IPG – Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft, Vodcast, “Allergisch gegen die Gender-Idee”: [www.ipg-journal.de/vodcast/artikel/allergisch-gegen-jede-gender-idee-593](http://www.ipg-journal.de/vodcast/artikel/allergisch-gegen-jede-gender-idee-593) [last accessed on 14 February 2016].

<sup>48</sup> Details of the movie can be found online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hello,\\_I'm\\_Your\\_Aunt!](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>Hello,_I'm_Your_Aunt!) [last accessed on 14 November 2015].

<sup>49</sup> Details of the movie can be found online at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1505957/> [last accessed on 14 November 2015].

<sup>50</sup> For more details as to non-heteronormative personas in Russian and international movies, see Kondakov (2011).

<sup>51</sup> At the Beijing Opera, all male and female roles are traditionally and usually played by male artists.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. the homoerotic elements in *Swan Lake*, John Neumeier's production and choreography of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* or Nacho Duato's production of *Castrati*.

is shown by Kirilina (2015). Moreover, one can find elements of camp in advertising which can create – mainly in the context of the new masculinity – a homoerotic atmosphere.<sup>53</sup> The existence of a postgender option is increasingly noticeable in Russia's society today.

From a postgender perspective, identity is seen as ambiguous and blurred. The postgender paradigm postulates that it is not possible to define a person according to a stable and singular identity because people do not have only one identity (cf. Hieber/ Villa 2007). The postgender paradigm aims at deconstructing traditional gender norms completely and stresses the idea that gender identity is a constantly and invariantly institutionalised and ritualised concept. It has started to influence Russian society and has triggered – although to a lesser degree as compared to other countries and socio-cultures – the formation of a new and definitely pluralistic model of man in Russia (Genz/ Brabon 2009: 28). This does not imply that Russian people, themselves, increasingly show a postgender identity today or try to eliminate strict gender definitions. Although one has to acknowledge that, for example, sex reassignment surgeries have been successfully carried out in (Soviet) Russia since the 1970s by Viktor Kalnberzs and Irina Golubeva (URL 35, 36) and although trans-identities or transgender cases occasionally do appear in public like the transgender Alina from Moscow (URL 37, 38) or the case of LGBT rights activists Reida Linn and Sofiiia Grozovskaia<sup>54</sup>, postgender is by no means a mainstream phenomenon.

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<sup>53</sup> See here for example the German advertising of Iglo from 2001, online at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HegAvvhmoAE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HegAvvhmoAE). See also [www.spiegel.de/panorama/schwule-in-der-tv-werbung-von-schwanensee-zu-fischstaebchen-a-117710.html](http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/schwule-in-der-tv-werbung-von-schwanensee-zu-fischstaebchen-a-117710.html); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymAeKDtf0K8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymAeKDtf0K8); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb90Vkyqrts](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb90Vkyqrts); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6aivppmzMo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6aivppmzMo); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBuKuA9nHsw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBuKuA9nHsw) [all last accessed on 22 February 2016].

<sup>54</sup> In March 2016, Reida Linn married her partner Sofiiia Grozovskaia in Moscow. This event caused furor in Moscow and in Russia in general because Reida's partner is transgender. The police had intended to press charges against the couple – the police argued that Reida Linn and Sofiiia Grozovskaia had committed so-called *hooliganism* (*khuliganstvo*) and contravened against the Russian LGBT propaganda law. Yet, the marriage had to be registered by the Russian authorities in the end. Reida's partner Sofiiia identifies herself as a transgender woman who is currently transitioning from male to female. However, since Sofiiia's passport still identifies her as (officially) male, there were no legal reasons for barring them from marriage. Cf. online at: [www.queer.de/detail.php?article\\_id=25807](http://www.queer.de/detail.php?article_id=25807) and <http://moslenta.ru/>

“Eliminating strict gender definitions” rather means that the Russian society is increasingly confronted with the plurality and diversity of identity as well as with the fact that identity offers a broad range of interpretation illustrated by trans- and other cross-identities (e.g. genderqueer people) which penetrate everyday life as can be seen when examining certain artists, films, or advertising (Genz/ Brabon 2009: 28, cf. also Hall et al. 2013, Hieber/ Villa 2007 and, as to the principle of gender as performance, Butler 1997). As a consequence, Russians have become increasingly aware of the fact that terms and concepts like *woman*, *man*, or *mother* are more ambiguous and fluid than they have seemed up to now. Indeed, it would be difficult for many Russians to uphold the idea of two sexes as the number of people increases who have been exposed to other identities like *sex not applicable* or *sex unknown* in the media, but also in everyday life as described by Kirilina (2015) and Scheller-Boltz (2013). Nevertheless, trans-identities still have a „high potential of irritation“ (Kroll 2002: 392), because they fall out of the heteronormative gender dichotomy and do not fit any of the generally accepted ideas of identity.

Like in other countries, the emergence of new concepts of identity raises the question of whether the educational system should incorporate and reflect these identities. Contrary to what Western readers might expect the debate about the inclusion of other identity forms has not been suspended or stopped. Most scholars still plead in favour of maintaining traditional values and traditional gender ideas as the basis for teaching gender roles and relations (cf. also Kliuchko/ Shtyleva 2015). Others, like Semenova and Semenova (2009: 217) reject both, the uniform individual and the uniform gender category for the Russian society. They plead, instead, for an exclusive self-realisation of every individual, irrespectively of their sex as well as for the plurality and diversity of identities as a means to support tolerance, to reduce thinking in categories and to end discrimination.

### 7 Sexual Identity: Enforcing Heteronormativity

While a model of education and society that is based on a strictly binary gender division according to traditional gender ideas is sometimes rejected or, at least, critically questioned in Russian psychology and pedagogics today, as well as in parts of the society, such an open-minded approach is, in general, not widely accepted in the Russian Federation. In 2013, the Federal law against homosexual propaganda (*zakon protiv propagandy gomoseksualizma*) – which is officially called the Russian Federal law for the purpose of protecting children from information advocating a denial of traditional family values (*zakon o zaprete propagandy netraditsionnykh seksual'nykh otnoshenii sredi nesovershennoletnikh*) – entered into force as Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation (cf. URL 39). The “ban of homosexual propaganda” was established in other laws, too: it is incorporated into Article 5 Point 2.4 of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation “On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development” (*O zashchite detei ot informatsii, prichiniaushchei vred ikh zdorov'iu i razvitiuu*) (cf. URL 40) and it is enshrined in Article 14 Point 1 of the Federal Law “On the basic guarantees of the rights of the child in the Russian Federation” (*Ob osnovnykh garantiakh prav rebenka v Rossiiskoi Federatsii*) (cf. URL 41). Consequently, “homosexual propaganda”, “public homosexuality”, and “publicly visible homosexual activities” have been unlawful for more than two years now (Gorbachev 2013, Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015).

In 2015, it was additionally proposed to ban people with a trans-identity from driving cars and from obtaining a driver's licence. Trans-people as well as people with a deviant sexual desire (e.g. fetishists, exhibitionist) have been basically equated with people who suffer from a mental disorder.

The political steps to regulate sexuality and sexual desire in order to maintain a traditional society and identity model stirred up intensive international debates, especially before the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. Many international institutions, organisations, and politicians interpreted the attempt to ban the visibility of homosexuality as an increasing restriction of human rights (cf. Jefferson Lenskyj 2014, Persson/ Pettersson 2014). The *propaganda laws* have curtailed the freedom of non-heteronormative individuals and provoked massive doubts internationally that sexual minorities were no longer protected by the Russian state. Last but

not least, it is still not really clear how the legal terminology has to be interpreted and how the laws are actually applied (Kondakov 2012a). Temkina and Zdravomyslova (2014: 263), for instance, argue that the propaganda law

suffers from inconsistencies and terminological ambiguity – the term “propaganda” is not defined, and pedophiles are mixed up with homosexuals.

Definitely, the use of the term *propaganda* and, respectively, *propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships* seems to be quite broad and undefined (Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015). Due to the definition of propaganda every action could be interpreted as propagandistic.

Propaganda is the distribution of information which intends to form the non-traditional sexual stance of minor persons, the attractivity of non-traditional sexual relationships, the distorted idea of the social equality of traditional and non-traditional sexual relationships, or which intends to obtrude information on non-traditional sexual relationships that arouses interest as to those relationships [transl.] (URL 42).<sup>55</sup>

Second, the *protection of minors* is not clearly defined (Gorbachev 2013). Even before the introduction of the *propaganda laws*, minors were banned from entering many gay and lesbian venues such as bars and clubs. It is hard to understand how the shutting down of places helps to protect individuals who were not allowed to patronise them in the first place. The connection between banning trans-people from driving and protecting minors is not obvious or even logical, either.

The offense of propagating non-traditional sexual relationships in the presence of minors is open to interpretation. Everything which seems to be socially non-conforming and outside the heteronormative frame can be assessed as homosexual propaganda and punished accordingly (although

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<sup>55</sup> Original: “Пропаганда [...], выразившаяся в распространении информации, направленной на формирование у несовершеннолетних нетрадиционных сексуальных установок, привлекательности нетрадиционных сексуальных отношений, искаженного представления о социальной равноценности традиционных и нетрадиционных сексуальных отношений, либо навязывание информации о нетрадиционных сексуальных отношениях, вызывающей интерес к таким отношениям.”



the Russian President Vladimir Putin never tires of repeating and stressing in public that queer people do not face any oppression<sup>56</sup> in Russia and that homosexuality *per se* is not a crime in Russia – in comparison to some U.S. states, where, according to Vladimir Putin, homosexuality is still considered a crime and, consequently, punished accordingly<sup>57</sup>. The passing of the anti-propaganda law strengthens, above all, the social exclusion and the social pathologisation of identities. Living conditions for people who self-identify as homosexuals have become difficult. The new law also promotes homophobia in Russia (Althaler 2014, Hauer et al. 1984: 22). As a consequence, the media<sup>58</sup> and parts of the Russian society have joined state authorities – among them the Russian police, the competent authorities of the ministry of interior affairs, and other security services – in maintaining the heteronormative order. It has become acceptable to advocate the punishment of non-heteronormative lifestyles or to call for the liquidation of non-heterosexual people (cf. URL 48). The incidence of verbal and/ or physical attacks – mostly on homosexual men – has risen (URL 49, 50, 51, 52, 53). Brutal, dastard, and physically or mentally harmful attacks on homosexuals are not only carried out by individuals or small groups of individuals. It has been observed that people join certain unofficial organisations or private gangs which act against homosexuals and supporters of sexual minorities in an organised and perfidious way. In Saint Petersburg, for instance, a group of so-called *gay hunters* (*gei-khantery*) has been

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<sup>56</sup> In contrast to this, the Russian politician and member of the Legislative Assembly of Saint Petersburg for the party *United Russia* (*Edinaia Rossiia*) Vitalii Milonov has repeatedly voiced his opinion that homosexuality is a crime and has likened it to an illness (URL 43).

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., the interview by Charlie Rose in 2015 (URL 44), a news coverage on abc News (URL 45), and the official and public treatment of homosexuals, e.g., by the police, demonstrated by the coverage of dbate (URL 46) or by the coverage of Vice News “Young and Gay in Putin’s Russia (URL 47).

<sup>58</sup> As an example, I would like to mention here the Russian journalist Nikolai Troitskii who posted in his private blog: “I hope and believe that this kind of ugliness will never come to Russia. I do not need this kind of freedom and democracy. No kind of tolerance is enough, against your own will, you think about a powerful bomb which would kill only the homosexuals. To be honest, if all these perverted creatures pegged out, the world would be much cleaner.” For more information on this statement and on the different reactions to it, cf. the special issue of the television programme *Pust’ govoriat* [Let them speak] from 2012 on this topic, including Nikolai Troitskii and selected guests with a different stance on sexuality and homosexuality; online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLLIPE7iT68&spfreload=10> [last accessed on 19 September 2015].

established who literally track down and hunt homosexual people, LGBT activists, and any of their sympathisers in order to name and expose them in public. The members of this homophobic formation bully and blackmail people; they denounce homosexuals and LGBT activists at work in order to destroy their careers and to remove them from their functions and positions.<sup>59</sup> “Gay hunters” focus especially on people working in educational institutions, like teachers or kindergarten workers, but also on actresses/ actors, singers, politicians, and other officials and functionaries. They write hate messages and threatening letters, they post videos on the Internet, giving names and showing the suspected victim directly, and they contact employers and colleagues. Homosexuals and gay activists are seen as a “perverse shabbiness” (*izvrashchennoe nichtozhestvo*) and as “the face shovels of Russia” (*mogil’naia lopata Rossii*) because of their sexual orientation which is said to be a sign of their “non-patriotism” (*ne-patriotizm*). The “gay hunters” see themselves as “creators” (*tvortsy*). Consequently, they are against people who “destroy” (*razrushaiut*). They insinuate that queerness or queer activism aim at weakening the state and at destroying society and culture (Ayoub/ Paternotte 2014).

Despite these recent developments, it is interesting to note that the perception of both, sexuality and sexual identity has undergone deep and profound changes during the past few decades as well as during the past few centuries in general (Baer 2009, Healey 2014a, 2013, 2001). There was actually a time, when sexuality and sexual identity were more liberated and, moreover, not seen as strictly limited within a heteronormative frame. In the course of Russia’s history, there have been periods of time when non-heteronormative sexual practices were tolerated or, at least, perceived as something that can happen. Indeed, there have been periods during which sexual desire was not primarily related to the male or female gender. If one considers sexual identity as the connection between

the categories of biological and social gender as well as of sexual desire which functions as certain specifics that construct a personal and cultural

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<sup>59</sup> Read and watch a coverage about “Hunting the Rainbow” from 19 May 2014 on [lesbiru.com](http://lesbiru.com); online at: <http://lesbiru.com/2014/05/gay-hunters/> [last accessed on 17 February 2016].

identity, increasingly considering sexuality in particular [transl.] (Kroll 2002: 360)<sup>60</sup>

then sexual desire is neither directly nor generally related to a biological gender. Rather, sexual desire must be seen as a part of the self-concept of a person so that sexual desire is an essential part of the individual identity. In addition, this means that the sexual desire of a person may differ from the general norm. For a long time, this awareness existed within the Russian society, too. It was known that some people had a sexual desire which deviated from the traditional standard which means that their sexual desire was not according to their sex. It was neither proper nor morally correct to talk in public about those circumstances or to raise this subject in any way. This taboo concerned mainly homosexual practices between men. This does not mean that non-heteronormative sexual practices and desires were accepted or tolerated by Russian society. It rather means that identity restrictions were not always that rigid and that different identity concepts were known or noticeable.

In this context, however, one must not forget that even today, homosexual activities and practices are not unusual in heterosexual groups in Russia. In particular, same-sex sexual activities are used as an instrument of power and as a means to establish hierarchies within all male groups. This concerns mainly three situations:

First, in the Russian or former Soviet-Russian army and military institutions as well as in penal institutions, homosexual practices were and continue to be used in the context of the so-called *dedovshchina* (Sperling 2015, Svetlichnaia et al. 2012, Yusupova 2015). This informal practice of establishing and maintaining a hierarchical order between senior and junior conscripts or, respectively, between new and older prisoners consists of mean-spirited, vile, and infamous tasks and activities prescribed by the “seniors” in order to mortify, humiliate, and subdue the new conscripts or inmates. Often, these practices are accompanied by brutal violence and sexual abuse, including same-sex sexual acts.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Original: “Verbindungen der Kategorien des biologischen und des sozialen Geschlechts sowie des sexuellen Begehrens als Merkmale, die eine personale und kulturelle Identität unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Sexualität konstruieren.”

<sup>61</sup> In a lot of prisons, the inmates are divided into three groups: the crime lords, “ordinary criminals”, and homosexuals as the lowest caste (Yusupova 2015: 54).

Second, especially after the passing of the propaganda law – seemingly heterosexual – men have begun to occasionally engage in homosexual practices with homosexual men in order to expose and humiliate them because of their sexual orientation, using, in addition, fetish rituals which are well-known and wide-spread in the gay scene. These homophobic and stigmatising criminal acts are not only the subject of international media coverage. The perpetrators themselves film their actions and post them on the Internet. While the homosexuals are publicly exposed, their abusers themselves are caught in an obviously homosexual act. Both examples show that practices like rape are used to oppress homosexuals and, moreover, to reinforce the dominance of heteronormativity and of the heterosexual male. Homosexual practices are used, on the one hand, as an instrument of demonstrating dominance and power and, on the other hand, as an instrument to show the weakness and helplessness of non-heteronormativity.

Third, it is well-known and generally confirmed in today's pedagogy and adolescent psychology that men, male youths in particular, engage in homosexual practices of various kinds in order to experience their own body and to gain sexual experience. Although this kind of living out sexuality does not aim at subduing and humiliating people, a certain kind of competition between men can still be found.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the period of the *taboo on sexuality* which was characterised by the strong tendency to declare sexuality as a public taboo. Moreover, sexuality was instrumentalised and intentionalised and, above all, it was embedded in a rigid heterosexual frame. When the Soviet Russian civil rights campaigner and political activist Alexandra Kollontai, talking about the creation of the “new woman” under Leninism, called for the liberation of sexuality, free love, and a restructuring of the sexual order so that sex(uality) and sexual practices would be regarded as being entirely natural, her views and opinions – known later, and still today, as the “glass of water theory” (*teoriia stakana vody*) – were widely criticised and condemned as a threat to morality (Hohmann 1990). The Soviet sex and

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Homosexuals are isolated, whereas the “lords” and the “ordinary criminals” are allowed to meet and gather. The programme *Journal Reporter* on the channel Deutsche Welle TV covered this topic in an issue about “Everyday life in a Russian penal institution” dating from 2008; online at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIX6uHREY2s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIX6uHREY2s) [last accessed on 17 February 2016].

gender researcher Igor Sergeevich Kon, one of the first Russian scientists to study homosexuality, sexual minorities, and non-heteronormative concepts of identity, was initially only able to have his early academic papers on sexuality and sexual practices published abroad, in Europe, until his work was later also published in (Soviet) Russia (Kon 2010, 1989).

In Soviet Russia, sexuality was a taboo topic right up until the collapse of socialism in 1989/ 1990. Gender models and sexual relationships were ideologised constructs defined for specific purposes and not to be questioned. Public debate on these subjects was discouraged or not possible at all. The well-known and popular phrase “We do not have sex [in Russia] and we are categorically against it!” (*Nu, seksa u nas net, i my kategoricheski protiv ètogo*)<sup>62</sup> which was articulated on television in the Soviet-American talk show *Telemost Leningrad-Boston “Women Talk to Women”* (*Telemost Leningrad-Boston. Zhenshchiny govoriat z zhenshchinami*) on 17 July 1986 testifies to this general – albeit naïve and absolutely false – conviction (cf. URL 54). Bringing sexuality, sexual behaviour, and sexual practices into the public domain, that means talking about sexuality and sexual practices, reporting on them, or discussing them openly, was frowned upon. Sexuality was mainly kept behind closed doors in the USSR and was entirely controlled by centralised institutions: the Church, the school, and the family. In fact, sex education and sexual enlightenment as we understand them today were virtually non-existent, or were not addressed by these institutions in the way that might have been expected or as they are today (Kon 2010). The regulated, ideologised treatment of sexuality meant that ideals were prescribed and norms defined which served to reinforce and perpetuate traditional gender roles, setting up power structures based on ideological concepts and ultimately also giving rise to subcultures (Štulhofer/ Sandfort 2005). Moral and family values and tradition were in the interest of politicians and society; any lewd behaviour, active indulgence in sexual relations or any other practices representing not morality and chastity but simply the satisfaction of lust, were shrouded in

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<sup>62</sup> Today, this phrase or the shorter version *V SSSR seksa net* [There is no sex in the USSR] is idiomatically used to refer to a non-objective and mythologised thinking, to evidently absurd things, or to unrealistic contents. These details can be found on Wikipedia; online at: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92\\_%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A0\\_%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%B0\\_%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%82](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92_%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A0_%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%B0_%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%82) [last accessed on 14 November 2015].

silence – taboo topics. Developing and giving expression to individual identity, including the creation of a sexual identity, were not permitted in public.

When, following Perestroika, post-Socialist Russia embarked on the road towards democracy and pluralism, this opened up new ways and opportunities for the creation of personal identity or, rather, the free expression of individualism. This period can be called the *opening up of sexuality*. It led to a gradual opening up of public debate about gender and sexuality. The whole subject of sexuality was freed from the vice-like grip of ideology and morality and emerged from the hidden darkness into the glare of social debate. Talking openly about sexuality gradually became an accepted part of everyday life, something entirely normal – even on television (e.g. on Russia's first sex talk show *About That (Pro èto* – hosted by Elena Abdulaevna Khanga) (cf. URL 55). The prudery which used to be so prevalent had apparently vanished. Sexual matters could now be openly discussed or addressed. Previously banned media carrying erotic or pornographic content (e.g. *SPID Info*) quickly became widespread. From the early 1990s, sexuality became more visible in public, with the opening of sex shops and other corresponding establishments (cf. URL 56).

Those who benefited most from the lifting of the taboo on sexuality and especially from its growing presence in Russian society were sexual minorities or individuals who did not want to be forced into the clearly defined heteronormative scheme. Gradually, a more liberal attitude emerged, especially towards homosexuals, who had long suffered repression, persecution, and exclusion. The emancipation of sexuality that began in the early 1990s led in 1993 to the abolition of Article 121 which had made homosexual practices a punishable offence for decades. As a result of the legalisation of homosexuality – which coincided with Russia joining the Council of Europe in 1996 – the public expression of this sexual identity was no longer diagnosed as psychiatric illness. This meant that people leading non-heteronormative lives could gradually establish their own identity and publicly express their sexual inclinations and preferences.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> This resulted in the first gay marriage in Russia. In September 2005, Denis Gogolev and Mikhail Morozov from Nizhnii Novgorod signed a contract of civil union in the presence of a notary (<http://www.gay.ru/news/rainbow/2005/09/28-5967.htm>).

The more open approach to sexuality inevitably laid the foundations for the period of *sexual deviance and decadence* which began approximately from the late 1990s. This period was characterised by the widespread eroticisation and sexualisation of women – both in the media and in everyday life. Consequently, women emerged as strong, dominant, and self-confident individuals, yet, they were at the same time stereotyped as erotic objects of desire and lust (Menzel 2013, cf. also Kirilina 2015). For men, as already shown above, this meant the loss of their position of dominance as well as their role as protectors. These gradual shifts in the relationships between men and women and the changing gender role models led to the aforerepresented *crisis of masculinity* (Baer 2009, Healey 2001, Scholz/ Willms 2008, cf. also Connell 1995). Moreover, a more differentiated idea of masculinity (cf. the tendency of *metrosexuality*) and other identity concepts like transsexuality and genderqueer have been showing a high social influence and are therefore continuously used as productive and creative elements especially in the media which has led to a visible irritation among men (Hall et al. 2013).

Today, in turn, Russia runs through the period of the *return to a traditional moral value system*. Sexuality is located in the field of tension between, on the one hand, a liberal, free-thinking attitude that has become established in many parts of society and, on the other hand, the traditional moral values that are being propagated, primarily in political and Church circles, and vigorously promoted to the general public. Sexuality is positioned on a binary axis with roles traditionally divided. At the same time, the concept of heteronormativity is now acquiring a new importance. The idea of the “three children-marriage” as norm is one example of a socio-political measure which aims at preserving the desired hegemonial and heteronormative structures for lifestyle and society and reviving awareness of this way of life. Looking at the current discourse, homosexuality is widely considered as the enemy (for more detail, see below). It is seen as a projection screen for everything negative as well as for abnormality, decadence, and deviance that enter Russia from the Western world due to Europeanisation and globalisation. Moreover, it seems to be absolutely out of step with Russian culture and lifestyle. While

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Their church wedding had already taken place a few years before (<http://www.xs.gay.ru/?id=120255365>).

Western states try to support, to positively and efficiently use, and, in particular, to protect identity diversity, Russia is stuck in a rigid gender dichotomy and intends to reject and deny non-heteronormative lifestyles. While Western states try to integrate non-heteronormative lifestyles and to give sexual minorities the same rights that heterosexual people enjoy, Russia relies on conservative and traditional values, supports the traditional family model and appeals to the traditional gender division as to ideas, roles, and functions. Moreover, the regulation of sexual identity is used or instrumentalised in order to establish a new collective identity again according to which people of one sex have the same specifics. It is generally assumed that a socio-culture is distinguished by homogeneity which also includes the sexual identity of people and ignores the actually always given heterogeneity of a society this way (Kroll 2002: 219).

It is interesting to notice that it is mainly the Russian man whose identity is currently discussed in the field of the globally changing gender orders and gender ideas in Russia. As one could already see in the chapters above, it is obviously the Russian man and the idea of masculinity in general which are at the centre of attention when the question of non-heteronormative lifestyles, patterns, and ideas is raised. This might be, to some extent, due to the current tendency to (re-)establish again the traditional idea of masculinity and the adequate position of the man within Russian society. And, finally, it is obviously the homosexual man or the man with a homosexual attitude who is criticised, attacked, and stigmatised in this context. To demonstrate this, I would like, at the end of this chapter, to draw the reader's attention to some recent events which fuelled the debates pertaining to gender roles and gender ideas as well as to the norm of heteronormativity. The discussions on these events demonstrate respectively that Russian society is highly influenced by the current gender policies and the gender discourse in Russia as well as, of course, by the currently applicable propaganda law. However, it shows above all how deeply divided Russian society is today, oscillating between traditionalism and non-heteronormativity, with a part of the Russians acknowledging and appreciating gender diversity and tolerating a flexible idea of masculinity and with another part relying on and adhering strictly to traditional ideas of man and woman. Last but not least, these events make clear that the idea of homosexuality or of non-heteronormativity respectively is not only used to stigmatise male individuals, but it is also instrumentalised in order to



construct everyday structures, activities, and phenomena according to traditional gender ideas and to assess and to categorise them as masculine or feminine and, consequently, as acceptable or “normal” or unacceptable or “abnormal” respectively (see also the following chapter on identity, space, and nation).

### 8 *Queering Male Identity in Art and Sports Changes Russian Reality*

In the following, I will provide examples from the art sphere in the widest sense. As the ballet choreographer John Neumeier said in 2013, art and culture may build bridges within society as well as between people and cultures (cf. URL 57). Culture and art may establish understanding and make people think so that these spheres are potentially capable of mediating between politics, everyday life, and people. Nonetheless, the perception and appreciation of art is always discursively shaped. Art is assessed on the basis of one’s ideas and opinion so that people make demands on art for they wish their opinion and ideas to come alive and to be confirmed in and by art. Consequently, art always takes the risk of being not appreciated and of being rejected.

In Russia, some reactions on recent cultural and art events were obviously meant to express some people’s attitude *vis á vis* the currently globally changing gender orders and the highly visible identity diversity. So, while in 2012 some people in Saint Petersburg left the audience because of a same-sex male pas de deux in John Neumeier’s choreography of – Thomas Mann’s homoerotic novel – *Death in Venice*, interpreting this staging as homosexual propaganda, the bigger part of the audience acclaimed the ballet performance, showing deep appreciation for its choreography (cf. URL 58). Quite apart from the fact that this ballet is based on a novel dealing with a homosexual theme which must be, of course, expressed in the ballet as well, the piece takes into account the current ideas of man and woman in our actual reality. Ironically, it is the ballet – an art form known for giving the illusion of a perfect world with traditional gender roles where women are depicted as fragile and weak creatures and men as leading and strong characters – which deals critically with gender roles and, especially, male non-compliance with hetero-

normativity. One can observe a homoerotic subject in *Swan Lake*<sup>64</sup> or in *La Peri* where eunuchs as non-heteronormative characters play an important role in the play.<sup>65</sup> Often these aspects are consciously – or maybe unconsciously – ignored and suppressed or they are not registered and observed due to obvious nescience. Currently, the ballet increasingly picks up the changing idea of masculinity and stages different concepts of masculinity which becomes, in addition, visible looking at modern ballet pieces, like *Five Sensitive Men* (cf. URL 59), *Castrati*<sup>66</sup>, *The Dying Swan*, performed by Vladimir Malakhov (cf. URL 60), or *Kyliàn/ Duato* (cf. URL 61). All these pieces show that masculinity can also be characterised by fragility, weakness, and suffering.

In this context, one must not forget other queer art events like the Eurovision Song Contest which is the topic of this volume. The Eurovision Song Contest has always been known as a stage of queer pop culture and performance as well as a setting of queer identity (Cassiday 2014, Motschenbacher 2013, 2012, cf. also Sullivan 2003). And here, I would like to anticipate the fact that Russian people notice the queerness of this event and they obviously accept this specific as well as the performing queer artists. As to Conchita Wurst, it must be mentioned here that many Russian televoters voted for the drag-queen in 2014. According to the telephone vote, Conchita Wurst would have reached eight points which would have actually meant the third place for “hir” in this competition. However, it was the official Russian national jury which boycotted the singer by giving zero points (e.g. URL 62, 63, 64, 65, 66). After the event, the Russian media aimed at inciting antipathy against Conchita Wurst and non-traditional identities, showing most often people who proclaimed their negative stance on non-traditional identities and seemingly hiding, to some

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<sup>64</sup> See some choreographies online at: [www.welt.de/print-welt/article522078/Coming-out-am-Schwanensee.html](http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article522078/Coming-out-am-Schwanensee.html) and [www.zeit.de/1976/20/das-leben-der-tanz-traum-ein-es-romantischen-prinzen](http://www.zeit.de/1976/20/das-leben-der-tanz-traum-ein-es-romantischen-prinzen) [all last accessed on 16 January 2016].

<sup>65</sup> An interesting interview about masculinity in ballet, male diversity, and the new role of men in ballet and in society today as well as on non-heteronormative male identities was given by male dancers from the Berlin State Ballet, in: *Bewegte Männer im Gespräch* [Emotional Men in Conversation]: Magazin. Staatsballett Berlin, 4, 2015/ 2016, without page.

<sup>66</sup> See here the interview with male dancers from the Berlin State Ballet, in: *Bewegte Männer im Gespräch* [Emotional Men in Conversation]: Magazin. Staatsballett Berlin, 4, 2015/ 2016, without page.

extent, positive reactions on the singer. While internationally known celebrities like Jennifer Lawrence showed their solidarity by wearing a beard in public, Russian men organised the flash mob *Dokazhi, chto ty ne Konchita Vurst* [Demonstrate that you are not Conchita Wurst]. In this initiative, Russian men participated who rid themselves of their beards. After shaving they posted pictures or videos on the Internet in order to demonstrate their masculinity (e.g. URL 67, 68, 69). The female equivalent was characterised by more tolerance and support. Women drew, stuck, or photoshopped beards on their face and posted their “funny” (*smeshnye*) pictures on the Internet (c.f. URL 70). As a consequence, this event also shows quite bluntly how deeply split the Russian society is today.

The last example, I would like to mention here is the introduction of a new rule in sports. It was Russia which organised the World Aquatics Championships in Kazan in 2015, where men were for the first time allowed to participate in synchronised swimming. This kind of participation which, of course, could be interpreted as a step forward towards the “feminisation of masculinity” stands in striking contrast to the current gender policies in Russia, which was articulated as such by the Russian minister of sports Vitalii Mutko as well as by athletes, like the synchronised swimmers Natal’ia Ishchenko and Viktoriia Fadina or the swimmer Evgenii Korotyshkin who all see synchronised swimming as an exclusively female sport and do not wish to see “hairy legs” in the swimming pool (URL 71, 72, 73). And once again, the media function here as a mouthpiece for both, Russian politics and the people who affirm and uphold the current rigid gender policies. Under the authority of Russian politics, the media tries to reach and to win over those in Russian society who supports the current political course, by marginalising and, finally, excluding those who actually do not sympathise with Putin’s regime and who consequently hinder the expansion of the nationally and patriotically oriented gender policies. In some cases, the media ridicule the males participating in this sport, using suspect argumentation strategies and showing dubious and trivial documentation material (cf. URL 74). They characterise synchronised swimming in a heteronormative sense as a gracile, aesthetic, and feminine sport, although at the beginning, when this sport came up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was exclusively seen as a male sport. On the Internet, one can find many readers’ entries which criticise the decision to allow males to participate in synchronised swimming. Male synchronised swimmers are

associated with gay men (and, therefore not “real” men) which is regarded as an embarrassment (*nepriiatnost’*) and a shame (*pozor*) for Russia as this sort of behaviour generally fails to correspond to both Russian culture and Russian patriotism. In this context, a number of amateur entries were published on the Internet which condemned men’s participation in synchronised swimming. They are, for example, “dedicated to those abnormal things that happen in swimming pools when engaging in the sport of synchronised swimming” (*posviashchaetsia tem razvratnym otnosheniim, kotorye tvoriatsia v basseinakh po povodu sinkhronnogo plavaniia*) (URL 75). Yet, it must be explicitly mentioned that there are also positive reactions as to this *novum* even though the reasons for the support and the affirmation of the male participation are different. In some cases, the affirmative attitude is based on the basic idea of establishing gender equality. When women may officially participate in football or boxing, so it goes to say, then men also may participate in, for example, synchronised swimming. In other cases, the affirmation of male participation in synchronised swimming is more nationally and patriotically motivated. For instance, because the Russian duet, comprising Aleksandr Maltsev and Darina Valitova, has won last year’s World Championship in synchronised swimming in Kazan, they are immediately seen as *molodtsy* ‘good guys’ and enjoy a higher support and appreciation within the Russian society (URL 76, 77, 78).

All these examples show that it is neither fair nor justified to generalise the perception and assessment of the current gender and sexual policies in Russia. While it seems – mostly from an international perspective – that “all Russians” or, at least, the majority of Russian society rejects a new non-heteronormative gender order, one must admit that the media play a very important role in creating this impression. It is not only the current gender policies that try to regulate gender ideas, gender roles, and sexual desire. To a great extent, it is also the media which assume the role of an identity modulator. By doing so, the media have created a split in Russian society which isolates those open to “new” gender roles and ideas beyond heteronormativity from the mainstream. Consequently, generalisations on this topic are not permitted. With this in mind, I will approach the investigation of the discourse on gender and sexuality in the context of Conchita Wurst and the Eurovision Song Contest, knowing full well that every research finding is only a little piece of the complex and confuse

“discourse puzzle” and that these results only illuminate one discourse among many.

*9 Identity, Space, Nation: Constructing Russian National Identity*

In recent years, Russia is seeking for its national identity or, more specifically, it is seeking a way of reconstructing, rethinking, and re-defining its national identity. This becomes obvious, when one takes a closer look at the Russian media and when one observes what kind of political steps are taken to reconstruct and maintain Russian national identity. Currently, two approaches have gained importance for the Russian discourse on the (re)construction of national identity. First of all, one observes a rising influence of space and spatiality which play an increasingly relevant role for the discourse on nation and national identity. Secondly, the strategy of refusal and dissociation has become very common in discussions about the state and about the development of national identity although the use of these two approaches is not at all a new phenomenon. Yet, they have become very popular in recent years probably due to the current political circumstances.<sup>67</sup>

Using a spatial perspective to find, construct, and define national identity is an old approach which Russians as well as other socio-cultures have been applying for several centuries.<sup>68</sup> It is especially the relationship between Russia and Europe which has played the leading role in this context. Recently, the interconnection of space (Russia) and nation (Russian/s) has been extended by two additional categories, namely gender and sexuality both of which have an enormous impact on the construction of Russia as a state and the Russians as a nation, whereas space and nation have, in turn, a great influence on the construction of gender and sexual identity (Baer 2009, Essig 1999, Jefferson Lenskyj 2014, Nohejl 2013a, Nohejl et al. 2013, Riabov 2007, Stella/ Nartova 2016, cf. also Johnston

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<sup>67</sup> The same applies to other post-Socialist countries. For instance, Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić (2016) investigate how national identities and space in general are linguistically constructed in the Balkans, by analysing graffiti and drawings on walls in Belgrade and Athens.

<sup>68</sup> An excellent overview on the construction of Russian and Soviet-Russian national identity over the centuries is given by Regine Nohejl et al. (2011, 2010).

2005, Persson 2015).<sup>69</sup> Here, the polydimensional character of identity becomes visible (Scheller-Boltz 2015b). Different identity concepts are tightly connected with each other and are used to construct, to think and, as one can see with the example of Russia, to regulate other identity concepts.

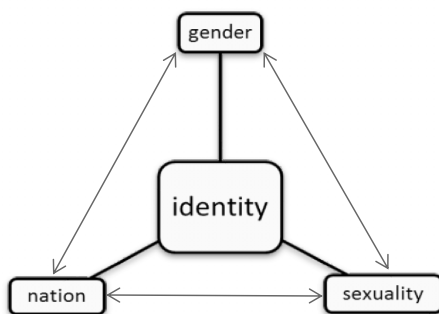


Diagram 1: The polydimensionality of identity in the context of gender, sexuality, and nation

Investigating the construction of gender and identity by means of spatiality and, in turn, the construction of space by means of gender and identity is an approach or a perspective known as research on gender geographies or gender spaces (e.g. Binnie 2004, Wastl-Walter 2010, cf. also Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2011, Yuval-Davis 1997), gay spaces (e.g. Benwell/ Stokoe 2006, Binnie 2004, cf. also Henshaw 2014), geographies of sexuality (e.g. Binnie/ Valentine 1999, Browne et al. 2007) as well as on queer geographies or queer spaces (e.g. Binnie 2004, Browne et al. 2007, Browning 1996, Johnston 2010, 2005, Wunsch 2005, cf. also Baer 2009, Stella 2013, 2012, Stella/ Nartova 2016) or on “gendered, sexed and sexual linguistic landscapes”, as Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić (2016: 131) put it in their recent investigation of the linguistic construction of space and nationalism in a gender and sexual context in Belgrade and Athens (cf. also Binnie 1997, Edensor 2002, Lembevski 1999, Nagel 1998). In this context, space is not only considered as a material and three-dimensional structure, but it

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Nohejl et al. (2011, 2010) who analyse the construction of (Russian) national identity in and through space by applying the principle of *svoi—chuzhoi* and discussing national questions in the context of gender.

is also predominantly seen as an abstract field or an area which is constructed by social interaction (Wastl-Walter 2010: 28f). Wastl-Walter demonstrates this by using the example of the labour market.

The labour market cannot be measured, mapped, or even illustrated three-dimensionally. Nevertheless, the labour market is a space of action which is socially constructed and influenced by political and economic interests so that it offers some people more flexibility than others [transl.] (Wastl-Walter 2010: 29).<sup>70</sup>

Consequently, regarding the interconnection between gender identity and space, one can conclude that in everyday life, gender and gender stereotypes are anchored in a spatial context in the same manner in which space is gendered and identified by the people who act and interact in it according to their gender identity (Wastl-Walter 2010: 13).

Space as an area of acting and social construction functions a) as a system of orientation for categorising and arranging the world, b) as a normative structure which determines and regulates acts and patterns of behaviour as well as the expectations concerning behaviour, and c) as a symbolic system in which every action and performativity is imbued with sense and meaning (Wastl-Walter 2010: 32f). In this context, the entities of gender and gender identity are relevant and inherent features of space and fulfil an influential function for a space to exist and to be recognised as such. Space makes the people within it (inter)act and behave in a way which complies with predominant gender norms. People themselves, in turn, (inter)act within a space in a prescribed way to, finally, make the space confirm and maintain its functions.

[N]ot only do people make spaces, but also spaces make people, by constraining them but also by offering opportunities for identity construction (Benwell/ Stokoe 2006: 211).

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<sup>70</sup> Original: “Den Arbeitsmarkt kann man nicht vermessen, kartieren oder sogar dreidimensional abbilden. Dennoch ist der Arbeitsmarkt ein Handlungsraum, der sozial konstruiert, durch politische und ökonomische Interessen beeinflusst wird und somit einigen Individuen mehr Spielraum lässt als anderen.”

We notice the extent to which space determines identity and to which identity determines space, when we look at the construction of sexual identity via spatiality and of space via sexuality respectively. For example, the construction of space as a heteronormative system or as a homophobic area respectively is the reason why homosexual people get the impression of being only a marginal part or, indeed, no part of the corresponding space and, consequently, of being outside of this space (Motschenbacher 2010, Wastl-Walter 2010).<sup>71</sup> This realisation influences non-heterosexuals to behave and to perform in a certain way which, in the end, confirms and maintains heterosexuality as a normative form of existence within that space.

For this reason, they deny their sexuality. However, that does not facilitate the realisation of their life concepts of living but makes them invisible. Once again, this stabilises heterosexuality as the normative category of sexuality [transl.] (Wastl-Walter 2010: 77).<sup>72</sup>

If one wants to study the concept of space in Russian studies one has to keep in mind the traditional division between *svoi* ‘own, self’ and *chuzhoi* ‘alien, other’. These categories belong to the traditional worldview or world concept (*kartina mira*) of the Russian people which have an enormous influence on shaping and constructing their collective identity and on which the Russian people relies when defining the Russian nation and, consequently, the Russian identity (Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2011). The Russian *kartina mira* contains two specific parameters: the world outside Russia in general (*chuzhoi*) and Russia on its own in particular (*svoi*). Constructing the idea of “one’s own” and separating this identity from “the other” as an alien identity means to conceptualise the world exclusively from the Russian perspective. The perception of the world is based on an egocentric worldview and is governed by one’s own value system, consisting of cultural, political, legal, and other factors. Thus, “the otherness of the alien” and its division from “the own” are constructions

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<sup>71</sup> See here additionally the works by Baer (2009), Benwell/ Stokoe (2006: esp. 214), Binnie (2004), Jefferson Lenskyj (2014), Persson (2015), Persson/ Petersson (2014), Waaldijk/ Clapham (1993).

<sup>72</sup> Original: “Aus diesem Grund verleugnen sie ihre Sexualität, wodurch jedoch die Lebenskonzepte nicht einfacher realisierbar, sondern unsichtbar werden und dies aufs Neue die Heterosexualität als normative Form der Sexualität stabilisiert.”



that are exclusively based on the “construction of one’s own” and must be interpreted as a result of this constructed “own” identity (Metzeltin/Wallmann 2010: esp. 41). However, as Schor-Tschudnowskaja notices, the process of defining “own” and “other” is a subjective process which has nothing inherently universal.

To characterise something as “alien” does not provide any real specifics about the nature of the “alien object”. To describe something as alien is relative, because the categorisation of something as alien depends on one’s own specific perspective. Something only becomes alien by virtue of one’s own definition. Once again, this underlines how strongly the categories of one’s “own” and the “alien” are intertwined [transl.] (Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2011: 111).<sup>73</sup>

The Russian world model as a process of perceiving “the self” and “the other” shows that “the self” and “the other” are intertwined so that “the self” or “the own” inevitably gives birth to “the other”. Consequently, identity contains “the own”, which means “the I”, “the we”, “the our” which directly includes the reference to “the other” (Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2011: 68).

The Russian *kartina mira* with its explicit spatial and, therefore, geographical orientation resembles the concept of social space, presented by Bourdieu (1991: esp. 231). Bourdieu himself alludes to the geographical perspective, comparing his social space to a geographical one. Both concepts contain a social constituent, focus on identity from a spatial perspective, and have to be seen exclusively as constructions. In a social space, all actors, groups, or institutions exhibit the more common characteristics the closer they stand to each other. All actors, participating in a social space, form a *svoi*-community in which they share the same ideas and take the same or, at least, a very similar perspective to see and interpret the world so that they perceive and evaluate their environment in almost the same way (Bourdieu 1989). The space that means the world they

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<sup>73</sup> Original: “Die Zuschreibung ‚fremd‘ stellt keine Information über wahre Eigenschaften des ‚fremden Objekts‘ zur Verfügung. Fremdheit ist relativ, sie ist von einem spezifischen Standpunkt, nämlich dem des ‚Eigenen‘ abhängig; erst die eigene Definitionsleistung macht etwas fremd – darin kommt erneut die enge Verschränkung zwischen ‚Eigenem‘ und ‚Fremden‘ zum Ausdruck.”

know is perceived and interpreted as something that is natural and self-evident (Bourdieu 1989: 19). Yet, it is not only the perspective on the world or the interpretation of what is perceived which lead to a homogenisation of the community. It is also the intention to assimilate and to merge with the community.

[A]gents classify themselves, expose themselves to classification, by choosing, in conformity with their taste, different attributes (clothes, types of food, drinks, sports, friends) that go well together and that go well with them, or, more exactly, suit their position. To be more precise, they choose, in the space of available goods and services, goods that occupy a position in this space homologous to the position they themselves occupy in social space. This makes for the fact that nothing classifies somebody more than the ways he or she classifies (Bourdieu 1989: 19f).

The perception and interpretation of what one sees as well as phenomena, objects, or (socially presumed personal) behaviour are exclusively constructed by society and they all get their meaning and importance only in relation to or in comparison with other entities. Consequently, differences do not exist, but are discursively created by relating, comparing, and by realising them as being different to “one’s own” (Benwell/ Stokoe 2006: 214). A social space which fulfils the function of a symbolically arranged system leads to an obvious manipulation of “the self” and “the other” by presumed ideas and constructed perceptions (Bourdieu 1989).

Russia’s construction of its own national identity has constantly taken place within the conflict between East and West and has been shaped in dependence of (Western) Europe.

“Europe” – as much as the “West – represents important components of the Russian identity. Over the centuries, Slavophiles and Westernisers, Bolsheviks and Eurasians, Liberals and Conservatives questioned the idea of whether Russia is a European country and whether we ought to intend to become a part of Europe [transl.] (Riabova/ Tsalko 2011: 206).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Original: “«Европа», равно как и «Запад», представляют собой важные компоненты российской идентичности; на протяжении столетий отечественная мысль в лице славянофилов и западников, большевиков и евразийцев, либералов и консерваторов задавалась вопросом, является ли Россия европейской страной и должны ли мы стремиться стать частью Запада.”

However, the problem of regarding and defining Russia as a part of Europe becomes not only visible from the Russian perspective, but this seems to be also challenging from a Western European point of view (Krejčí 1959).

Does Russia belong to Europe? Or is it a special cultural realm which does not only follow its own specific historical path, but which pursues its own goals and strives to live up to its own ideals which have nothing in common with the “European” ones? [transl.] (Tschizewskij/ Groh 1959: 1).<sup>75</sup>

Over the centuries, Russia and Europe have been regarded and categorised as different spaces. Yet, the precise stance on both spaces and their evaluation has always depended on the particular group propagating this position. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Slavophiles* were drawn to the Russian nation and culture while the *zapadniki* ‘Westernisers’ supported a pro-Western movement with a strong focus on Europe, wishing Russia to become more like Europe.<sup>76</sup> Russia’s attitude towards Europe has not changed much in recent years. On the one hand, we can observe people who show a pro-European and, in this regard, an anti-Putin stance. On the other hand, there is a group of Putin supporters who back Putin’s politics and the idea of Russia as a Great Power in the world which abounds in tradition and culture. The recent political decisions and socio-political measures deepen the split between these groups even further. The anti-European and pro-European tendency demonstrates the fragmentation of

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<sup>75</sup> Original: “Gehört Rußland zu Europa? oder ist es eine besondere kulturelle Welt, die nicht nur ihre eigenen geschichtlichen Wege geht, sondern dabei auch ihre eigenen Ziele verfolgt und ihren eigenen Idealen zustrebt, die mit den „europäischen“ nichts zu tun haben?”

<sup>76</sup> See in more detail Geier (1996) as well as Riabov/ Riabova (2014). Geier (1996: 1) says that relations and perceptions between Russia and Europe have existed for about half a millennium. They have almost never been based on sufficient knowledge of each other or on mutual exchange. Rather, they have been and still are characterised by a lack of knowledge concerning the other, by distrust and antipathy, fear, hostility and hatred as well as by prejudice and defamation. Original: “Seit etwa einem halben Jahrtausend bestehen Beziehungen und Wahrnehmungen zwischen Rußland und Europa. Sie waren und sind kaum durch hinreichende Kenntnisse voneinander, von gegenseitigem Austausch getragen. Vielmehr waren und sind sie geprägt von Unwissen über das Gegenüber, von Mißtrauen und Abneigung, Furcht und Angst, Haß und Feindschaft, von Vorurteilen und Nachreden”.

the Russian nation as well as the desperate search and maintenance of Russia's national identity.

Europe – which is today rather synonymous with the European Union – still plays an important role for Russia as well as for Russian national identity.<sup>77</sup> However, if one considers the current discourse, it becomes clear that the general mood is directed against a pro-European orientation, with the anti-European voices highly dominating the national climate. From the Russian perspective, (Western) Europe is seen as un-Russian, whereas Russia is perceived as Non-European (Healey 2010). In this context, it is interesting to note that the construction of Russian national identity is not based on the principle of affirmation in order to conclude what is Russian today and what can be seen as characteristic for Russia. Rather, the Russian politicians and a great part of the Russian society use a strategy of refusal and dissociation to construct a Russian national identity on the basis of what Russia and the Russian nation are significantly not. The “self” does not play an important role in this discourse. The focus is mainly on the “alien” from which one's own identity is deduced.

Today, all things which are European are, allegedly, unknown and undesirable for Russia. They are seen as something that causes worries and danger (Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2011: 64). Consequently, Russian, that is to say non-European characteristics, are held in higher and more positive esteem than European.<sup>78</sup>

Since individuals strive for a positive self-image in general, they tend to increase the value of their own social group(s) and to devalue alien group(s) when making social classifications in order to shed a positive light on their own self-image by either highlighting their affiliation with or distance from a group [transl.] (Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2011: 93).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. here the similar situation in Serbia, as shown by Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić (2016).

<sup>78</sup> Especially in the 1990s and also at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Europe had a high standing among Russians. Russia intended to adopt (Western) European values and standards to demonstrate its progress towards a modern and democratic state. During that era, a lot of Russians looked towards Europe and had the wish to emulate the European lifestyle.

<sup>79</sup> Original: “Da Individuen im Großen und Ganzen ein positives Selbstbild anstreben, tendieren sie daher bei sozialen Klassifizierungen zur Aufwertung der Eigen-

One feature, which is currently at the core of Russia’s debate over what is Russian or non-Russian, is the concept of non-heteronormativity. Deeming non-heteronormativity as European and Un-Russian or, respectively, non-homosexuality as un-European and therefore Russian increasingly advances to a meaningful and influential criterion for distinguishing Russia from Europe (Baer 2009, Jefferson Lenskyj 2014, cf. also Baker 2005). Today, more and more European countries give the same or almost the same rights to sexual minorities which heterosexual people and couples have been enjoying for years. Moreover, some countries, like Sweden, place great value today on a gender-neutral education of children and young people. This includes using gender-neutral toys, playing gender-neutral games, and educating in such a way as to allow children to explore all kinds of gender roles, irrespective of sex. This tendency stands in striking contrast to the general assumptions of Russian society. Putin’s current political course propagates a “traditional hetero-patriarchal nationalism”, as it is called by Aizenstain (2014), which enshrines the myth of the essential, naturally given heterosexuality (Healey 2014, cf. also Sullivan 2003: 81). In Russia, heterosexuality is applied as a symbolic asset which comes with “symbolic power” (Bourdieu 1991) and excludes everyone who is not heterosexual. The heterosexual family and children are given a high status today, because they do not only foster the continuation of the family, but they also serve to ensure the continual existence of Russian society and the strengthening of the Russian nation.

<b>National Identity</b>	
↓ gender	↓ sexuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gender identity(ies)</li> <li>- gender ideas</li> <li>- gender roles</li> <li>- gender stereotypes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sexual identity(ies)</li> <li>- sexual orientation</li> <li>- sexual desire(s)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ regulation of gender identity(ies)</li> <li>→ regulation of sexual identity(ies)</li> </ul>	

Table 1: Constructing national identity through gender and sexuality

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gruppe(n) und Abwertung der Fremdgruppe(n), um das eigene Selbstbild per Zugehörigkeit und/oder Abgrenzung positiv erscheinen zu lassen.”

With regard to homosexuality, it is obvious that Russia uses homosexuality, “imagined in terms of effeminacy and emasculation” (Baer 2009: 2), for political purposes, especially to pursue its anti-Western political course (Kon 2013). Emancipation as well as discussions on gender and sexuality are interpreted as a Western import whose only aim is “to weaken Russian manhood and Russia’s power” (Jefferson Lenskyj 2014: 13). The discussion surrounding the rejection of homosexuality by the Russian nation focuses in particular on Russian masculinity (Kondakov 2012b). It is the man who plays the pivotal role in demonstrating strength and power and who transfers these characteristics onto the nation.

The concept of nation is based on the concept of the gender binary in its diverse, but always hierarchical conditions. [...] The modern national state is considered as being autonomous, but it is the male citizens who give the power to the state. At the same time, an idea of masculinity or maleness came up which had to differ from the idea of femaleness and femininity [transl.] (Eckert 2013: 164f).<sup>80</sup>

Masculinity becomes the criterion of Russian national identity as well as the factor determining the place of Russian society in relation to other societies and to other spaces such as Western Europe.

Muzhik – this is a significant marker of the current Russian identity (Riabov/ Riabova 2008: 254).<sup>81</sup>

The own men are the most masculine. The own women are the most feminine (Riabova/ Tsalko 2011: 207).<sup>82</sup>

The Russian man functions as a “symbolic border guard” (Riabova/ Tsalko 2011) who regulates the identity of all males according to his own identity

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<sup>80</sup> Original: “Das Konzept Nation basiert auf dem Konzept Zweigeschlechtlichkeit in seinen vielfältigen aber immer hierarchischen Verhältnissen. [...] Der moderne Nationalstaat wird als autonom verstanden, dem die männlichen Bürger ihre Macht übertragen. Zur gleichen Zeit entstand ein Verständnis von Männlichkeit oder Männlich-Sein, das sich von einem Verständnis von Weiblich-Sein oder Weiblichkeit abgrenzen musste.”

<sup>81</sup> Original: “Мужик – это значимая маркировка современной русскости.”

<sup>82</sup> Original: “Свои мужчины – самые мужественные, Свои женщины – самые женственные.”

and who keeps the space free of identities that do not fit the dominant identity in his zone of influence.<sup>83</sup> The Russian man is neither a woman nor a homosexual. The Russian man is the protector of the woman and of the Russian nation as it is demonstrated and even over-demonstrated by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. His public appearances are staged and resemble a public performance of sorts; his masculinity is exaggerated and comes across as affected. This gave him the general reputation of a macho man (cf. Sperling 2015).

Putin's variety of macho stunts can be read as an ongoing effort to assert political masculinity in this way (Sperling 2015: 12).

However, this instrumentalised machismo masculinity is continuously picked up by the media in order to promote the idea of the "real man" who is the protector of society and the nation. The Russian media show him while he is fishing, hunting, shooting, doing sports, or riding horses, motor bikes, or a racing cars.

This extreme and completely ideologised idea of masculinity is not at all a *novum*. To a very large extent, it could be observed, for example, in the Stalin era.

The official idea of the Soviet body brimmed with power and vigor and this vigor was presented in parades, pyramids of people, by athletes, and tractorists one can see on the photos of Nikolai Kuleshov and Ivan Shagin. In contrast, everything soft and seductive increasingly became a taboo [transl.] (Khoroshilov/ Klemp 2003: 5).<sup>84</sup>

At the time, perverts – this included homosexuals – were considered to be neither patriots nor nationalists.

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<sup>83</sup> In this context, Coates says: "Hegemonic masculinity maintains, legitimates and naturalises the interests of powerful men while subordinating the interests of others, notably the interests of women and gay men" (Coates 2007: 41).

<sup>84</sup> Original: "Das offizielle Bild des sowjetischen Körpers strotzte vor Kraft und Lebensfreude und die zeigte sich in den Paraden, Menschenpyramiden, Sportlern und Traktoristinnen auf den Fotos von Nikolaj Kuleschow und Ivan Schagin. Das Weiche und Betörende aber wurde mehr und mehr tabuisiert."

Good citizens – always straight – must control, punish, and eventually eliminate treasonous desires (Essig 1999: 5).

However, one cannot deny the widespread manifestation of homosexuality even in Russia during the past few decades. Yet, a lifestyle which is lived out by homosexuals, is, in general, seen as a result of an aggressive globalisation which is mainly interpreted as “the Americanization of sexual culture” (Binnie 2004: 32) and, consequently, as a development with a Western origin that tries to overwhelm standards and ideas in the non-Western world. Europe is associated with a space of queer identities which follows a way of moral incorrectness. Europe heralds the fall of culture and civilisation and symbolises the apocalypse. Russia, in striking contrast, embodies the norm (Riabov 2007, Riabov/ Riabova 2008). Homosexuality is associated with weakness, femininity, and perversity and is seen as a rejection of norms and as a prototype of decadence.

Part of the approach used by homophobes to characterize homosexuality as decadent is to emphasize its fecundity by, on one hand, associating homosexuality with a weakening of the people and, on the other, with a negative secondary stage of life (Tin 2008: 136).

Moreover, it is argued that homosexuality leads to a lesser understanding of patriotism, as only a heterosexual person can exude an appropriate patriotic understanding necessary to protect one’s own country. Europe and the European man are interpreted as weak and feminine, whereas Russia and the Russian man are considered strong and masculine. Consequently, political and social measures must be taken to keep Russia free of non-heterosexual identities and lifestyles. This situation leads to a rising spread of politically motivated homophobia (Soboleva/ Bakhmetjev 2015) which is strongly accompanied by traditionalism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, sexism, racism, anti-Western rhetoric and a growing clericalism, as shown in detail by Igor’ Kon (2010: 217). As a consequence, Russia does not see itself as a part of Europe, interpreting Europe as alien (*Evropa kak chuzhoi*) (Riabova/ Riabov 2013).



There were significant changes in the civil identity of the citizens of the Russian Federation: they stopped seeing themselves as Europeans and Russia as a part of Europe [transl.] (Riabova/ Riabov 2013: 31).<sup>85</sup>

Due to the ongoing debates on gender norms, sexual identity, and the alleged fall of culture in Europe, the concept of homosexuality is used in Russia as a referential entity or a referential stigma. Nowadays, countries, like the Ukraine, are described and interpreted as homosexual in order to articulate their weakness and their pro-European tendency (cf. also part 4 of this book). Moreover, people, like politicians, are labelled homosexual although this expression has nothing to do with sexuality and is not used in a sexual context. Rather, it refers to the notion that the person in question is open-minded, tolerant, pro-European, and liberal, supporting European tendencies and values, leading to the alleged fact that they have an anti-Putin stance and therefore are unpatriotic toward Russia.

In summary, it can be said that Russia uses two entities to a great extent in order to reconstruct and to refine its national identity: homosexuality and Europe. This is illustrated in the following graphic.

<b>Russia</b>	<b>Europe (European Union)</b>
<i>heteronormative</i> space	<i>queer</i> space
space of <i>protection</i>	space of <i>evil</i>
space of <i>power</i>	space of <i>weakness</i>
space of <i>morality</i>	space of <i>perversity</i>
space of <i>norm</i>	space of <i>decadence</i>
cultural <i>valorisation</i>	cultural <i>degradation</i>
– protection of cultural values	– loss of cultural values
– protection of norms	– loss of norms
– protection of tradition	– loss of tradition
– protection of moral values	– loss of moral values

Table 2: Characteristics of Russia and the European Union from the Russian perspective

<sup>85</sup> Original: “[...] в цивилизационной идентичности граждан Российской Федерации произошли ощутимые изменения: они перестали признавать себя европейцами, а Россию – частью Европы.”

Russia is still trying to find its place in relation to the wild Asian East and a decadent, apocalyptic Western Europe. Russia wants to be recognised by the world as a nation which must be reckoned with and whose character and identity are uniquely Russian. The current, rather tense foreign political situation, which was recently strained by the Annexation of Crimea, the involvement in the Syrian war, or the violation of human rights as to the suppression of homosexuality and trans-identities, is directly related to the construction and consolidation of its (new) national identity. In this context, Russia relies on traditional moral ideas and values. Politicians appeal to traditional and established gender ideas and roles as well as to family values and point to historically developed traditions and, moreover, to the continuity of the Russian culture.

Russia marginalises or even excludes alien identities or identities that are seen and considered as alien. While non-heteronormative identity concepts may generally be categorised as global or cosmopolitan, Russia (mis)uses them in a spatial and national context. Homosexuality is stigmatised as un-Russian, unmanly, and unpatriotic and as something which cannot be tolerated within a strong, dominant, and powerful society the aim of which is to maintain the Russian nation.

## Part 3:

### On the Instrumentalisation of Queerness for Implementing Traditional Ideas of Gender, Sex, and Nation in Russia

#### The Case of Conchita Wurst

*It sounds very funny now,  
but I think that I have never received a bigger compliment.  
If an entire nation is afraid  
that a young gay man in drag with a beard  
could influence its public opinion so much  
that he could bring about the collapse of its entire society,  
then I can only take this as a compliment.  
(Conchita Wurst 2014)<sup>86</sup>*

#### *1 Introductory Remarks*

On the night following her victory at the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest, the Austrian singer Conchita Wurst (aka Tom Neuwirth) gave an interview on the show *Stern TV* broadcast by the German TV channel *RTL*. When asked about how she felt when confronted with negative comments and insulting reactions to her person and performance, such as the reaction of the Russian populist and right-wing nationalist politician and member of

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<sup>86</sup> Original: “Es hört sich jetzt wahnsinnig komisch an, aber ich denke, ich habe noch nie ein größeres Kompliment bekommen. Wenn eine ganze Nation davor Angst hat, dass ein junger schwuler Mann in Damenklamotten mit Bart so meinungsbildend ist, dass er eine ganze Gesellschaft zum Bersten bringt, dann kann ich das nur als Kompliment sehen”. – Interview with Conchita Wurst on the German television show *Stern TV* from 22 May 2014; online on Youtube at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0h1ViBtMO0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0h1ViBtMO0) [last accessed on 31 October 2015].

the State Duma Vladimir Zhirinovskii<sup>87</sup>, Conchita Wurst replied that she found it flattering:

If an entire nation is afraid that a young gay man in drag with a beard could influence its public opinion so much that he could bring about the collapse of its entire society, then I can only take this as a compliment.

The Russian reaction to Conchita Wurst's victory at the Eurovision Song Contest is astounding even three years after her rise to fame. Indeed, her performance triggered a strong emotional reaction across the political and social spectrum. To be sure: There were supporters of the singer, people who showed tolerance to queerness or who seemed to have at least no problems with non-heteronormative lifestyles. However, such views were mostly not represented in the media. It was the anti-Conchita movement which dominated the public debate on Russian television and in the newspapers. Judging by the media alone, one could get the impression that the majority of the Russian society was against homosexuals, trans-identities, and any kind of non-heteronormative "otherness" (e.g. the surveys *Golos Rossiian* [The Voice of Russians] from 2014 (URL 79), *Liudi govoriat* [People speak] from 2014 (URL 80), the coverage on the television programme *Rossiiia 24* from 2014 (URL 81) as well as Althaler 2014, Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015). The Russian journalist Dmitrii Konstantinovich Kisselev played a prominent role in this debate. He was an active and affirmative supporter of Putin's policies and attracted a great deal of attention internationally due to his homophobic views and propagandistic news coverage (URL 82). In the news, he along with other journalists presented the picture that most Russians considered non-heteronormativity to be completely out of tune with Russian life and Russian culture and that non-heteronormative people were generally unacceptable in Russian society. By doing so, the media coverage reflected the predominant political course of establishing and maintaining traditional and rigid gender ideas.

How could Conchita Wurst, a young and up to this point rather unknown artist from Austria, play such a central role in the discourse on gender in Russia, a country thousands of kilometres away from her native

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<sup>87</sup> She expressed this feeling in a similar way in an interview with Andrew Neil on *BBC Newsnight* from 23 May 2014: "This is a very big honour for me because they think that I'm that powerful to burst a whole country. So, thank you."

region of Styria? It ought to be pointed out that most of this homophobic propaganda in Russia had already been firmly established well before Wurst's victory. Yet, the drag queen's performance and overwhelming triumph created an interesting discursive moment in the Russian debate: for the first time, Russian politics, media, and society had a concrete persona who could be used and instrumentalised to justify the current political mainstream and the socio-political measures implemented in the field of gender and identity.

Amidst the heated political debates on gender and identity following the passing of a number of political measures in Russia which drastically limited the rights of certain minorities in both public and private spheres, Conchita Wurst served as a prism for the discourse on gender and identity. Her appearance and strong media presence fuelled a debate which evolved almost explosively. In particular, Conchita Wurst brought to the surface an issue which is central to any discussion on gender: what do Russian men and women have, what do men and women have to be like generally in order for us to recognise them as men and women? The discussions that followed were closely linked to debates on sexual identities as well as issues concerning the question of what having a right or wrong gender and sexual identity means for the nation *per se*.

This third part of the monograph will give an insight into the central concepts of what it means to be a man or woman in Russian society and into the alleged need to uphold these concepts including the traditional functions of gender. The focus of this part is Conchita Wurst following her victory at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2014 as well as her recent impact on the discourse of gender, sexuality, and national identity in Russia.<sup>88</sup> The basis of my analysis is formed by readers' comments gathered from the online issue of the popular newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets* primarily during the period between May 11, 2014 and July 1, 2014. These comments illustrate the ways in which gender, sexuality, and nation are conceptualised and perceived in contemporary Russia and the role which language plays for the construction and perception of gender, sexual, and national identity. The investigation will make clear that people's perception of gender ideas as well as of sexual desire and national identity is in-

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<sup>88</sup> Several parts of the third part of this monograph have been published in Scheller-Boltz (2015c, 2015e).

fluenced tremendously by the current political course, by the church's dogmata, and by their fellow citizens whose views and attitudes are constantly and massively repeated by the media. Especially the media have become a hermetic sphere in which one opinion echoes and confirms the other up to a point where opinion takes precedence over facts.

From a language perspective, it is interesting to observe the diverse linguistic means which are employed to influence and manipulate opinion, such as word choice, word formation, metaphorical language as well as linguistic strategies of argumentation which lead to discrimination and demarcation. Readers will notice a deep interconnection between gender and sexual identity. Issues concerning gender identity are for the most part embedded in the context of sexual identity. Sexuality plays an important role in defining gender ideas. Consequently, this analysis aims at illustrating how Russian society deals with identity diversity and at describing the strategies which are applied to marginalise, to discriminate, and to exclude identities which do not fit the regular and traditional heteronormative frame. I have already argued in the previous part that these strategies are not randomly chosen. Gender and sexual identities are used intentionally for constructing and maintaining Russian national identity. Here again, it is mainly the linguistic performances and the argumentation strategies which shed light on what this identity should be like and how national values are presented. Moreover, it is interesting to see how other nations are assessed and valued against this backdrop and how certain assumptions about gender and sexual identities are instrumentalised in the current conflict between Russia and the West, and the European Union in particular.

I would like to stress here that I do not intend to make any generalisations. It is not fair, accurate, or possible to make general assumptions or to make an overgeneralised assessment of Russian society from an analysis based on readers' comments. Such an approach would require a much more extensive corpus. As one will see below, not every member of Russian society reacts to Conchita Wurst with suspiciousness and antipathy. Moreover, prejudice against identity diversity and non-heteronormative lifestyles can also be found in other countries besides Russia, for instance, in Western countries of the European Union, such as Germany, Great Britain, France, Ireland, and even in a country like Sweden where the mainstream supports non-heteronormative people politically, where non-heteronorma-

tive individuals enjoy their full rights as citizens and are guaranteed a high quality of life in a rather tolerant atmosphere (cf. Kondakov 2010). Not every citizen of Western Europe sees Conchita Wurst as a symbol of tolerance or accepts identities beyond the gender binarity. As an example, I would like to point out Stig Grenov, the leader of the Christian party *Kristendemokraterne* in Denmark who is critical of non-heteronormative identities.<sup>89</sup> And even in Conchita's home country of Austria not everyone is open to trans-identities or tolerates non-heteronormative identity concepts in general. Austria's Heinz-Christian Strache, a populist and rather right-wing nationalist from the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) is known for having made quite disparaging remarks about Conchita Wurst.

If someone like Conchita Wurst does not know if they are a man or a woman, then they should see a psychotherapist instead of participating at the Eurovision Song Contest. Well, and I ask myself why does ORF our, or it, well, I don't know, how I, if Wurst doesn't even know it herself, then I do not know it at all. Is it an It now, or a He, or a She? [sic!] [transl.] (URL 83).<sup>90</sup>

In Poland, some reactions to Conchita Wurst reflected a negative attitude towards non-heteronormative people, too (cf. Szulc 2014). Interestingly, many comments showed many similarities to the Russian statements (e.g. *chory świat* 'a sick world', *Co się dzieje na tym świecie* 'what goes on in this world', *chora moda na homo* 'a sick fashion of homosexuality', *zresztą bóg stworzył kobietę i mężczyznę to niech tak zostanie a nie jakieś transy pedały [...]* *bo jest chore* 'actually God made woman and man and this has to stay like this, not any trans-people or fags [...] because this is sick', *Pokazuje upadek i dekadencję Europy* 'it shows the downfall and the decadence of Europe'; URL 84 and for detailed information see below).

However, with all due caution against generalisations, there are general tendencies in Russian society that concern the perception of identity

<sup>89</sup> See e.g. the opinion of Stig Grenov, leader of the Christian party *Kristendemokraterne* online at: <http://cphpost.dk/news14/national-news14/eurovision-too-gay-for-christian-democrats-party.html> [last accessed on 9 August 2015].

<sup>90</sup> Original: "Wenn einer wie die Conchita Wurst nicht weiß, ob's a Manderl oder a Weiberl is, dann brauchats besser an Psychotherapeuten als beim Song Contest aufzutreten. Und ich frag mich ja, warum der ORF überhaupt unseren, oder es, ich weiß ja nicht, wie ich, wenn die Wurst des selber net waß, weiß ich es schon gar nicht. Ist es jetzt ein Es, ein Er oder Sie? [sic!]."

diversity and widespread ideas that a big part of the Russian society shares when they talk, assess, and conceptualise gender and identity. And although, in some cases, the situation in Russia does not differ from places in Western Europe, one has to admit that people in Western Europe do not face the same social pressure, restrictions, or interventions on the part of their governments (Engel 2002: 50). Last but not least, the investigation of the discourse on Conchita Wurst demonstrates more general and predominant tendencies in Russian society. It confirms assumptions which are to be expected in the current political climate in Russia, when taking into consideration the socio-political measures initiated by the Russian local and federal governments and legislatures and the tense relationship between Russia and Europe.

## *2 Queer Europe: The Eurovision Song Contest Strives for Tolerance*

In order to understand the Russian reaction to Conchita Wurst, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the competition she won and its place within the cultural fabric of Europe: the Eurovision Song Contest. The ESC is a music competition and the only show on television which is broadcast simultaneously throughout Europe and also in some other parts of the world such as Australia, North America, and some Asian countries.<sup>91</sup> With some 120 to 190 million viewers, it is not unreasonable to claim that the Eurovision Song Contest brings Europe and – to some extent – the world together.<sup>92</sup> All participating countries present themselves in different ways. They convey and express their “culture” mainly through costumes, but especially through music. Musicians mix, for example, ethnic sounds with modern pop music or perform songs in their mother tongue. On the night of the Eurovision Song Contest, Europe displays its diversity. Russia, which has been participating in this music festival since 1994, shares and

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<sup>91</sup> This information was obtained from the official website of the Eurovision Song Contest; online at: [www.eurovision.tv/page/timeline](http://www.eurovision.tv/page/timeline) as well as at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/eurovision/11405449/If-Australia-is-in-Eurovision-whos-next.html> and <http://www.eurovision.de/> [last accessed on 14 November 2015].

<sup>92</sup> See here e.g. [http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/songcontest/4746241/Song-Contest-in-Wien-hatte-197-Millionen-Zuschauer?\\_yl\\_\\_backlink=/home/kultur/songcontest/index.do](http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/songcontest/4746241/Song-Contest-in-Wien-hatte-197-Millionen-Zuschauer?_yl__backlink=/home/kultur/songcontest/index.do) [last accessed on 14 November 2015].



supports this European spirit year after year. Russian singer Dima Bilan was even able to win the music competition once in 2008. As a result, Russia hosted the ESC in 2009.

Despite its focus being on music, the Eurovision Song Contest is much more than mere entertainment. Its origins can be found in the post-war effort to bring peace and friendship back to the war-torn countries of (then Western) Europe. It is probably this matrix of peace and tolerance through which the festival has been able to attract a substantial queer following. Today, it is especially the queer community which supports and virtually adores this event (Cassiday 2014, Motschenbacher 2013, 2012, cf. also Sullivan 2003).

The flashy costumes, inane lyrics, cheesy choreography, and over-the-top staging that have come to characterize the contest's winners over the past twenty years have increasingly earned Eurovision the label of camp, as well as an international following of some 125 million viewers, many of whom are gay (Cassiday 2014: 1f).

This is not to say that people with a heteronormative identity do not watch and support this event with the same interest. They become – at least for one moment – fascinated and mesmerised by the overwhelming queerness and open up – probably rather unconsciously – to the idea of a tolerant Europe and a tolerant world. From this perspective, the Eurovision Song Contest as a rather queer event is more than a show. Above all, it represents diversity, understanding, tolerance, and respect. In other words: without question, the Eurovision Song Contest accomplishes a political mission, too. This does not remain without repercussions for the viewers in the participating countries, including Russians. Russian society is very familiar with the queer and camp character of the Eurovision Song Contest and has been watching the show with enthusiasm for years.

However, a lot of people ignore or – maybe – do not realise that the Eurovision Song Contest is and always has been political. The mere fact that this event brings Europe together on one evening predisposes the Eurovision Song Contest as a stage for political statements. This may be surprising. After all, the rules of the European Broadcasting Union, which organises the annual competition, do not permit overtly political lyrics or

the addressing of ongoing political conflicts (URL 85).<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, performers have been known to denounce social and political plights, racism, intolerance, or discrimination. As an example, one could point out the contributor from Romania in the year 2015, the group *Voltaj*, who drew attention to the situation of the so-called *euro-orphans* in their song *De La Capat* [All Over Again], or the quarrel within the European Broadcasting Union about the participation of the Ukrainian singer and Crimean tatar Jamala (aka Susana Iamaladinova), whose song *1944* deals with the deportation of Crimean tatars under Stalin but could also be interpreted as an allusion to the annexion of Crimea in 2014 (URL 86, cf. also part 4 in this monograph). The televote, too, has been repeatedly interpreted as a reflection of historical cultural and political alliances and present conflicts, with countries traditionally giving or withholding points from their neighbours.

As I said, the subtle political matrix of tolerance and diversity has turned the ESC into a stage *par excellence* for queerness and alternative identities. However, a closer look reveals that the Eurovision Song Contest is leaning towards a male queerness or a queer maleness (obviously, this assertion must draw on the classic distinction between male and female). The fact that I would like to point out is that it is more male-identified performers on stage who appear in a queer context and who are surrounded by a certain queer aura. Irrespective of their socio-cultural background, many male-identified artists have seemed to enjoy playing with identities and gender ideas. A lot of them have flaunted the break with the conventional, meaning heteronormative concept of male identity – a rupture which has taken a central moment in many performances. Their homoerotic and/ or androgynous appearances have blurred identity lines. In recent years, elements used to produce an ambiguous male identity have ranged, among other things, from the singing voice – one remembers, for example, the extremely high-pitched voice of Romanian singer Cezar in 2013 – and elements of camp which have appeared in costumes, in the stage décor and setting and in the performances in general – as, for example, shown by the Belorussian group 3+2 in 2010, by Ireland's Jedward in 2011, by Blue from the United Kingdom in 2011, or by Moldova's SunStroke Project & Olia

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<sup>93</sup> Original: "No lyrics, speeches, gestures of a political or similar nature shall be permitted during the Eurovision Song Contest."

Tira in 2010 – to ambiguous song texts where relationships, partners, and the adored person have remained unspecified so that one could assume any gender context and any possible identity constellation – as, for example, shown, by the Azerbaijanian duo Ell & Nikki in 2011 (Motschenbacher 2012). The diverse use of queer and camp elements creates an aura of metrosexuality and suggests the idea of a continuum of identity which the performers do not only embody on stage but promote as a possible everyday lifestyle. The aforementioned performances show that this way of acting is by no means specific to Western European artists. Singers from post-Soviet countries, too, have incorporated the idea of gender and identity play into their performances. Ironically, this is even true for Russian artist Dima Bilan, winner of the music festival in 2008, who demonstrated exemplarily the fragility of masculinity. He staged so-called “real masculinity” in his performance, markedly emphasising his machismo. However, by using a homoerotic setting and very kitschy elements, he successfully disrupted heteronormativity (Cassiday 2014). Yet, it was probably Ukraine’s Verka Serdiuchka, the “trashy drag-queen from Ukraine”, who in 2007 – accompanied by obviously non-heteronormative band members – gave the best rendition of the spirit of the Eurovision Song Contest. Her identity on stage could be interpreted as a symbol of Europe as a place of tolerance with regard to gender and identity diversity (Cassiday 2014).

A great deal of the queerness at the Eurovision Song Contest is brought into the show by choreography and performances consisting of male background dancers. Verka Serdiuchka’s setting from 2007 may be legitimately characterised as the prototypical queer and camp performance. The use of science fiction costumes and the visible use of camp elements add, taken all together, a high degree of fetishism to the performance. The same could be said about the performance of Sweden’s Eric Saade in 2011. His stage décor, the costumes that he and his dancers wore on stage and the interaction between all the performers resembled a reverie of gay fetishism and clearly alluded to a homosexual location. As a last example, I would like to mention here the performance of Ani Lorak from Ukraine in 2008 which demonstrated a high degree of what could be read as queerness by the audience. The male dancers literally radiated metrosexuality and created an aura of homoeroticism.

The role of the hosts of the Eurovision Song Contest in breaking heteronormativity has also been demonstrated exemplarily by Petra Mede

in Sweden in 2013 who presented the nation of Sweden in an interlude in which kissing and marrying male couples were featured, along with female football players and fathers bottle-feeding their children. Moreover, a number of male hosts have overtly flirted with male artists.

In comparison, female performers often adhere to traditional feminine stereotypes and clichés. Instead of challenging an identity continuum and questioning fixed gender roles and traditional ideas, they frequently opt for the other extreme. They stage an exaggerated femininity and present women as sex symbols or sexual objects. Many female singers perform in such a way in order to emphasise their roles as sexualised and eroticised objects of desire (Kirilina 2015). Singers like Alena Lanskaia from Belarus, Ani Lorak from Ukraine, or the Polish girl band Donatan & Cleo are striking examples of this performance style in recent years. Queer identities such as lesbian Marija Šerifović from Serbia in 2007 (URL 87) or transsexual Dana International from Israel in 1998 are rare. The same is true for actions which could be described as queer such as the lesbian kiss in the performance of Krista Siegfriids from Finland in 2013 or the allusion to lesbian desire in the performance of t.A.T.u. from Russia in 2003. In fact, female same-sex desire can be found only very sporadically on the stage of the Eurovision Song Contest.

### *3 Conchita Wurst and the Eurovision Song Contest 2014*

The period, when Conchita Wurst entered the Russian discourse on gender, identity, and sexual desire, was characterised by significant change as has been shown in the previous part of this monograph. Russia's rigid gender policies and the ensuing international debates on these political measures, in particular, had created a tense atmosphere. In general, Conchita Wurst was given a brilliant reception and she was received very well by the public and the media after her ESC victory. Even in Russia, the singer had been able to win 8 points in the televote (as opposed to 0 points from the jury). Nevertheless, there was a volley of protest and reproaches. Some viewers were clearly upset and started asking the question of what had become of the once rather predictable Eurovision Grand Prix. In Russia, as well as in some other post-Socialist countries such as Belarus, the victory of Conchita Wurst at the Eurovision Song Contest was used for propaganda purposes. Ideological ideas were brought forward propagating a conservative view of

society, identity, and gender roles. Conchita Wurst stirred up the debates on traditional gender ideas and identity concepts. Once again, the media drew attention to traditional values in order to stabilise a homogeneous society and, consequently, to prevent the expression of a unique personality. Consequently, Conchita Wurst was no longer thought of as the bearded woman or a gay transvestite. Rather, she functioned as a projection screen for different discourses on gender and identity concepts. Moreover, she was instrumentalised to confirm Russia's "own normality" and to decry the "alien otherness", the "abnormal perversity" of Europe.<sup>94</sup>

In recent years, the idea of man and woman according to traditional and thereby strictly divided patterns within the Russian society has become visible in the Russian performances at the Eurovision Song Contest. Cassiday (2014: 17) notes a rising rejection of gay camp and homoerotic elements in Russian performances and a significant rise of Soviet-style and traditional elements, instead.

Recent Eurovision acts representing Russia confirm that the country's gay trajectory to a Eurovision win has not merely come to a heteronormative halt, but actually taken several homophobic steps backward (Cassiday 2014: 21f).

In this vein, one can interpret the performance of the Tolmachevy Sisters (*Sestry Tolmachevy*) in the year 2014. The Russian singers displayed a naïve and, to some extent, submissive cuteness. They embodied a concept of femininity which matches the general idea of a perfect and, consequently, heterosexual Russian woman.

In a similar way, Russia's performance by the Buranovskie Babushki in 2012 can be assessed. It showed six older women from the Russian Republic of Udmurtia in their traditional clothing who conveyed an image of a woman who was somewhat independent and self-confident but who also at the same time alluded to the traditional female role by including actions depicting kitchen and household scenes in their performance and by reproducing stereotypical female behaviour on stage. Moreover, one could observe here a tight link between ethnicity, nationalism, and gender ideas.

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<sup>94</sup> Conchita Wurst is not the only androgynous character with a beard. The Bosnian singer and artist Božo Vrećo from the group Halka performs in a similar outfit on stage. After the victory of Conchita Wurst, he was called "the Bosnian Conchita" (*bosanska Končita*) in the Bosnian media.

In this context, the critical reactions to Conchita Wurst become more comprehensible as she represents a radical departure from this concept of ideal femininity, showing difference and variety. Furthermore, she conveyed a representation of the individual as a unique rather than collective creature.

### 3.1 *Russian Discourse and the Idea of Femininity*

Despite its officially apolitical nature, the Eurovision Song Contest has become an arena for the clash of different views and attitudes toward gender and identity. Everything which happens at the ESC will be interpreted according to and instrumentalised within the specific discourse on gender, identity, and sexual desire. It is hardly surprising that this was particularly relevant in the case of Conchita Wurst.

Conchita Wurst stirred up debates on traditional notions of gender and concepts of identity. This is why we should take a closer look at the ways in which her persona was contextualised in relation to the overarching concepts of femininity and masculinity. Let me begin by examining the ways in which the singer elicited prevalent ideas about femininity<sup>95</sup>.

The discourse on Conchita Wurst showed quite bluntly that the majority of Russians still adheres to the idea that there are only *two* genders,

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<sup>95</sup> Here, it may appear to be irrelevant whether I will talk, in the following, of the idea of the woman or of the idea of femininity. Both concepts share a lot of specifics and associations and they seem to be rather interchangeable. However, it seems to me to be more appropriate to speak of the idea of femininity in the following. Why? The word *woman* refers to a concept which is mainly embedded and interpreted in the context of biology. In contrast to this, femininity must be seen in the context of performativity: femininity points, first of all, to the performative character of a woman. In other words: if *woman* is primarily the assignment of a person to a biological – here: female – category, then *femininity* is primarily the assignment of certain behaviour and thinking patterns to the category of female persons. This includes, for example, typical characteristics such as voice, looks, and appearance, as well as specific gender roles such as gender-specific functions, tasks, and duties. As shown in the first part of this book, both, the concepts of the woman and the concept of femininity are visibly shaped by their particular socio-cultural history. As a result, the concepts of “woman” and “femininity” are embedded and always interpreted in their socio-cultural context. As a consequence, the respective expectations of a woman and of the ways how to perform femininity vary in different socio-cultures.

namely man and woman, each equipped with a fixed set of characteristics. Consequently, the discussion focused on the requirements which must be fulfilled by the representatives of the respective biological category. What can or must be expected particularly from a woman in terms of behaviour? Which characteristics are ultimately associated with the respective biological category? And how should the assignment of a person to a specific biological category affect their everyday acting if we are to understand their gender according to the general socio-cultural norms of gender intelligibility? For a certain part of the Russian society, the appearance of Conchita Wurst provided an opportunity to question the characteristics and attributes a “real” woman should have. Consequently, the discourse on Conchita Wurst was primarily guided by two questions: a) what is a woman actually and a man respectively and b) what kind of specifics must a woman or a man have as a member of modern day Russian society?

The discourse on Conchita Wurst showed clearly that for Russians, a woman has a certain attitude and is characterised by specific features which do not only distinguish her as a woman but which distinguish her, in particular, from a man. For this reason, male and female attitudes, looks, and behaviour patterns needed to be observed separately. However, the gender-queer artist Conchita Wurst challenged traditional notions of gender and blurred the lines separating what is considered male and what is considered female by intentionally intermixing both male and female characteristics and features. Here, it was mainly her beard which placed her in the spotlight and which was harshly criticised by a large slice of the Russian people. From a traditional perspective, a woman should not be masculine. Her appearance and behaviour should comply exclusively with female gender norms, which provide a generally accepted frame within which she can act and negotiate her identity. In contrast to this, Conchita Wurst fell outside the feminine norm and performed, consequently, outside of the (heteronormative) frame. As a symbol of masculinity, her beard had neither relevance nor meaning for a woman or for being a woman, as a beard and a woman are perceived by many as irreconcilable opposites. Consequently, the beard on Conchita Wurst’s face caused irritation among spectators and led to what I would like to describe as a panic caused by symbolic disorientation. Spectators did not know what to make of Wurst’s beard. They insisted on categorising the artist either as a woman or as a man but failed to do so in a consistent manner. To them, a so-called “intermediate gender”

was unacceptable and impossible to imagine. In an interview with the Russian newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, politician Vitalii Valentinovich Milonov from Saint Petersburg argued that Conchita Wurst should not be allowed to enter Russia unless she agreed to visibly define her gender according to the traditional female—male axis.

Well, first of all, a beautiful creature should determine who they are – man or woman. Well, and from the point of view of a politician, I can say that we have goods whose import is prohibited. Pork from certain countries, chlorinated chicken legs. Only because this may cause gastrointestinal troubles. We do not prohibit the entry of a person, but of the product Conchita Wurst, coming from show business. We do not need such a nightmare. The Russian Federation does not need to welcome this monster. If the European establishment which is infused with evil has chosen such a symbol, then this has absolutely nothing in common with us (MK Online, 12 May 2014, URL 88).<sup>96</sup>

Why do I suggest the word *misunderstanding* to describe the reason why so many Russian spectators were irritated by Conchita Wurst's beard? The singer herself has explained her beard as a symbol of diversity, ambiguity, and freedom. Hence, the beard should be characterised as an individual feature of a person or, in this particular case, as an individual feature of a woman. In combination with an obviously female appearance, a beard stands for individuality as well as for gender mixing or a cross-gender identity. The beard is a rejection of the concept of a uniform identity. Identities can change, they can be ambiguous and not as clearly defined as one might expect. Conchita Wurst's beard represents that there is a possibility. A possibility to construct and to live out one's own identity.

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<sup>96</sup> Original: “Ну, прекрасное создание должно сначала определиться, кто оно такое — мужчина или женщина. Ну а с позиции государственного человека могу сказать, что у нас есть товары, ввоз которых запрещен. Свинины из некоторых стран, ножки Буша с хлором. Просто потому, что это может вызвать кишечные расстройства. Мы запрещаем въезд не человеку, а продукту шоу-бизнеса Кончите Вурст. Мы не нуждаемся в подобного рода кошмарах. Не нужно для Российской Федерации, чтобы мы принимали это чудовище. Если европейский истеблишмент, который пронизан пороком, избрал себе такой символ, то к нам это не имеет никакого отношения.”



Moreover, the beard represents a blemish of sorts drawing attention to the notion that identity is an ideal which can never be reached and completed.

Unfortunately, her message did not come across as such. The Russian public interpreted the beard as an affront or an act of provocation. It also rejected the implications of the singer's performance for the concept of identity. This is reflected by the linguistic findings used in the study: for instance, Conchita Wurst is constantly categorised as a member of one of the two groups, male or female. This becomes obvious when one looks at the personal nouns that are used to refer to the artist. However, from analysing the use of male and female personal nouns, two differences can be observed which seem to be particularly interesting from a referential semantic perspective: first of all, the female personal nouns carry most often a neutral meaning or rather they are used in a neutral context, while male personal nouns carry an expressive, mainly pejorative connotation. Second, the male personal nouns used tend to emanate and connote homosexuality and, consequently, they very often appear in a homosexual or even homophobic context, while the female personal nouns emanate a heteronormative connotation and are instead used to refer to a heterosexual woman (cf. *Pochemu pidora zhenshchinoi nazvali?* 'Why did they call a fag a woman?' – MK Online, 11 May 2014)<sup>97</sup>.

The female personal nouns are primarily used to make clear that Conchita Wurst is recognised and assessed as a woman. In this way, the corresponding nouns express, in particular, femininity. This becomes, for instance, evident, when we look at agent nouns like *pevitsa-transvestit* '[<sub>masc</sub>]transvestite [<sub>fem</sub>]singer', *ispolnitel'nitsa* '[<sub>fem</sub>]singer', *trans-ispolnitel'nitsa* '[<sub>fem</sub>]trans-singer', *avstriiskaia ispolnitel'nitsa* '[<sub>fem</sub>]Austrian [<sub>fem</sub>]singer', *pobeditel'nitsa pesennogo konkursa* '[<sub>fem</sub>]winner of the song contest', *frau Vurst* 'Mrs Wurst'.

Most often, Conchita Wurst is referred to as *devochka* 'girl' and *zhenshchina* 'woman'. In some contexts, the pejorative noun *baba* 'crone' is used, too. However, these nouns are often coupled with masculine specifics, a discursive technique which obviously aims at degrading the femininity of Conchita Wurst directly. Consequently, expressions like *devochka s borodoi* 'the girl with the beard', *zhenshchina s borodoi* 'the woman with the beard', *borodataia zhenshchina* 'the bearded woman', *borodataia*

<sup>97</sup> Original: "Почему пидора женщиной назвали???"

*devochka* ‘the bearded girl’ are used to make clear that Conchita Wurst is not a “real” woman.<sup>98</sup> In this context, the noun *boroda* ‘beard’ stands for ‘a masculine attitude’ or ‘a masculine feature’ and is rather used as a stigma. It can be interpreted in such a way as Conchita Wurst is ‘a woman who has a masculine attribute’. In contrast to the noun, the adjective *borodataia* ‘bearded’ underlines the meaning ‘the woman who is too masculine’. Other interesting expressions are the word group *baba borodataia* ‘bearded crone’ and the deadjectival noun *borodatka* ‘bearded woman’ which are intended to diminish her position within the female hierarchy.

The noun *tetka* is also worthy of mention here. It has two meanings, depending on the context, on who uses it, at whom it is directed and on the intention of the speaker. The word *tetka* is primarily used to refer to a grumpy, unfriendly, angry, overweight woman who exudes a masculine habitus. Consequently, a woman who is referred to as *tetka* is degraded within the female hierarchy due to the fact that she does not emanate traditional feminine characteristics. She shows a habitus which exudes masculinity. The second meaning of *tetka* can only be used when referring to males. In this sense, the noun refers to a man, mainly but not exclusively to a homosexual man. It implies that his behaviour is too feminine and/ or it alludes to his sexual orientation which is presumed to be non-heterosexual. It is also occasionally used as a derogatory term for heterosexual men who fail to conform to hegemonic notions of masculinity in terms of behaviour or interests (e.g. opinion, look, style, decision making, hobbies...) which can vary, depending on the situation. Using the word *tetka* ‘fag, fairy, queen’ in reference to a male, aims at diminishing his position within the male hierarchy and calls into question his gender identity as a heterosexual. With regard to Conchita Wurst, one can conclude that the use of the noun *tetka* (e.g. *borodataia tetka* ‘the bearded grumpy woman’ versus ‘the bearded fag’) reveals inevitable doubts concerning the femininity of the artist, while at the same time calling into question her masculinity based on her feminine appearance, her effeminate behaviour, or simply due to her perceived sexual orientation as homosexual.

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<sup>98</sup> The same word choice can be observed in Polish, although to a much lesser degree; cf. *baba z brodą* ‘the crone with the beard’, *kobieta z brodą* ‘the woman with the beard’ at fakt24.pl (URL 89).

Furthermore, Conchita Wurst was compared to the Russian performers, the Tolmachevy Sisters who were said to embody a correct femininity. This underscores the idea that one's own identity is always the result of a comparison to other identities, too. In this context, the Russian idea of masculinity and femininity as well as its evaluation was influenced by notions of gender perceived as alien.

The ideas of masculinity and femininity of others influence the content and the assessment of the gender models in one's own culture [transl.] (Riabov 2007: 65).<sup>99</sup>

According to some readers, the appearance and performance of the Tolmachevy Sisters at the Eurovision Song Contest comprised attributes perceived as conventionally and properly feminine. A woman should be *krasivaia* 'beautiful', *chistaia* 'pure', *prekrasnaia* 'gorgeous', *milaiia* 'lovely', *nezhnaia* 'tender', *zhenstvennaia* 'feminine', *dobraia* 'well-tempered', *khoroashaia* 'good', *s zhenstvennoi figuroi* 'with a feminine physique', *krashenaia* 'rouged' (cf. also Kirilina 2002). Women were seen as *krasavitsy* 'beauties'<sup>100</sup> or *angely* 'angels'<sup>101</sup>. Hence, a strict division was drawn between men and women due to their different physical features and behaviour. A woman was defined by both, women and men, according to her looks and to her other feminine attributes. From this perspective, the more feminine attributes a woman possessed, the higher the regard she had in female circles and in Russian society. It was said that a Russian woman was judged especially in accordance with traditional and classic standards of beauty. Yet, there also seemed to be a stark division between Russian femininity and European femininity, a hierarchy in which the Russian woman and Russian femininity were of much higher value. In this context, some readers deduced a simplistic generalisation from the performance of the Russian singers. The pureness and the harmony of the Tolmachevy

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<sup>99</sup> Original: "Образы мужественности и женственности Чужих оказывают влияние на содержание и оценку гендерных моделей собственной культуры."

<sup>100</sup> Cf. e.g. "Две замечательные девочки, - Настя и Маша, для меня представляют прекрасных русских красавиц. Я за них голосовал. Счастья вам, двойняшки..." (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. e.g. "Вот именно, что "наши ангелочки", и нечего нашим ангелочкам делать в этом вертепе..." (МК Online, 07.05.2014).

Sisters purportedly reflected the general characteristics of the Russian nation: from this perspective, both girls represented Russian culture perceived as homogeneous, uniform, and standardised. In contrast, European culture was judged as weird, bizarre, and strange (*strannaia*)<sup>102</sup>.

It ought to be pointed out here that other, previous artists at the Eurovision Song Contest such as transsexual performer Dana International from Israel or lesbian singer Marija Šerifović from Serbia did not cause a comparable furore or uproar with their performances. Their acts were met with more tolerance. Although both singers did not correspond to the heteronormative idea of a woman their physical appearance on stage embodied a traditional femininity, perceived as both natural and real.

At the contest, men with a feminine appearance have already performed a lot of times. Dana International from Israel even took the first place once. But precisely now, the Russian media caused quite a super-mega-stir about this – well, we don't have any other problems to deal with in our country.<sup>103</sup>

Well, actually Dana was *beautiful* and performed effectively with a good song. And she actually *looked like* an artist. We have always been loyal with regard to that. One can even remember Serdiuchka. But here, a bogle, complex-ridden, performed with a stupid song and with a *miserable* beard. Well, it was all in all absolutely *galling*.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Original: “Она не специально ,она нарочно это все делает. Пусть у вас все женщины такие будут. У вас *странная культура* и дипломатия б никого не уважать и ни чьи законы. Будет стоять вопрос о дальнейшем сотрудничестве и общении с Европой. У нас такая культура : вот тебе Бог на небеси ,а вот тебе порог” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>103</sup> Original: “на этом конкурсе уже много раз выступали мужчины в женском обличьи, и даже первое место однажды заняла транссексуалка из Израила (Dana International), но почему то именно сейчас российские сми раздули из этого какую супер-мега сенсацию - ах, ну да у нас же в стране больше никаких проблем нету” (МК Online, 15.05.2014).

<sup>104</sup> Original: “Да нет! Просто Дана *красиво* и эффектно выступила, и с хорошей песней, и, вообще, *выглядела* как Артистка! - к таким народ всегда относился лояльно. Можно и Сердючку вспомнить.... А тут вышло снедаемое комплексами, чуелко с бездарной песенкой, и с *поганенькой* бородкой (зачем-то). Да и вообще, он просто *неприятный* очень...” (МК Online, 15.05.2014).

Yet, one must also consider the fact that the socio-political circumstances in Russia were different when both Dana International and Marija Šerifović won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1998 and 2007, respectively. In contrast to Dana and Marija, Conchita Wurst appeared at a time, when gender and identity policies were becoming ever-increasingly rigid in Russia and when Russian politics was starting to actively intervene in the process of identity construction. The time in which Conchita won the ESC was not characterised by a liberal and democratic political climate but rather by authoritarianism.

### *3.2 Russian Discourse and the Idea of Masculinity*

While the expected performance of femininity is mostly reduced to style, appearance, and stereotypical feminine features, such as having a gentle personality and an attractive outward appearance, the idea of masculinity is discussed in different contexts. Debates surrounding femininity focus on superficial characteristics and traits; femininity is localised and characterised as a closed-off sphere which seems to exist on its own, without showing any relevant and far-reaching internal and, in particular, external effects.

In contrast, notions of masculinity and the way of performing it are discussed in a much more multifaceted manner. Two aspects that are of particular interest to my discussion of the discourse surrounding gender and the impact of Conchita Wurst are outlined as follows:

First of all, masculinity is also associated and linked with other identity concepts or, to be more exact, masculinity seems to have a significant and wide-ranging impact on the construction and perception of other identity concepts. This concerns, on the one hand, different concepts of individual masculinity (i.e. what it means to be a man) and, on the other hand, identities which are not related to masculinity *per se*, but which are associated with being or with having to be masculine. In this context, masculinity is very often interpreted from a spatial perspective so that masculinity serves as a criterion and an attribute of special spaces and places. In fact, the concept of masculinity is frequently used today as a yardstick when defining and characterising nations. As a result, the assessment of a national identity is especially dependent on the fact how “masculine” a nation is (cf. Kondakov 2012b).

Secondly, masculinity is often surprisingly discussed in the context of homosexuality or non-heteronormativity. These debates often deal with the concept of male homosexuality and bring to the surface issues which are closely linked to the gay world and to the gay lifestyle. Most often, they create or include some form of opposition between “real” masculinity and homosexuality or aspects which are viewed as markers or signifiers of the gay world and the gay lifestyle. One can observe here a clear strategy of demarcation which is very often based on spatial argumentation. As a consequence, masculinity is not only discussed on its own, but very often – and obviously more often than femininity – in relation to other concepts.

I have pointed out that much of the debate surrounding Conchita Wurst and her gender identity focused on the artist’s beard. The beard is a manly feature which symbolises real masculinity. The beard stands in striking contrast to the concept of a woman and of femininity. Consequently, some male readers felt offended by Conchita Wurst and her gender-crossing attire and make-up. From their perspective, Conchita Wurst was a woman who had transgressed what it means to be a woman, as it is impermissible for a woman to have a beard.<sup>105</sup> These readers expected Conchita Wurst, a person whom they recognised foremost as a woman to embrace a harmonic reflection of her gender as a woman – and not the disruption of gender by a striking or, as it was said, “brutal” (*brutal’naia*)<sup>106</sup> beard. And while some people such as the actress Jennifer Lawrence (URL 90) or last year’s Miss Austria Amina Dagi (URL 91) showed their capability for tolerance towards identity diversity and expressed their solidarity and sympathy with non-heteronormative people or genderqueer lifestyles by wearing, amongst other things, a beard in public, in Russia, men organised the flash mob *Dokazhi, chto ty ne Konchita Vurst* [Demonstrate that you are not Conchita Wurst] on Runet (URL 92), appealing to Russian males to shave off their beards and rid themselves of this “femininity”. This action was accompanied by a statement by Vladimir Iakunin, the former President of the Russian Railways Company and active supporter of Vladimir Putin: “Men, get shaved! Don’t become women!” (*Muzhchiny, breites’! Ne bud’te babami!*) (Deutsche Welle Online, 15 May 2015, URL 93).

<sup>105</sup> Original: “впрочем если бы не было бороды не было бы столько гневных отзывов, а тут действительно непонятно” (МК Online, 14.05.2014).

<sup>106</sup> Original: “*брутальная* мужская борода (на уточненном женском лице)” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

With regard to the debate on masculinity, one observes a very frequent use of the word *muzhik* for ‘a real man’, ‘a man’s man’, ‘a real lad’. In former times, the noun *muzhik* was primarily used to refer to a ‘peasant’ or ‘villager’ (in contrast to *gorozhanin* ‘townspeople’). Today, *muzhik* in everyday language generally carries the meaning of ‘man’ and is used as a synonym of *muzhchina* ‘man’ although there are serious discrepancies between both nouns with regard to their stylistic value and connotation. While the neutral word *muzhchina* ‘man’ can be used in every context to refer to a male person in an objective and stylistically neutral way, the word *muzhik* is typically used in colloquial language (*razgovornaia rech*) and belongs to both, the so-called “low register colloquial language” (*snizhennaia leksika*) and the so-called *prostorechie* as a typical Russian colloquial variant. In principle, the noun *muzhik* carries a negative, mainly pejorative and crude meaning and denotes primarily a less educated, ignorant, grubby, rough, and, hence, most often socially disadvantaged male (usually from adolescence onward) (cf. BTS Online)<sup>107</sup>. However, in recent years, the noun *muzhik* has significantly gained in frequency in language use, accompanied by an essential shift in its semantic and, in particular, pragmatic use (Shaburova 2002). The use of the noun highlights the necessity of an explicitly masculine look and behaviour which a man must exhibit in order to be accepted as a man in Russian society. Hence, the word *muzhik* functions as a “positive valence and [...] the norm of modern Russian masculinity” (Sperling 2015: 36) and refers to the ideal Russian man and implies strength, power, and superiority. Moreover, the Russian *muzhik* is a representative of a strong nation and embodies Russia as a powerful, leading, and, above all, traditional country in which the man gives his power to society and to the nation. This is currently demonstrated *par excellence* by the Russian President Vladimir Putin who stages his image as a real *muzhik* and who is considered as such by his people which is substantiated by the current Putin cult in Russia. This includes even pop songs by Russian artists<sup>108</sup>, which are dedicated to the president (Sperling

<sup>107</sup> Online at: <http://www.gramota.ru/slovari/info/bts/>.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. e.g. Mashani: *Moi Putin* (online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6Jw9rsWCE>), unknown artist: *Deistvui, Putin, Russkii Prezident* (online at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl\\_piRRItmM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl_piRRItmM)), Tolibdzhon Kurbankhanov: *VVP* (online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKsAbne393Y>), Sasha Chest feat. Timati: *Luchshii drug* (online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jp9pff>)

2015: esp. 36-47). Consequently, the frequent use of the noun *muzhik* reflects the tendency of the so-called *remasculinisation* of the Russian man – or, as one can understand from the discourse, of the “male tribe” (*muzhskaia plemia*)<sup>109</sup> – and of Russia itself. Other spaces, in contrast, are associated with femininity due to their lack of (real) *muzhiks* (Riabov/ Riabova 2008).

One has to keep in mind that the demasculinisation of others is part of the remasculinisation of Russia, i.e. of the identity policies which are characteristic for the Russian society in the 2000s [transl.] (Riabova/ Riabov 2013: 333).<sup>110</sup>

This does not mean, however, that Russian society fails to recognise male types who do not adhere to the expected idea(l) of masculinity. As a prime example, one may, for instance, consider Verka Serdiuchka, the drag artist from the Ukraine. Yet, it is very interesting to note that this character is perceived in a manner which differs completely from how Conchita Wurst is perceived. Verka Serdiuchka is primarily seen as a comedian (*prikolist*) with a non-ugly look<sup>111</sup>, as a persona who plays on stereotypes (*stsenchnyi obraz* ‘stage and art character’, *obraz byl tsel’nyi i zabavnyi* ‘his character is uniform and funny’). But, amongst other things, his purported heterosexuality conjures forth the image of him as a real man who is only “dressed like a woman” (*pereodetyi v babu muzhik*). Therefore, the persona Verka Serdiuchka can be understood and explained, whereas Conchita Wurst remains indescribable and unexplainable because she shows her “real style” (*pozviznennyi obraz*).<sup>112</sup>

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neKf4), Andrei Gubin: *Putin Super DJ* (URL 121) [all last accessed on 26 April 2016].

<sup>109</sup> Original: “Не унижайте, пожалуйста, мужское племия!” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>110</sup> Original: “Следует учитывать, что демаскулинизация Чужих – часть ремаскулинизации России, т.е. политики идентичности, характерной для российского общества 2000-х.”

<sup>111</sup> Original: “Причем тут Сердючка? Данилко *приколост* он входит в роль и *внешний вид не отвращает*... А тут только можно слушать. Смотреть не приятно” (МК Online, 23.09.2013).

<sup>112</sup> Original: “потому что Сердючка *сценический образ*, и все об этом знали, переодетый в бабу *музык*, но образ был *цельный*, и *зававный*. Это же гей и транс - это его *пожизненный образ*, впрочем если бы не было бороды не было



It was the comparison of Conchita Wurst with Verka Serdiuchka, and the general perception of Conchita Wurst which prompted a discussion about sexual orientation. Upon analysing readers' comments on masculinity, one notices immediately that masculinity is very often discussed in the context of sexual orientation and desire. It becomes obvious that a man, irrespective of how he looks and of how he behaves, is a man only if he is heterosexual. Furthermore, a male is defined as a man when he has engaged or engages in typical masculine activities, for instance, in marriage (*ispolnial' supruzheskii dolg*)<sup>113</sup> and fulfils responsibilities that are reserved for men such as having been in the army (*sluzhit' v armii*)<sup>114</sup>. Conchita Wurst, however, is exclusively defined through her radiating non-heteronormativity. She is, consequently, assessed as a deviant person. While feminine personal nouns which are used to refer to Conchita Wurst can often be characterised as neutral, the masculine personal nouns which are used in reference to the artist, express quite bluntly discrimination, stigmatisation, and social marginalisation and are, in most cases, linked with homosexuality as a deviant and perverted sexual orientation. Moreover, most of the masculine personal nouns, which are used when referring to Conchita Wurst belong predominantly to the homophobic lexis<sup>115</sup>. Among those offensive words which are used when referring to the Austrian artist are, for instance, *gomosek* 'faggot', *sodomit* 'sodomite', *pederast* 'paederast', *pedik* 'paederast', or *pidor* 'fag'. In 1989, Belousova (1989: 156) still called most of these words "words which refer to a person who suffers from a sexual perversion" – including *gomoseksualist* 'homo-

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бы столько гневных отзывов, а тут действительно непонятно. ОНО. Как ребенку объяснить, кто это? Про Сердючку можно объяснить, а про Кончиту?" (МК Online, 14.05.2014).

- <sup>113</sup> Original: "После просмотра конкурса «Евровидения» сегодня ночью три раза поспался в холодном поту от кошмаров, шупал лицо у жены и на радостях исполнял супружеский долг" (МК Online, 11.05.2014).
- <sup>114</sup> Original: "Всё познается в сравнении... Наш Зверев = это ЕЩЁ МУЖИК !!! Даже в армии служил. Что будет дальше - просто непредсказуемо. А ведь люди - не улитки (см. учебник по зоологии)" (МК Online, 11.05.2014).
- <sup>115</sup> This is irrespective of the fact that some of these words are sometimes used with a completely different pragmatic function and, clearly, with a different meaning in a homosexual in-group. By the non-homosexual out-group, those words are intentionally used in order to deliberately and publicly insult, degrade, and discriminate homosexuals as well as, for example, deviant and weak heterosexuals.

sexual’, *pederast* ‘paederast’, *sadist* ‘sadist’, *erotoman* ‘erotomaniac’. Recently, they have gained in frequency in the course of the recent political measures against identity diversity and the public debates on maintaining traditional lifestyles and gender roles. More neutral nouns, like *transvestit* ‘transvestite’ or *ispolnitel’* ‘singer’ are rarely used.

### 3.3 Russian Discourse and the Idea of Gender Roles and Stereotypes

It is no exaggeration to state that at present, the predominant view on gender in Russia is characterised by traditional and normative ideas: Russian women must in general be attractive, cute, demure, and pure. Russian men must be virile, strong, and definitely not homosexual; they must fulfil tasks and duties which belong to the “male tribe” (*muzhskoe plemia*). The Russian discourse on gender identities and gender roles generally confirms these characteristics and attitudes towards men and women. As to Conchita Wurst, the discourse reinforced these gender stereotypes and gender ideas and, thus, strengthened the general paradigm of gender binarity. As to gender stereotypes and gender roles, one observes that the gender binarity in the heterosexual matrix is primarily given a social meaning: it is of great importance to marry<sup>116</sup> and to give birth to children in order to ensure the continuity of a powerful, healthy, and “normal” society and, as a logical consequence, of the Russian nation (*zadacha kul’tury zvat’ cheloveka k razvitiuu, a ne naoborot* ‘it is the task of culture to persuade people to develop and not the other way round’). Gender roles play an important part in influencing individuals to make decisions which are in line with these biopolitical goals. These roles encourage women to perceive themselves as weak and in need of protection, whereas men exist to give women shelter, to support and take care of them.

In Europe, there are simply no real lads left. All their men have become women. Poor girls from Europe, come to Russia! We are waiting for you

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<sup>116</sup> Original: “Голосование на Евровидении показало, сколько Кончит живет на западе.Практически, каждый второй(ая).Бедные девки, за кого замуж выходить?” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

with open arms. Come here to know what quality love from a man feels like [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>117</sup>

The debates on gender roles and gender stereotypes are no longer restricted to the microstructure of families and everyday relationships between men and women. Recently, they have also entered, for instance, the debates on sports. The discussion on men's inclusion in synchronised swimming offers an interesting insight into this: on BBC News (URL 94), the Minister of Sports of the Russian Federation Vitalii Mutko argued, for example, that synchronised swimming is "a purely feminine sport". Other commentators said that the fact that men can participate in this sport now, would not affect the femininity of synchronised swimming, but that men would have to find an adequate role and function in the swimming pool (cf. part 2). What they meant to say was: men cannot simply take part in this sport. They have to find a way of performing synchronised swimming in accordance with heteronormative expectations. As a consequence, they must re-enact a binary gender order with their female partners during their performances. In this context, the Russian competitor Aleksandr Maltsev said in an interview:

Men's choreography is different from women's. It's a completely different style. In a mixed duet, the man should personify strength, power. The woman, in contrast, beauty and grace [transl.] (URL 94).

Maltsev's statement reflects the view that gender identities are biologically predetermined categories (e.g. *prirodnaia zhenstvennost'* 'femininity by nature') which should be reflected by one's behaviour and even by art. There seems to be no awareness that gender identity is constructed and that its construction is conveyed and maintained by performing it. There are obviously only two gender identities which are distinguished by different and divergent characteristics and which when taken together complete each other (e.g. *Esli rodilsia muzhikom, tak soizvol' suka bud' muzhikom. A ne baboi* 'If you are born as a male, then agree with fucking being a man. And

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<sup>117</sup> Original: "просто в Европе не осталось мужиков. Все их мужики становятся "женщинами". Бедные европейки, приезжайте в Россию! Мы ждем Вас с распростертыми объятиями. Хоть познаете качественную мужскую любовь!"

not a woman!')<sup>118</sup>. Hence, there is no openness to the idea that one could perform gender in ways which do not correspond to one's sex or – and this would be an even more radical position – that there are no fixed characteristics of gender. Questioning his own preconceived notions of what a man and a woman should be like and why this should even be relevant in the context of art or sport is clearly outside of Maltsev's realm of imagination.

Maltsev is not alone in this: the Russian actor Maksim Averin expressed his stance on gender identity and the gender binary in an interview with *Moskovskii Komsomolets* on 16 May 2014 in the following way:

In our times, the terms “man” and “woman” have been leveled down somehow, they have become more “light” [i.e. like diet products]. This concerns, oh my God, the feelings, too. Half-living, half-loving... Look, when people begin to live and love, then the words “man” and “woman” take their places. That a term like “unisex” exists and that the borders of the sexes get blurred, this is abnormal to me. For God's sake, live your life whichever way you want and have sex with whom you want to. But if there is something between the legs of a man ... then he ought to behave accordingly. I don't feel comfortable to look at those who behave like a woman. The weak sex has the right to be capricious, to have a special logic. I am a tolerant person, but I am against all of us becoming sexless creatures [transl.] (URL 95).<sup>119</sup>

The gender binary supposedly shapes the “normal” unity between two people, each of whom belongs to one side of the gender continuum. The

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<sup>118</sup> Original: “Если родился мужиком, так соизволь сука будь мужиком. А не бабай!” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>119</sup> Original: “Она синтез. И нежная, и податливая, и строгая, и сильная. Все что угодно! Понятия «мужчина» и «женщина» в нынешнее время как-то нивелируются, становятся «лайт». И чувства, увы, тоже. Полуживу-полулюблю... Вот когда люди начнут жить и любить, тогда слова «женщина» и «мужчина» встанут на свои места. То, что сейчас есть понятие «унисекс» и границы между полами стираются, для меня ненормально. Ради бога, распоряжайся своей жизнью как хочешь и спи с кем хочешь. Но если у мужчины между ног есть что-то... то он должен соответственно себя и вести. Мне неприятно видеть тех, кто ведет себя как женщина. Слабый пол имеет право на капризы, на особую логику. Я толерантный человек, но я против того, чтоб мы становились бесполоми существами. Об этом в спектакле, кстати, тоже есть” (МК Online, 16.05.2014).

main quality of this binary – and this is the basis of heteronormativity – is that each of the two poles is deficient on its own. It needs the other pole to be complete. This paradigm almost inevitably leads to the following conclusion: if sex is biologically predetermined then sexual identity is biologically predetermined, too. From this angle, only heterosexuality can be considered as natural and “normal” (e.g. *priroda sozdala* ‘made by nature’, *zakony prirody* ‘laws of nature’, *estestvennyi otkor Darvina* ‘natural selection by Darwin’), “since people are no snails”<sup>120</sup>. Even the use of the colloquial noun *natural* ‘heterosexual person; literally: natural person’ reflects the view that heterosexuality is the natural form of sexual identity.

The generally assumed heteronormativity is not only reduced to societal microcosms such as family, but it runs through the whole of Russian society and nation, including every structure, institution, system, and, as has been shown above, even sports which all are generally characterised by their binary and heteronormative order (Sperling 2015). Framing heterosexuality and heterosexual identities as “the norm” and, consequently, as “normal” and “natural”, requires the rejection and marginalisation of other identities. As Judith Butler said:

In this sense, we see the “norm” as that which binds us, but we also see that the “norm” creates unity only through a strategy of exclusion (Butler 2004a: 206).

In contrast to this, non-heterosexuality is associated with a “disbalance” (*disbalans*), with “a mistake by nature” (*oshibka prirody*), and, consequently, with “a mental-health problem” (*problema v psikhike*) or a general “illness” (*zabolevanie*).<sup>121</sup> This is also the view of some politicians and official representatives like Vladimir Iakunin who declared in public that

<sup>120</sup> Original: “А ведь люди - не улитки” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>121</sup> Original: “в природе есть исключения. рождаются не только мужчины и женщины, но средний пол. многие, имея финансовую возможность по достижению совершеннолетия принимают решение с помощью медицины устранить дисбаланс. живут работают, счастливы. мы можем прожить рядом и никто никого не смущает. но есть другое. разрушительная политика ценностей. им эти парады необходимы, чтобы постоянно быть на слуху, чтобы привлекать к себе как можно больше внимания и чтобы заявлять всем, что порока нет. но порок есть. *ошибка природы и проблемы в психике*” (МК Online, 14.05.2014).

“those Russians who voted for Conchita have an abnormal psychology” (*u tekh rossiiian, kotorye golosovali za Konchitu, ne vse normal'no c psikhikoi*) (URL 96, 97). Hence, compliance with heteronormativity is a distinguishing or even the main characteristic of a human being.

Fags and lesbians make me sick, too, in the truest sense of the word. Oh my God, I feel pity for all those children who have parents who are both female (so, mamas) or both male (it is nonsense to talk about these perverts as if they had a male sex) and educate a child (two dads) – this is abnormal [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2014).<sup>122</sup>

A heterosexual [literally: a natural man] never becomes gay, and they [homosexuals] never become heterosexual [literally: natural] [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>123</sup>

Biology is not the only discipline enlisted in the service of heteronormativity. The heteronormative gender binary is also one of the central tenets of Orthodox religion and the Russian Orthodox Church. According to this dogma, a truly religious individual is never anything but heterosexual. Consequently, the Russian nation as a religious community (*my religioznyi* ‘we are religious’)<sup>124</sup> is distinguished by its heteronormativity or non-homosexuality. Hence, organised religion could only interpret the performance of Conchita Wurst – as the “most scandalous person” (*samyi skandal'nyi personazh*)<sup>125</sup> at the Eurovision Song Contest – as “an intended propaganda of sin and sexual deviation” (*namerennaia propaganda grekha i seksual'nykh otklonenii*)<sup>126</sup>.

It is justified to say that heterosexuality is a significant feature of a person; yet, it is not the only fact that makes a man or a woman acceptable

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<sup>122</sup> Original: “Меня также в прямом смысле тошнит от педиков и лесбиянок. Господи, как же жалко детей, у которых две особи женского пола (типа, мамы) или две особи мужского пола (нонсенс, говорить об этих извращениях, что они мужского пола), воспитывающие ребёнка (два папы). Это – НЕНОРМАЛЬНО” (MK Online, 15.05.2014).

<sup>123</sup> Original: “Натурал никогда не станет геем, а им никогда не стать натуралами.”

<sup>124</sup> Original: “Мы религиозны” (MK Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>125</sup> Original: “самый скандальный персонаж” (MK Online, 05.05.2014).

<sup>126</sup> Original: “намеренная пропаганда греха и сексуальных отклонений” (MK Online, 11.05.2014).

within society. In the eyes of the public, Alisa and Dmitrii, for example, must look like an ordinary heterosexual couple from Moscow. However, Dmitrii is transgender. As a biological male, Dmitrii has a female identity named Alina. The couple confused and even outraged the recording officials at the register office when they both appeared at their wedding in a white wedding dress. The authorities argued that Alisa and Alina had tarnished the ceremony of marriage and, moreover, “disgraced the idea of family” (*pozorit’ poniatie o sem’e*).<sup>127</sup> It is evident that genderqueer identities are not acceptable even if the biological constellation corresponds to heteronormative ideas.

### 3.4 Russian Discourse and the Increase of Homophobia

By appealing to the above mentioned rigid traditional and moral values with particular reference to the concept(s) of gender and sexuality and by deliberately disadvantaging and virtually discriminating against non-conformist society members due to their non-heteronormative identities, adherents of a uniquely Russian identity, in particular politicians and the Russian Orthodox Church, try to redefine Russia’s national idea.<sup>128</sup> This process is accompanied by the regulation and by the marginalisation and exclusion of sub-identities and minorities.

It was already in the year 1999, when Vladimir Putin said in an interview that “our country [Russia] needs a reconstruction in order to have a future” (*nasha strana nuzhdaetsia v rekonstruktsii dlia togo chtoby imet’ budushchee*).<sup>129</sup> Scheller-Boltz (2015f) mentioned in one of his recent papers on the relation between gender, sexuality, and space that it is not at all clear when exactly Russian politics and, in particular, Vladimir Putin decided to add the issue of re-finding and re-defining Russian national identity to his agenda. Maybe it was as early as 1999 when Vladimir Putin

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<sup>127</sup> For more information, cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEaX3PaqV0M> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqEikvmyqvQ> [both last accessed on 20 April 2016].

<sup>128</sup> As to the idea of the Russian nation and tradition as well as to the idea of the Russian soul (*russkaia dusha*); cf. Berdiaev (1990).

<sup>129</sup> Cf. online at: <http://m.ostro.org/general/world/articles/399754/>. Watch the corresponding video of this interview which is available on Youtube, online at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWL0x4p-zHs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWL0x4p-zHs) [both last accessed on 10 March 2015].

gave the aforementioned interview to the Russian news service *OstroV*. Whichever way one may look at it, one cannot ignore the fact that the process of rebuilding and re-establishing Russian national identity plays a crucial role within Russian politics. Moreover, the re-establishing and strengthening of a national identity according to a conservative model has been gaining in popularity within Russian society in general. In this context, it is interesting to note that it is not only politics which is involved in this process. It is society *per se* which actively takes part in the establishment and consolidation of Russian national identity.

The process of establishing and consolidating national identity is always based on ideological principles and ideas which

themselves exist as cultural constructs, subject to processes of change and revision by individuals and groups (Bucholtz 1999: 14).

Moreover, the construction of a national identity is based on a certain understanding of nation. Generally, and as Mae (2007: 41)<sup>130</sup> puts it, the idea of nation is characterised by a politically motivated *We-consciousness* which leads to a demarcation of other nations as well as by the will to act together which forms a community based on action and will.

With this in mind, it is not difficult to apply these theoretical explanations to the situation one observes in Russia today. The desired national identity is based on myths and ideological ideas which are deeply rooted in the former Soviet Union.<sup>131</sup> One of the widespread beliefs at that time was: the greater the population, the stronger the nation.

The Soviet Union linked its power with its population size, which had to be sufficient to sustain an enormous army and a labour-intensive industry (Attwood 1996: 96).

The same can be observed today because

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<sup>130</sup> Original: “[...] ein politisch ausgerichtetes Wir-Bewusstsein (in Abgrenzung zu den Anderen) und einen damit verbundenen gemeinsamen Handlungswillen, durch den Menschen zu einer Handlungs- und Willensgemeinschaft integriert werden.”

<sup>131</sup> For detailed information, cf. *Rossia i Evropa v poiskakh identichnosti* (2000).



the conservative discourse was particularly powerful, entailing a mobilization against gender equality and demanding a return to traditional Orthodox values – to the ‘normal’ family, with a corresponding conventional role of women (Temkina/ Zdravomyslova 2014: 263).

It seems obvious that such an ideology which is based on heteronormativity turns this precise heteronormativity into a prototypical socio-cultural construction. However, it is no less evident that a gender order is always understood as being an essential part of one’s own tradition, of one’s own nation, and, above all, a substantial pillar of one’s culture (Mae/ Saal 2007: 9). Thus, the idea of gender is used as a political instrument in order to legitimise a political course (Riabova/ Riabov 2010, cf. also Sperling 2015: 12f). The societal displacement of women, by reducing them to reproduction and housekeeping, and the reinvigoration of men, by recognising them as supporters and protectors, are articulated by the Russian President in the context of a powerful and superior nation. The current political regime in Russia draws both, the Russian nation and the Russian state, as masculine entities although Russia is actually and traditionally associated with femininity, as it is illustrated by the national and patriotic personification *Rossii-Matushka* ‘Mother Russia’ or *Rodina-Mat* ‘Mother Homeland, Mother Russia’ which are both frequently used even today. Moreover, it is important to understand that Russian politics is highly involved in the process of representing and performing this masculinity (Sperling 2015: 37). It is a woman’s duty to give birth to children to maintain and to strengthen the nation. On the contrary, it is a man’s duty to support and protect the nation and to act in a patriotic way and display his pride of Russia – a pride which is connected, amongst other aspects, with the armed forces and military parades which are regularly shown on television (Sperling 2015). Consequently, Sperling speaks here of a “gendered patriotism” (Sperling 2015: 149).

Russia sees itself as “the last bastion of normality” (Riabov/ Riabova 2014: 6). And according to this ideology and the idea of such a gendered nation

any group with minority interests is unwelcome. [...] Of course, ethnic, religious, sexual, and even political minorities exist in all countries. Yet, they are not entitled to make political demands only due to this fact. Individualism

is as suspicious as the standing out from the mean mediocrity. [...] And as to homosexuality, this corresponds neither with the “norms of the Socialist society” nor with their ideal of a nuclear family which is propagated and pursued even more strongly than in the West [transl.] (Hauer et al. 1984: 13).<sup>132</sup>

Consequently, it is only logical that it was homosexuality which has gradually made its way into debates concerning gender policies in recent years. However, there is something which is unique to the Russian discourse on homosexuality or non-heteronormativity in general. The regulation of gender and sexuality is not the only motive behind the homophobic political course. Public displays of non-heteronormativity and non-heteronormative lifestyles also serve as a scapegoat for certain social grievances. In recent years, this line of argumentation has moved to the foreground and is now part of open, public discourse. Homosexuality, consequently, is primarily associated with scenarios of threat and danger (Althaler 2014: 63, cf. also Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015). In this context, the argument is that Western Europe is plagued with serious problems of which include the onslaught of a number of undesirable social changes which stand in stark opposition to traditionalism and will thus inevitably lead to a complete collapse of both culture and civilisation. Russia, in contrast, relies on traditional and “normal” ideas which are believed to help build a strong and powerful nation. This attitude to gender and the need to sexualise spaces in order to assess nations and policies has been gaining in political popularity.

The other significant fact worth mentioning concerns the Russian people. To a great extent, it is Russian society itself which establishes, strengthens, and upholds homophobia. Although homosexuality, homosexual practices, and homoerotic desire are by no means new phenomena in Russian society and can be observed throughout Russian history (Baer

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<sup>132</sup> Original: “[...] jegliche Gruppe mit Partikularinteressen als unerwünscht [...]. Es gibt zwar in allen Ländern ethnische, religiöse, sexuelle und sogar politische Minderheiten, aber sie sind nicht berechtigt, aufgrund dieser Tatsache politische Forderungen zu stellen. [...] Individualismus ist ebenso suspekt wie das Herausragen aus der mittelmäßigen Durchschnittlichkeit. [...] Und im Falle der Homosexualität kommt dazu, daß sie weder den ‘Normen der sozialistischen Gesellschaft’ noch deren Idealbild von der Kernfamilie entspricht, das noch stärker als im Westen propagiert und angestrebt wird.”

2009, Healey 2014b, 2001), Russian society today is highly influenced by the current identity policy which is both homophobic and discriminatory.<sup>133</sup> People are manipulable to such an extent that they embrace without question whatever ideological beliefs politicians happen to present to them. The Russian media play a prominent, leading role in this context, last but not least due to their business model which simultaneously relies on and is influenced by politics (Althaler 2014, Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015). The political measures taken to curtail the rights and lifestyles of non-heteronormative individuals, as well as the way in which these measures are presented and justified politically, show, to some extent, an indoctrinating effect on certain individuals and groups in Russian society who take it upon themselves to prevent public displays of non-heteronormativity and who discriminate, in particular, against homosexual men. In addition, the Russian media focus mainly on homophobic acts carried out by Russians. By doing so, they are reinforcing the idea that homosexuality is not to be accepted or tolerated in Russia. Their intention is to encourage the nation as a whole to take a similar homophobic stance. The fact that this approach has proven so successful leads to a number of important conclusions. A recent representative survey within the Russian society, undertaken by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre *VTsIOM* in 2016, shows that 81 percent of the Russian population judges homosexuality as objectionable, whereas only 12 percent indicated that they have no problems with homosexuals (cf. also Kondakov 2013, 2010). It must be added here that people in Moscow and Saint Petersburg are more tolerant (21 percent indicated that they have nothing against homosexuals) than people in other places in Russia (URL 98, URL 99). Some like Aleksei Felisenko, a Russian lawyer from Rostov-na-Donu, feel the need to justify their views by denying that they are prejudiced. In August 2013, Felisenko posted the following comment on the Internet:

This little legal text is a very concise legal document from the perspective of the existing legal norms to which it refers: it concerns the domestic legislation of Russia as well as international law and, in particular, the conventional law of the Council of Europe. Moreover, the law expresses a

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<sup>133</sup> A detailed overview on homophobia in Russia and on the attitude of the Russian society towards homosexuality, including a historical overview on the development of homosexuality and homophobia is presented by Igor‘ Kon (1995).

merciful attitude towards the participants of legal relationships – due to these (and not for their sake), this law was passed – i.e. towards LGBT people (this term was introduced to the legal lexicon by the Council of Europe). In other words, for people with a non-traditional sexual orientation, this law is a real gift from the Russian State, and minors (children) are protected by the law from difficult and often incomprehensible information which affects their physiological and psychological development. [...] The unanimous passing of the law justifies the view that in the Russian Federation, there is actually no prejudice against LGBT people. One can even say that such prejudice definitely does not exist. The Russian society, which is represented by its legitimate State organs, confirmed by the passing of the law and enshrined legislatively that in the territory under the rule of Russian law, there are people who – besides other things – are affected by perverse sexual desires for each other, irrespective of their own sex. These people who are called LGBT people according to the legal terminology of the European Union, are pioneers in the sphere of sexual perversity to such an extent that they wish for all other Russians to know about their “uniquely impressive” lifestyle and to ally themselves with them at the first opportunity. Where is the prejudice in this? You cannot hide a cat in a bag (URL 100).<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Original: “Этот небольшой по тексту закон является очень ярким правовым документом с точки зрения существующих законодательных норм, которых он касается, как во внутреннем законодательстве России, так и в международном праве и в частности в конвенциональном праве Совета Европы. Более того, в принятом законе заметна его направленность на милосердное отношение к участникам правоотношений, из-за которых (но не ради которых) этот закон и принимался, – лицам ЛГБТ (термин, введенный в правовой лексикон Советом Европы). Иными словами, для лиц (людей) нетрадиционной сексуальной ориентации этот закон является настоящим подарком от Российского государства, а людей, не достигших совершеннолетия (детей), закон защищает от сложной и не всегда понятной информации, касающейся их физиологического и психического развития. [...] единодушное принятие Закона позволяет сказать о том, что в Российском обществе предрассудки в отношении лиц ЛГБТ практически отсутствуют, можно даже сказать, что их нет вовсе. Российское общество в лице своих легитимных государственных органов принятым Законом подтвердило и зафиксировало законодательно, что на территории действия российского законодательства проживают люди, которые, помимо всего прочего, увлечены извращенными половыми отношениями друг с другом, вне зависимости от собственной половой принадлежности. Эти люди, по правовой терминологии Евросоюза называемые лицами ЛГБТ, являются до такой степени подвижниками в сфере половых извращений, что желают, чтобы все остальные граждане России знали об их

Homophobia is currently a widespread phenomenon within Russian society. For example, during a round of talks at the Russian Youth Educational Forum *Seliger* in August 2013 a young man publicly expressed his views on homosexuality and promised the Russian President to support his political course.

My name is Anton Maramygin. I am a Cossack from Iaivinskaia from the Prikamskii separate Cossack District. Our elders and atamans have entrusted me with thanking you for the course our country has taken and for your policies. We see what you are doing: fighting against the sodomites and not allowing them to adopt our children. We support you in every way. We call you *batka* [father] and support you. And if it is necessary to demonstrate to all those Navalnyis [Aleksei Navalnyi is a Russian lawyer and political activist; consequently Navalnyis means ‘dissidents, members of the opposition movement’] that the nation is supporting the course of our president, then we will come out with our legs and arms, and if it is necessary, we will support the policies of our president with a whip. We will show them that this is our country and that we make our law. And they have told me to squeeze the hand of our national leader on behalf of our entire Cossack Prikamskii. Vladimir Vladimirovich, will you give me permission to do this? [transl.] (URL 101, 102).<sup>135</sup>

This statement can be described as a prime example of a homophobic performance. As one can clearly see, it is not only the propagated idea of identity in general which is used for homophobic purposes. It is also the

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«уникально-удивительном» образе жизни и присоединялись к ним при первой возможности. Какие тут могут быть предрассудки? Шила в мешке не утаишь.”

<sup>135</sup> Original: “Меня зовут Антон Марамягин, я являюсь казаком станицы Яйвинская Прикамского отдельного казачьего округа. Наши старейшины, атаманы поручили мне поблагодарить вас за тот курс, которым идет наша страна, за вашу политику. Мы видим, что вы делаете: боретесь с содомитами, не даете усыновлять наших детей. Мы всячески поддерживаем вас. Мы называем вас батькой, поддерживаем. И если надо будет доказать всяким овальным [= навальным ← Алексей Навальный], что народ поддерживает курс нашего Президента, мы выйдем своими ногами и руками, а если понадобится, нагайкой поддержим политику нашего Президента, покажем, что это наша страна и наши правила. И они попросили меня пожать от всего нашего Прикамского казачества руку нашему национальному лидеру. Разрешите, пожалуйста, Владимир Владимирович?”

language (use) that plays an important role in constructing homophobia (Baker 2005). Anton Maramygin's negative attitude towards non-heteronormativity is, first of all, made obvious by the noun with which he refers to homosexual individuals (*sodomit* 'sodomite'). Secondly, he mentions the current violence against homosexuals (*borot'sia s sodomitami* 'to fight against the sodomites'), adding that people will fight against homosexual people with their "legs, arms, and, if it will be necessary, their whips" (*my vyidem svoimi nogami i rukami, a esli ponadobitsia, nagaikoi*). Thirdly, he implies that he is against giving homosexuals equal rights, saying that it is a justified decision not to give Russian children to homosexual couples (*ne davat' usynovliat' nashikh detei*). Fourthly, his argumentation is influenced by a spatial dimension, when he mentions that this is "our country" (*nasha strana*) and "our laws" (*nashi pravila*). It is not necessary to further examine this dialogue at this point. What is important here is the fact that these episodes increased considerably and were reproduced after Conchita Wurst had won the Eurovision Song Contest.

When analysing the readers' comments from *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, one ought not to be surprised to find a strong antipathy towards homosexuality which is expressed in different ways and by different means. People show their strong homophobic views by using pejorative and discriminatory nouns (cf. Baer 2015) when they refer to Conchita Wurst or to homosexuals in general.<sup>136</sup> The use of neutral nouns such as the official terms *gomoseksual* and *gomoseksualist* 'homosexual man' or the colloquial expressions *goluboi* 'gay' and *gei* 'gay' is rare. The emphasis is on attacking. Hence, insulting and discriminating words prevail (e.g. *pedik* 'paederast', *pederast* 'paederast', *pedofil* 'paedophile', *gomik* 'fag', *gomo-sek* 'fruit, poof', *pidaras* 'faggot', *pidar* 'faggot', *pidor* 'faggot', *pedoras* 'paederast', *sodomit* 'sodomite', *sodom* 'sodomite', *debil* 'fuckwit').

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<sup>136</sup> Female homosexuality is generally mentioned and talked about only marginally. Homosexual women are referred to only by the connotatively neutral noun *lesbiianka* 'lesbian woman' or by the more colloquial word *lesba* 'dyke'. In contrast to homosexual men, there are no well-known pejorative or, generally speaking, other terms for lesbian people than *lesbiianka* and *lesba*. The pejorative and insulting nouns for male homosexuals cannot be used to refer to women. The same disbalance can be observed, by the way, in other languages, like German, English, or Polish (Hauer et al. 1984: 22, cf. also Attwood 1996).

It would be good if it were like this, but actually the paederasts are slowly appearing... There is not a single bank holiday which is commemorated without those fags like Moiseev, Zverev... Peskov... [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>137</sup>

While heterosexual people are considered as normal beings according to tradition (cf. *natural* ‘heterosexual, literally: natural’, coll. *normal’nye liudi* ‘normal people’), homosexuals are generally called *liudi s netraditsionnoi orientatsii* ‘people with a non-traditional sexual orientation’, *netraditsionnye* ‘non-traditionals’, *netraditsional* ‘un-traditional person’, *nenaturaly* ‘unnaturals’, or *nenormal’nye* ‘abnormals (cf. Sullivan 2003: esp. 84). Again, this exemplifies the regulative use or rather misuse of identities as judging homosexuality as unnatural and abnormal confirms the definition of heterosexuality as natural and normal and, consequently, as inevitably correct and normative.<sup>138</sup>

Defining homosexuality as unnatural implies a certain fluidity of sexuality as the dichotomy between natural and unnatural behaviour implies change. This implies, in turn, that people can easily change from a heterosexual to a homosexual orientation and, therefore, can switch identities. From this point of view, heterosexuality is an identity which is always at risk and must be protected – hence, the constant appeals by members of Russian society to save the children and to keep them away from homosexuals:

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<sup>137</sup> Original: “Хорошо бы если так, но на деле, педики потихонько наступают... Не один праздник не обходится без таких гомиков как Моисеев, Зверев... Песков...”

<sup>138</sup> Homophobia, however, is not limited to overt intolerance against individuals suspected of being gay. In public interactions, people who might not think of openly attacking homosexuals often use language that denigrates homosexuality. In a lot of cases, those who employ this language in public are males, usually young, and presumably heterosexual. For them, it may be adequate, “normal”, or even cool to use those words without actually knowing what they exactly do by using those words. Moreover, they are, in most cases, not familiar with the concept of in-group-language-use. When people who belong to an in-group use words like *pussy*, *sissy*, or *queen*, this does not mean that people of an out-group are allowed to use these words, too. Out-group-people often have no awareness of the different pragmatic values that words can carry (Armstrong 1997).

Misha, let's hope that your son will not learn from this "it" [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>139</sup>

I don't want to insult you, but you should not expose your ten-year-old boy to such glory that much, because he could like it and then you won't have any grandchildren [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>140</sup>

I hope that your children will not see that in the future and won't imitate that [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>141</sup>

One must always remember that not everyone participates actively in discourse and presents such views in public. The discourse also serves as a means to express the opinion of the sector of the population that does not speak up and to regulate what can be said in a certain context (Wengeler 2005: 268-270). Consequently, the opinion of this sector of the populace and the way these people express their attitude is highly influenced by other factors and circumstances. The predominant discourse has the power to regulate identities. It directly shapes the behaviour and actions of politicians, regulating authorities and controlling institutions such as the police as well as partisans of the governing groups. Consequently, most Russians follow the same idea(l)s and interests which are strongly linked to current policies. This sector of the population forms a homogeneous group which focuses on a uniform ideology and, moreover, dictates what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, what is adequate and what is inadequate, what is natural and what is unnatural (Bourdieu 1989). This fosters a situation in which sectors of the Russian population appropriate political decisions and start to act as self-proclaimed vigilantes or guardians of the law who must fight the "homosexual monster" due to the belief that it is an evil threat to Russian society and the nation (see below). Homophobia is thus framed as something natural. As a result, any homophobic acts are considered to be justified and in the interests of the "general public" (Morrish 1997: 335). This becomes evident when one analyses how

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<sup>139</sup> Original: "И дай Бож "Миша", чтобы Ваш сын не взял с этого "оно" пример."

<sup>140</sup> Original: "Не хочу Вас обидеть, но Вы бы своего десятилетнего сына поменьше к такому великолепию приучайте, а то понравится, так и без внуков можно остаться."

<sup>141</sup> Original: "желаю что бы ваши дети это не видели в будущем и не подражали."



the general antipathy towards homosexuality and identity diversity is linguistically constructed and expressed. Interjections play a very prominent role here. It is impossible to overlook the fact that aversion to homosexuality is underpinned through the use of interjections which are intended to express negative attitudes towards both the singer Conchita Wurst and homosexuality in general. Such interjections have negative connotations and express a deep disgust which is felt towards non-heteronormative individuals. Besides the use of interjections in their original form (e.g. *ne dai bog* ‘Perish the thought’, *tfu* ‘ugh, yuck’, *fu* ‘ugh, yuck’, *gadost’!* ‘shit’, *uzhas* ‘awful’), interjections are often written in the comments in a way which reflects how they would be pronounced in a verbal interaction (e.g. *beeeeeee* ‘yuuuuck’, *fuuu* ‘yuuuck’, *breddd!!!* ‘bullshit’). Using interjections in written texts as authentically as possible from the perspective of phonetics and articulation is clearly motivated by the readers’ need to emphasise their hostile stance with regard to homosexuality.

Another strategy used to degrade and discriminate against non-heteronormative people and to express one’s aversion to these individuals is the use of comparisons. Here, one can clearly see that homosexuals who are primarily recognised as “sexual dissidents” (Binnie 2004) share the same caste – and the lowest one at that – with all deviant “characters” who are socially marginalised or even rejected by society as a whole (cf. Yusupova 2015).

Soviet society was generally distinguished by extreme intolerance of dissident thinking and uncommon behavior, even when entirely innocent. And homosexuals are still the most stigmatized of all social groups, including even prostitutes and drug addicts (with whom homosexuals were frequently associated, owing to tendentious anti-AIDS propaganda) (Kon 1995: 247f).

However, even this caste seems to have a hierarchy in which, for instance, the thief enjoys a higher standing than the “fag” (*vor luchshe gomika* ‘a thief is better than a fag’). Moreover, identities beyond the traditional heteronormative matrix are associated with *otrashchenie* ‘heinousness’ and *izvrashchenie* ‘perversity’ (cf. also *propaganda patologii-izvrashchenii* ‘the propaganda of pathology and perversities’). Homosexuals are seen as being mentally disturbed: they are often compared to, if not equated with

people with mental disorder (Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015). This comparison obviously reflects the attitude of politicians towards sexual minorities, which is frequently perpetuated by the media: e.g. *liudi s psikhicheskimi otkloneniiami* ‘people with mental anomaly’, *liudi s legkim pomeshatel’stvom* ‘people with a little mental confusion’, *bol’nye liudi* ‘ill people’, *devianty* ‘deviants’, *mutant* ‘mutant’, *obdelennye liudi* ‘disadvantaged people’, *nepolnotsennye liudi* ‘non-fully fledged people’, *izvrashchennoe litso* ‘perverse figure’, *izvrashchenets* ‘pervert’<sup>142</sup>, *ushcherbnye liudi* ‘rubbishy people’, *lechit’ ikh v psikhushke* ‘to cure them in a loony bin’, *psikhicheskoe rasstroistvo* ‘mental defect’, *otpravit’ v bol’nitsu zakrytogo tipa do polnogo lecheniia* ‘put them in a closed psychiatric institution until they are completely cured’, *nado lechit’ bol’nykh* ‘one has to cure these ill people’, *lechit’, lechit’, lechit’* ‘cure them, cure them, cure them’, *gospitalizatsiia po prichine pomeshatel’stva* ‘put them in hospital due to their mental confusion’, *pidarov – ili mochit’ ili lechit’* ‘fags have to be killed or cured’.

But why should the president deal with those questions? [...] Hey, psychologists, where are you? [transl.] (URL 103).<sup>143</sup>

Furthermore, the association of homosexuality with perversity is expressed by localising the non-heterosexual orientation in a context of zoophilia, necrophilia, and, in particular, of paedophilia (Riabov/ Riabova 2014, cf. also Althaler 2014, Attwood 1996, Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015). Homosexuality is understood as an essential element of a modernisation course which challenges heteronormative values and makes the pathological the norm. In this context, paedophilia enters the discourse as a particularly de-

<sup>142</sup> Original: “Да, я хотел сказать ЭТО НОВОЕ ЛИЦО ЕВРОПЫ, а минусы мне накидали уже новые мордашки под Европу в России. Вот чем опасны подобные шабашки. Они пробуждают *извращенцев*. В чём здесь и можно убедиться” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>143</sup> Original: “Но почему президент должен заниматься этими вопросами. За что ему большое уважение! Ау психологи, где Вы? Где разъяснения, где лечение мышления. Где психология взаимодействия мысли, слова и действия? Пороки, анамалии, (чем и является гомосексуализм и тому подобное) появляется В нескольких случаях (как бы ни опровергали эти заблудившиеся люди, так как они больны, надеюсь пока).”

viant phenomenon which is visibly considered as the inevitable concomitant of homosexuality (Scheller-Boltz/ Althaler 2015).

And do you support paederasty? And the subtext – do you support satanism? And tomorrow this? Media from Hongkong: in continental China, they eat children and cook soup from placenta [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>144</sup>

70% of paedophiles are gay! So, Iura, this is absolutely scary [transl.] (URL 104).<sup>145</sup>

And the proud British and the spoiled French as well, let them fuck with dogs. It's the decision of these nations to commit suicide. Fuck off [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>146</sup>

Apparently, assigning homosexual men and people with a trans-identity to the group of perverse figures also serves the goal of stripping them of their humanity. This dehumanising effect is reflected by inconcrete nouns or insulting unspecific words like *sushchestvo* 'creature', *neobychnyi personazh* 'extraordinary figure', or *urodstvo* 'abnormality, abnormal creature'.<sup>147</sup>

The discourse demonstrates in no uncertain terms that non-heteronormative identities are not to be taken seriously. It is either their assumed mental disorder or their suggested abnormality in general that reduces non-heterosexual people to "creatures" who may be put on show for amusement or even for mockery. People with a non-traditional orientation resemble a

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<sup>144</sup> Original: "а вы за педерастию? - а подтекст - вы за сатанизм? а завтра это? - СМИ Гонконга: в континентальном Китае едят детей и варят суп из плаценты."

<sup>145</sup> Original: "70% педофилов- геи! так что Юра это всё страшно."

<sup>146</sup> Original: "А гордые британцы и утонченные французы пусть хоть с собаками трахаются. Вольно этим нациям заниматься самоубийством - флаг им в руки."

<sup>147</sup> "Я когда "ЭТО" бородатого...или "тую" ... не ..."тое" существо увидела, у меня была одна реакция "ЁРШ ТВОЮ МАТЬ"! Я хоть и лояльна к людям с нетрадиционной ориентацией...но мужик накрашенный в женском платье у меня вызывает только *отвращение!* Простите, если кого-то обидела своими словами, но это моя реакция. "Ужас,летающий на крыльях ночи"))))" (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

funny circus attraction<sup>148</sup> and are associated with “circus artists” (*artista tsirka*) and clowns.<sup>149</sup>

The fact that homosexual men are sometimes regarded as objects of amusement and assessed as funny and comical again underscores their generally assumed deviance. However, it is in particular their non-heterosexuality *per se* that points to their alleged deviance and, most of all, to their un-Russianness. They do not procreate and, therefore, do not support and maintain the Russian state. From this ideological perspective, homosexual people do not help to consolidate the Russian nation. On the contrary, they threaten the continuity of Russia.

Homosexuality defied all this. It could not be confined to marriage, and was clearly not geared towards procreation. It involved sex for its own sake, not for public good. It complicated the cosy image of men and women as two indivisible halves of a whole, drawn to each other as opposites. It was also a dangerous sign of individualism (Attwood 1996: 102).

Consequently, homosexuals are by sheer nature unpatriotic. They do not share the same ideological values as heterosexual people and even go so far as to dismiss and destroy tradition and national symbols. The so-called femininity of homosexuals is interpreted as a strategy to demasculinise and, as a consequence, to weaken the state and the Russian nation (cf. Henshaw 2014). Not least, there is a widespread belief that homosexuality is an import from the West, which is increasingly regarded as a powerless and deviant space (Baer 2009, cf. also Ayoub/ Paternotte 2014).

Indeed because homosexuality continues to be imagined in Russia as foreign and in almost exclusively gendered terms – i.e., as a female soul in a male body – it has become for many Russians a symbol of the nation’s decline, of Russia’s loss of ‘virility’, and its vulnerability vis-à-vis the West (Baer 2011: 183).

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<sup>148</sup> “Раньше бородатых женщин в цирке показывали или на ярмарке, а теперь на Евровидении” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>149</sup> The association of “such bearded women” with a circus artist was also presented in the Russian media (e.g. URL 105).

Hence, homophobia is actively used as an instrument to discredit homosexual men due to the belief that they are characterised as being in opposition to the Russian nation and the unique Russian national identity.<sup>150</sup> Homosexuals are not regarded as individuals but rather as a uniform group working towards the demise of the nation.

Russia is against gays, gays are against Russia. Please insert an article into the penal code against perversity [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2014).<sup>151</sup>

To be a fan of a transvestite means to appreciate neither oneself nor one's country, nor one's tradition [transl.] (MK Online, 07.05.2014).<sup>152</sup>

Of course, the propagated deviance and abnormality of non-heteronormative people serve as an argumentative basis for not giving them the same rights as heterosexual people or the freedom to enjoy the privileges and opportunities in life that heterosexuals have possessed for a long time.

We need laws that limit or prohibit the actions of homosexuals in Russia. We don't need words [transl.].<sup>153</sup>

In this context, people's argumentation is often based on disputable sources which can hardly be called scientific or do not reflect the latest research findings. Nevertheless, these sources are still used because they underpin the opinion which these people have. What happens now is that the information which some people use as evidence to support their views becomes reputable simply by virtue of it having been used as evidence. In other words: the information I have given is correct because it has helped me to form my opinion. In the following passage, I will give an illustrative example as to the perception of homosexual couples who adopt children:

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<sup>150</sup> Homophobia is also used against men in general who seem not to think according to the general ideological line, opposing, for example, the current political course (Sperling 2015: 115-123).

<sup>151</sup> Original: "РОССИЯ ПРОТИВ ГЕЕВ, геи против РОССИИ!!! Ввести уголовную статью за извращения!"

<sup>152</sup> Original: "А за трансвеститов болеть, не уважать ни себя, ни свою страну и обычаи!"

<sup>153</sup> Original: "Нужны законы, ограничивающие или запрещающие деятельность гомосексуалистов в России, а не слова" (URL 106).

Scholars from the West confirmed the opinion of the deputies of the Russian State Duma who have studied the agreements concerning the adoption of Russian children with those countries where civil unions are legalised. The legalisation of civil unions automatically leads to the possibility of adoption. Russian orphans face a real danger because they can fall out of the frying pan into the fire: from the orphanage directly to the perverts. The results of these adoptions are sad if one takes a look at the research results of the American sociologist Mark Regnerus from the University of Austin (Texas), published yesterday. The sample of Mark Regnerus is absolutely representative. He interviewed almost 3000 children who were educated by homosexual couples. The results are incredible. 12% of the children think about committing suicide (5% in normal families). 40% tend to infidelity, in comparison to 13% in normal families. But the most shocking fact is that 40% of children, educated by gays and lesbians, have venereal diseases, whereas the percentage of children from heterosexual families with venereal diseases is less than 8. Moreover, non-traditionally raised children need to see a psychotherapist twice as often; almost 30% of these children are unemployed. After publishing this analysis, the American press immediately launched a campaign which aimed at discrediting the scholar. The press which is financed by an influential gay-community called for a removal of Mark Regnerus. But there is a reason why the University of Austin is ranked on place 67 in the world ranking of the most successful universities. In a review of his analysis, 18 professors assessed the work of the scholar as correct and “methodologically right”. The scholars also have enough of the aggressive gay minorities which hysterically call for equal family rights. I hope that there will be plenty of interesting discoveries for us in the future with regard to sexual deviations (MK Online, 10.02.2013).<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Original: “Западные ученые подтвердили мнение депутатов Госдумы, собирающихся пересмотреть соглашения об усыновлении российских детей с теми странами, где легализованы гей-браки. Легализация гей-браков автоматически подразумевает возможность и усыновления детей. У российских сирот появилась реальная опасность попасть из огня в полымя: из приюта, прямиком к извращенцам. Последствия таких усыновлений печальны, если судить по опубликованным вчера исследованиям американского социолога Марка Регнеруса из Университета Остин (Техас). Выборка у Марка Регнеруса получилась безупречной по репрезентативности — он опросил почти 3000 детей, которых воспитывали однополые пары. Результаты ошеломляют — 12% таких детей думают о самоубийстве (5% — в нормальных семьях). К брачной неверности склонны 40%, против 13% в нормальных семьях. Но самое шокирующее — 40% воспитанников геев и лесбиянок заражены

The dominant discourse pushes non-heteronormative individuals back to the margins of Russian society, by stigmatising and discriminating against them. However, before I draw attention to the marginalisation and discrimination of non-heteronormative people from a linguistic point of view, I must mention that there are cases in which people are unaware of the fact that they are stigmatising and disadvantaging non-heteronormative identities. They think they are tolerant (and are obviously mistaken about this) because they do not know exactly what discrimination means or to what extent discrimination, including discriminatory language use, actually develops. With regard to homosexual men, there are many readers' comments in which the readers insist that they are tolerant toward homosexuality. It is their preference, however, that homosexual men act out their homosexual feelings and lifestyle at home behind closed doors and not to show their sexual orientation in public.

Fuck each other, but do not approach normal people. This is all we want from you. This is so easy [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>155</sup>

The society shows patience for homosexuals, but paedophiles are arrested [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>156</sup>

Are you, paederasts, banned from breathing, drinking, eating? Are you not employed or somehow limited? Are you forced to work on plantations or in

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венерическими болезнями, хотя у выходцев из гетеросексуальных семей этот процент не более 8. Так же, детям воспитанным «нетрадиционно» в 2 раза чаще приходится прибегать к услугам психотерапевта, а безработных среди них почти 30%. После публикации этого исследования, в американской прессе сразу же началась кампания по дискредитации ученого. Оплаченная влиятельным гей-сообществом пресса потребовала уволить Марка Регнеруса. Но, Университет в Остине, недаром занимает 67 место во всемирном списке самых престижных учебных заведений. После внутреннего расследования, которое провели 18 профессоров, признало работу ученого легитимной и «методологически-правильной». Похоже, агрессивные гей-меньшинства истерично требующие для себя полноценных семейных прав, серьезно достали ученых. Надеюсь, теперь нас ждет множество любопытных открытий из области сексуальных девиаций.”

<sup>155</sup> Original: “Долбите вы друг друга, но только не лезьте к нормальным людям. Вот и все что от вас требуется! Это же так просто.”

<sup>156</sup> Original: “Общество относится терпимо к гомосексуалистам а педофилов сажают.”

uranium mines? None of that! You have the same rights as we, the normal people, have. You can vote for deputies, become mayors of big European metropolises, you have become priests in many countries, you influence politics. What else do you want? In many societies, you are even allowed to organise your parades which are, to put it mildly, unattractive to others. Here, from the perspective of tolerance, I must add a phrase like: “I don’t have anything against people of a non-traditional sexual orientation; I think they are equal to us...” etc. etc. No, I have something against them and I don’t see them as equal to us. But I don’t want to kill them or to arrest them. If you want to be paederasts, then go ahead. You have the right to play with each other your specific games at home (URL 107).<sup>157</sup>

By fighting for “the rights” for perverts, it is forgotten somehow that healthy and normal people have their rights, too. First of all, we have the right to be insulated from the paederast propaganda, the right not to see these gay parades. I don’t care what two paederasts do with each other at home. But they must not show that and, furthermore, propagate their pathology because this infringes upon the rights of normal and healthy people (URL 108).<sup>158</sup>

Apart from the fact that the readers act in a discriminatory way here, their statements reveal some additional prejudice which is often voiced in the

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<sup>157</sup> Original: “Вам, педерасты, запрещают дышать, есть пить? Вам не дают работать или в чем-то ущемляют? Вас заставляют работать на плантациях и урановых рудниках? Ничего подобного. Вы обладаете теми же правами, что и мы, обычные люди. Вы избираетесь депутатами, становитесь мэрами крупных европейских мегаполисов, во многих странах стали священнослужителями, влияете на политику. Чего еще не хватает? Вам даже во многих обществах позволено устраивать ваши, мягко говоря, непривлекательные для других, «парады» и «шествия». Тут, с точки зрения «толерантности», я должен бы вставить фразу типа: «Ничего не имею против лиц нетрадиционной сексуальной ориентации, считаю их равными нам....» и т.д. и т.п. Нет, имею и не считаю равными! Но я не призываю их уничтожить или бросать в тюрьмы. Хотите быть педерастами – будьте. Вы имеете право у себя дома заниматься друг с другом своими специфическими играми.”

<sup>158</sup> Original: “В погоне за «правами» извращенцев как-то забывается, что здоровые и нормальные люди тоже имеют права. И в первую очередь, - право быть огражденными от педерастической пропаганды, право не видеть этих «голубых» парадов. Мне все равно, что творят друг с другом два педераста у себя дома. Но они не должны выносить это на всеобщее обозрение и, тем более, пропагандировать свою патологию, ибо это уже нарушает права нормальных и здоровых людей!”



context of homosexuality. Homosexuality is associated primarily with sex and promiscuity as well as with hedonism and exhibitionism. The comments imply that homosexuals define their identity mainly by sexuality and that they have a strong penchant for displaying their identity and their affection for each other in public. Again, it is the dominant discourse that pushes a “marginal” sexual desire into the focus of an identity which is perceived as perverse and abnormal (Schößler 2008: 110).

I'm not against individuals with a different sexual orientation. I just don't want them to force their sexual orientation on other people. If a man likes to have sex with a man, then they should have sex at home. People with a normal orientation are not obsessed with their orientation, do not flaunt it and fuck in a closed room [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>159</sup>

One must emphasise here that these people who wrote the readers' comments fail to recognise or to ignore that people with a heterosexual orientation nearly always show affection toward each other in public. This kind of exhibitionism is, however, legitimised by biological reasons which must not be challenged. Moreover, homosexual males are perpetually exposed to the ideological myth that homosexuality is nothing but a constant interest in sex whereas for heterosexual people, promiscuity, affairs, and a desire for sexual intercourse seem neither to come into play nor to be part of a heterosexual lifestyle.

Returning to strategies used to discriminate and marginalise homosexual and non-heteronormative identities, one can observe the tremendous impact that the dimension of space has: those who make such comments call for a Russia which is free of homosexuals. They generally plead for isolating gays (e.g. *A k budushchemu dopuskat' vsiakikh pidorov nel'zia* ‘any fags are not allowed to enter the future’). Homosexuals should either be deported to Europe which is said to abound with homosexuals (e.g. *otpravit' na zapad* ‘deport them to the West’, *gnat' vsekh geev v Evropu* ‘chase all gays to Europe’) or they should be sent to places in Russia, in

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<sup>159</sup> Original: “Я не против разных сексуальных индивидов. Претензии одни - насаждение своих сексуальных стереотипов другим людям. Ну нравится мужику спать с мужиком-так спите дома. Нормальной ориентации люди не выставляют на показ свою одержимость к своей ориентации и трахаются в закрытом помещении.”

particular to the North, where nobody lives and where they would not disturb other people by expressing their identity and lifestyle (e.g. *ssylat' na sever* 'deport them to the North [where the population is very small]').

The homophobic attitude towards – mainly male – homosexuals is expressed by comments that state that homosexuality is a crime or a criminal act which demands punishment. Consequently, a number of those people who argue against the legitimisation of non-heteronormative lifestyles even approve, justify, or advocate acts of violence against homosexuals (e.g. *borot'sia s merzotoi sodomskoi nuzhno* 'we have to fight against the sodomite abomination').

Let the paederasts fuck each other in all holes, if they love that. But don't touch children. And let them go as far as possible with their rights. Actually, they have to say thank-you because they are given a knuckle sandwich only rarely [transl.] (URL 109).<sup>160</sup>

It would not be bad to re-introduce the penal article for homosexuality [transl.] (URL 109).<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, the opinion is voiced that any non-heteronormative action or behaviour should be reason enough to punish the respective individuals accordingly. Commenters wish for homosexuals to be imprisoned (e.g. *posadit' v sizo* 'put them in prison')<sup>162</sup> and for the current Russian law to be applied (e.g. *vvesti ugovnuiu stat'iu za izvrashcheniia* 'apply the law relating to perversion').

In this context, it is argued that homosexual males should not be given any protection as this would allow citizens to take matters into their own hands and "solve the question of homosexuality" (i.e. attack them).

One only has to leave the parade on 31 May in the district without forces from the interior ministry. This is absolutely enough and the question as to

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<sup>160</sup> Original: "Да ПРАВ ВВП!!! Тысячу раз прав!! Пускай пидоры трахают друг друга во все дырки, если им нравится, но ДЕТЕЙ не трогают! И пошли они все подальше со своими "правами"! Пусть скажут спасибо, что им морды редко бьют."

<sup>161</sup> Original: "А не мешало бы вернуть статью в УК за гомосексуализм."

<sup>162</sup> "Они не оставят. Горбатого могила исправит. Поэтому всех их надо *загнать* в психушки и на зону. И везде заставить пахать. Это еще мягко" (URL 109).

fags in the Russian Federation would be solved forever [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2014).<sup>163</sup>

I hope that they won't be protected by the police and the nation will get the opportunity to show them all its love [transl.] (MK Online, 29.05.2014).<sup>164</sup>

In addition, some readers' comments allude to the regime of the *dedovshchina* in Russian prisons. It is not sufficient that homosexuals are seen as criminals and are imprisoned, but they should also be humiliated and sexually abused by their male inmates.

In jail they will like that very much! [transl.] (MK Online, 18.05.2014).<sup>165</sup>

In the male coop, this wonder [i.e. Conchita Wurst] will also be at ease. It [sic!] won't get any rest from its [sic!] fans [transl.] (MK Online, 18.05.2014).<sup>166</sup>

### 3.5 *The Construction of Gay Europe and Straight Russia*

In Russian discourse, homosexuality is used for different reasons in order to pursue different goals. Homosexuality is associated with weakness, powerlessness, and subordination. Heterosexuality is the hallmark of a strong, powerful, and superior identity which is not only normal and natural but which is also associated with strength and dominance. As I have already mentioned, the spatial dimension plays an important role in defining and assessing sexual identity. Discourse transforms homosexuality – one must keep in mind that we are talking about a character trait or a human quality here – into a localised concept. One must consider the *social space* as it has been described by Bourdieu (1989). Hence, there is an insistent request to keep Russian culture free of European queerness (e.g. *zapretit'*

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<sup>163</sup> Original: “Просто надо, чтобы 31 мая в районе парада не было сотрудников МВД. Этого будет вполне достаточно, чтобы раз и навсегда вопрос о гомосексах в РФ был закрыт.”

<sup>164</sup> Original: “Налеюсь, что полиция их охранять не будет, и народ сможет им продемонстрировать всю свою любовь.”

<sup>165</sup> Original: “В тюрьке её ОЧЕНЬ полюбят.”

<sup>166</sup> Original: “На мужской зоне этому чуду точно понравится. От поклонников отбоя не будет.”

*v'ezd na territoriiu RF ètomu evropeiskomu debilu i vyrozhdentsu* 'to prohibit the European idiot and degenerate to enter the territory of the Russian Federation', *u nas v Rossii pidarasy ne prizhivutsia* 'here in Russia, fags will not become accepted')<sup>167</sup>. It becomes evident that Russian people feel insulted and offended by queerness<sup>168</sup> because they feel that it is a European and, therefore, un-Russian phenomenon.<sup>169</sup>

Whereas Russia is associated and thought of as a heterosexual and therefore powerful country, Europe is perceived as homosexual and therefore deviant, decadent, and perverse (cf. Ayoub/ Paternotte 2014). The legal situation in the European Union and the anti-discriminatory policies in its (Western) European member states are used by a lot of Russians as well as by Russian politicians to create an image of Europe as a uniform space – one “unified country” – where all gays gather and where people can generally do whatever they fancy. This disproportional picture is used to define Europe as a space of chaos, disorder, and dysfunctionality which seems adequate for homosexual people.

Two incidents which took place in France exemplify this: the first one happened after Conchita Wurst won the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. France started an experiment – supported by the French government – which aimed at drawing attention to what sexism and discrimination mean. The goal was to fight sexism. All boys and girls were told to come to school in skirts. This initiative encountered enormous resistance on the part of the French, but it also ignited a discussion on gender and sexual identity in Russia. Some of the most common responses to the experiment were along the lines of *takoi marazm!* ‘this is bullshit!’ (URL 110).

The second incident concerns the introduction of *marriage pour tous* [marriage for all] which has abolished the difference between heterosexual and homosexual marriage – the commonly so-called *civil unions*. In Russia, the indignation at this decision was intense as France was prototypically

<sup>167</sup> “Дай Бог что бы этот так званный "закат" не распространился на Россию” (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).

<sup>168</sup> “не оскорбляйте нас появлением "этого" в столице, да и вообще в стране. страждущие могут ехать в Австрию причаститься к толерастической заднице” (МК Online, 16.05.2014).

<sup>169</sup> “Сегодня толерантность ,а завтра эти кончиты будут расхаживать по улицам и улыбаться с рекламных щитов.мне кажется ,России давно уже не стоит участвовать в таких мероприятиях ,как евровиденье.нам с европой не по пути” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

associated with being the country of *l'amour, l'érotisme, and le sexe* but had now become transformed into a “sick gay” country indicating an obvious loss of values and tradition as well as having succumbed to the will of the European Union.

France also doesn't feel ashamed. France has always been the prime-example of relationships between man and woman, the prime example for healthy erotic relationships. And now, it has suddenly become gay [transl.] (URL 111).

The concept of homosexuality has become the distinctive marker in Russia's separation from Europe. Russia sees and constructs itself as a heterosexual space, whereas Europe is defined by Russians as a homosexual space. With homosexuality evoking a certain associative frame, this criterion of sexual orientation also shapes the perception of spaces in general. Thus, countries which show a leaning toward European ideology concerning same-sex sexuality or which have recently shown just a general pro-European tendency such as Ukraine (Riabov/ Riabova 2014: 7) are not only interpreted as homosexual, but are also considered weak and powerless and, moreover, headed in the wrong direction.<sup>170</sup>

I'm proud of Russia. It has been and will always be a great country. In contrast, Ukraine has actually shown itself to be a nation of barbarians and killers. Well, let Europe see what you are really like [transl.] (MK Online, 07.05.2014).<sup>171</sup>

This line of demarcation had been drawn well before Conchita Wurst won the Eurovision Song Contest. For instance, on 10 February 2013 the Russian newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets* ran an article called “We are not Europe? Thank God!” (*My ne Evropa? I slava bogu!*). The article dealt with “the real war between Russia and Europe” (*mezhdru Rossiei i Zapadom idet voina [...] nastoiashchaia*). Its author argued that Europe had completely resigned itself to “gayification”, while Russia was still “one of the

<sup>170</sup> “Жаль Украину, европа усиленно затаскивает ее в свои бородастые объятия...” (MK Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>171</sup> Original: “Я горжусь Россией, она была и будет великой страной, а вот действительно ДИКАРЯМИ И УБИЙЦАМИ собственного народа показала себя Украина, вот пусть и посмотрит Европа, что вы есть на самом деле.”

last havens for man and for mankind (*Rossiia – odin iz poslednikh oplotov cheloveka i chelovechestva*) (URL 112).

These stereotypes and metaphors have resurfaced repeatedly over the past few years. One of the prominent events which provided a stage for them was the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. Clearly, such debates increased both in terms of momentum and intensity in particular during the period immediately following Wurst's victory at the music festival.

One of the first reactions after the drag queen claimed top honours at Europe's biggest music competition was a call for ending Russia's participation in the ESC. It was the ultra-conservative Valerii Rashkin from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation who made a plea for Russia's withdrawal from the Eurovision Song Contest and suggested instead that Russia organise its own music competition which was to be called *The Voice of Eurasia (Golos Evrazii)*<sup>172</sup>. His argument was that "we cannot stand this endless madness anymore" (*nel'zia zhe terpet' èto beskonechnoe bezumie*). Belarus, the host of the annual music festival *Slavianskii Bazar*, refused to invite Conchita Wurst to perform on stage despite the fact that previous winners of the ESC (e.g. Aleksandr Rybak, Loreen, Emmelie de Forest) – not to mention artists or singers who are said to be gay, like the Russian singers Filipp Kirkorov and Boris Moiseev – had always been invited to perform on the stage of the Belarusian music contest which is one of the biggest in Eastern Europe (URL 114). As a consequence, some readers supported the idea of a new Russian music festival and suggested that Russia must cease competing in (or *boikotirovat'* 'to boycott')<sup>173</sup> the Eurovision Song Contest in the future.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> "Становится стыдно участвовать нормальным людям в таком бедламе. Предлагаю организовать конкурс ЕВРАЗИЯ, где будут выступать конкурсанты с нормальным мировоззрением и талантом в.ч. и с Азии, Китая, Индии, Японии, а те кто оправдывает такое пусть вернутся на своей бороде.." (МК Online, 11.05.2014). This comment, in turn, reveals the interesting fact that people do not seem to be aware of the situation that in India, for instance, the existence of a so-called *third gender* is generally accepted. Consequently, the author of the aforementioned comment may be in for a surprise (URL 113).

<sup>173</sup> "А может, лучше просто *бойкотировать* такие шоу" (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>174</sup> "Жиргорова прописать в европе, а России вообще перестать участвовать в этом Содоме и Гоморе" (МК Online, 11.05.2014). With regard to this comment, it is interesting to note that Europe is written in lowercase, whereas Russia is capitalised which can have happened either by accident or on purpose.

The strategy of “demonising Europe” and “idealising Russia” (Scheller-Boltz 2015f) was also upheld and reinforced by Russian politicians. Of course, this strategy aimed at affirming and strengthening the recent anti-Western political course. “The West” was depicted as chaotic, discordant, inconsistent, and, consequently, weak. Moreover, non-heterosexuality or the support and the tolerance of non-heteronormativity was seen and is still seen as a sign of threat and danger due to the widespread belief that this “alien” identity culture does not exist in Russia as it is incompatible with Russian society.

### *3.6 Metaphorising Conchita Wurst – Metaphorising Western Europe*

Russian politicians and various TV personalities portrayed Conchita Wurst as a monster, who encapsulated and embodied the deformity, squalidness, and decadence of the West. Conchita Wurst’s victory purportedly made it clear once and for all that Europe had turned its back on traditional values, whereas Russia embodied tradition and demonstrated – not least through the performance of the Tolmachevy Sisters – the right way to think, to feel and, in particular, to be. This led to new metaphors which emerged in the context of the construction of space through gender and sexuality.

Europe was not only characterised as queer, gay, and chaotic, and thus, as a space subjugated by evil forces. To the Russian public, Europe became the embodiment of evil itself. Europe was seen as the *space of evil and danger*. Like every space, Europe was classified and, consequently, separated according to presumed identity patterns (Benwell/ Stokoe 2006). Such a spatial approach to gender and identity causes marginalisation and constructs a system of power and dominance from which spaces and, in the end, identities derive their meaning.

The discourse on Conchita Wurst, identities, and non-heteronormativity focused primarily on Europe. It illustrated the leading role of the European Union within the debate on identities. For a part of the Russian audience, Conchita Wurst, hailing from and, hence, representing Europe, embodied the decadence, perversity, and evil of Europe on the stage of the Eurovision Song Contest. In this context, the additional metaphor of *the fall*<sup>175</sup> was

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<sup>175</sup> “А зачем России Евровидение? Ну плохая Европа, загнивающая, зачем туда своих представителей отправлять? Вот один сосед, сделал своему соседу

brought up. Conchita Wurst was seen as the symbol of “the fall of Europe” (*zagnivaiushchii Zapad*) (cf. also Riabova/ Riabov 2013: 32). She embodied Europe’s “cultural degradation” (*degradatsiia kul’tury*)<sup>176</sup> and “loss of culture” (*poteria kul’tury*) as well as the “breakup of European culture” (*razlozhenie kul’tury*)<sup>177, 178</sup>.

Homosexuality has been a constant theme in the “anti-Western discourse” (Riabova/ Riabov 2013) in Russia. In the 1990s, the politician Vladimir Zhirinovskii had already used the discussion on sexual identity as a medium of demarcation (Tuller 1996) – a rhetoric which he has perpetuated to this date. After Conchita Wurst won the Eurovision Song Contest, Zhirinovskii – in line with other politicians and authorities – associated her victory with the decline of moral values in the European Union (*padenie moral’nykh tsennostei v Evropeiskom Soiuze*) as well as, accordingly, with the end of Western Europe (*zakat Evropy*) and the ruin of its society (*razval obshchestva*). He proclaimed:

They have a culture with tears in the eyes...100 years ago the Russian general Brusilov crushed all Austrian divisions, and 50 years ago the Soviet

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гадость, потом пришел к нему в гости. Как это можно объяснить? Дурость?” (МК Online, 07.05.2014).

<sup>176</sup> “Но как бы это не было, это все очень печально и просто аморально, сплошная *деградация культуры!*!” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>177</sup> “вропа забыла как закончилась великая Римская империя? Ну так в пору сказать - мы идём к вам. *Разложение и загнивание* зашло уже далеко. Обидно за хороших исполнителей и понятно, что туда ехать - себе навредить. Ведь история показывает, что отбор идёт по национальным и прочим признакам, а не по голосу. Хотя надо и через это пройти, что б спокойно игнорировать такие шоу” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>178</sup> “Кончита — это пробный вброс для популяризации таких образов. Если она победит, а она победила, то это *показатель разложения Европейской культуры*, в самом широком его понимании. *Европа и так деградирует*, просто это будет последним его доказательством для слепых. Отдадим должное мировым заправялам, - вброс был сделан на высочайшем уровне. Германия или Великобритания, например, на такое бы никогда не пошли. Эксперимент, который был поставлен над маленькой страной, увенчался успехом. Теперь дан зелёный сигнал для более крупных стран (см. выше). Дальше — более агрессивная политика в этой области. Видимо, до этого более-менее осторожно распространялось такое явление (назовём это так). Теперь же дан официальный зелёный свет от самих европейцев” (МК Online, 11.05.2014).



army occupied Austria. We freed Austria in vain: we had to stand there and there would be other people [transl.] (URL 115).<sup>179</sup>

He expressed his view that

there [in Europe] they do not have men and women anymore, there remains only an It”<sup>180</sup>. He concluded, “This is the fall of Europe”<sup>181</sup>.

The singer and actor Danko affirmed this stance and introduced another metaphor: *the face of Europe*. He stated that the European Union showed its real face through Conchita Wurst.<sup>182</sup>

Since Conchita Wurst’s victory, the metaphorical expression of *the face of Europe* (*litso Evropy*) has gained quickly in popularity. “The face of Europe”, here, has two meanings: firstly, as winner of a pan-European, highly medialised music festival, Conchita Wurst’s face became the symbol of Europe and secondly, the expression *face* implies a sudden realisation of having an identity different from one’s own – after all, a face implies that there is an on-looker who perceives it. Conchita Wurst was seen as a symbol of non-heteronormativity and non-conformity in Europe. As a result, Europe was understood as a space in which almost everything is accepted and tolerated and with no set boundaries. Hence, characterising Europe as a deviant, decadent, and non-conformist space caused the use of “the face of Europe” in a more metaphorical way, namely: decadence and deviance as the true face of Europe.

I only want to say that this is the new face of Europe! [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>183</sup>

Like Europe, like its face [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>184</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Original: “У них культура со слезами на глазах [...] 100 лет назад русский генерал Брусилов разгромил все австрийские дивизии, а 50 лет назад советская армия оккупировала Австрию. [...] Мы зря освободили Австрию: мы должны были там стоять и там были бы другие люди.”

<sup>180</sup> Original: “У них нет больше мужчин и женщин, только оно.”

<sup>181</sup> Original: “Это закат Европы!”

<sup>182</sup> For more detail, cf. URL 116.

<sup>183</sup> Original: “я всего лишь хотел сказать, что ЭТО НОВОЕ ЛИЦО ЕВРОПЫ !”

<sup>184</sup> Original: “Какова Европа таково и лицо.”

How Europe, so the face of Europe [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>185</sup>

Vladimir Zhirinovskii opened the door for such opinions, suggestions, and, finally, comments. His polarising expressions, which were supported by a number of other politicians, by members of Russian society, and, last but not least, by the media, were based on ideological assumptions about the structure of society. In this context, we see how language contributes to the construction of space(s) (Gu 2012).

Another metaphor, I would like to address is the metaphor of the *apocalypse*. This metaphor and the rationale behind it could be summed up as follows: queer is bad, queer is a threat, queer is a danger, and queer is death; therefore, queerness is the omen of the apocalypse. This radical conclusion is drawn from my analysis of readers' comments, particularly those from the *Moskovskii Komsomolets*. These comments illustrate the equating of queerness with the end of Europe as well as with the end of culture in general. Non-conformist masculinity appears as a sign of the apocalypse and homosexuality and non-heteronormativity personify the apocalypse *par excellence*.

And we – apocalypse, apocalypse... What are we waiting for? There it [the apocalypse] is. It is not standing at the threshold. It is already in the house. [...] It's frightening [...] [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2014).<sup>186</sup>

So, here it is. Soon, there will be the apocalypse for sure. Where does the world drift? [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>187</sup>

In many comments, the “apocalypse” metaphor is not expressed in explicit terms, but rather is implied by the use of specific verbs which refer to an end or which indicate that the end is near. One particular verb worth

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<sup>185</sup> Original: “Какова Европа, таково и лицо у европы.”

<sup>186</sup> Original: “А мы - апокалипсис, апокалипсис... Да чего его ждать, вот он, даже не у порога стоит, а в дом вошел. Уж и не знаю сколько Лотов найдется в нашем содоме и гоморре. Страшно. И при этом столько защитников "толерантности".. Содом он и есть содом. самый что ни на есть греховный грех. Отмолитесь, толерантчики.”

<sup>187</sup> Original: “Ну все!!! скоро точно апокалипсис будет!! куда катится мир...”

mentioning in this context, is *katit'sia* 'to go, to drift, to tend'<sup>188</sup> which is often used in combination with *mir* 'world'.

Damnation. The crone with the beard. Where does the world go to? [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>189</sup>

Where does Europe drift to? [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>190</sup>

There are other expressions which also refer to the upcoming apocalypse like *perevernut'sia* 'to overthrow, to overturn, to tumble'<sup>191</sup>, *ne spasti* 'not to rescue'<sup>192</sup>, or *priekhat' na konechnuiu stantsiiu* 'to arrive at the last station'<sup>193</sup>.

In some cases mythological and religious metaphors are used to express the end of the world, e.g. *satana* 'the Satan'.

This was the message that Satan is already standing behind the door [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>194</sup>

This is the victory of the demon [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> “Что за убожество? а что это такое!? Я удивляюсь миру, живу 19 лет, и с каждым годом паражаясь людьми. Как этот срам, и стыд можно было пустить на евровидение? Ведь это смотрят и дети от 8-14 лет. Что они скажут? Спросят? -Мам, мам а почему у девушки борода? да ничего особенного Сын или дочка. Это всеголиш Трансвистит. Мужик баба. Если родился мужиком, так соизволь сука будь мужиком. А не бабай! Стрёмно, ужасно стрёмно. Я просто в шоке от таких людей! Куда мир катиться” (MK Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>189</sup> Original: “Трындец. ,, Баба,, с бородой. Куда катится мир./.”

<sup>190</sup> Original: “куда укатилась европа?”

<sup>191</sup> “Ужас. Мир перевернулся” (MK Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>192</sup> “Европу уже не спасти” (MK Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>193</sup> “Участие в таких шоу - позорище! Европа приехала на свою конечную станцию...” (MK Online, 11.05.2014).

<sup>194</sup> Original: “Это было послание, что Сатана уже за дверью(((.”

<sup>195</sup> Original: “Европейские ценности-баба с бородой и с усами и в голове пустота. Победа беса.”

### 3.7 *Denigrating the Alien – Praising One’s Own*

Strategies shaping the image of spaces also play an important role for the Russian discourse on gender and identity. I have already pointed out that in this discourse, Europe is equated with a space of weakness and decay, whereas Russia is equated with a space of power and vitality. Europe serves as a negative blueprint to remind Russians of what might become of their nation if they adopt the “European” model of organising society. The main function of this discursive technique is to incite hatred against Europe in order to detract from the shortcomings of Putinism: a failing economy, corruption, an inefficient bureaucracy, rising inequality, and a dysfunctional judiciary system.

This technique is effective because it leverages homosexuality in order to manipulate. Europe is not depicted as a space of weakness because of its liberal attitude towards sexual “immorality” and “perversion” (i.e. homosexuality). Rather, homosexuality is seen as a general disorder and a sign of the disintegration of space itself. Thus, by excluding alternative identities from its space, Russian politics work to uphold the status quo and thereby the integrity of Russia as a space.

This discursive technique has contributed to the changing perception of Europe by Russians. After the collapse of Communism, Russians sought to adopt so-called European values. European quality and lifestyle were tremendously popular in the early 1990s. Today, Europe is perceived negatively. European societal structures, social security, and the freedom of self-determination are frequently criticised. Old stereotypes are reignited and negative generalisations are concocted in an effort to depict Europe as a chaotic space.<sup>196</sup> Consequently, many plead for the boycott of Europe as a place for study, work, and travel:

After this, I declare... I won’t go to Austria for a [...] trainee programme [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> “Чушь. В Германии действительно пока чисто, но моя родственница 2 недели назад была в Париже. Сказала, что мусор лежит грудам даже на Елисейских полях. Везде вонь и грязные бомжи. Забудь про чистую гейропу. Это сейчас рассадник всей мерзости” (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).

<sup>197</sup> Original: “После такого, заявляю...Я не поеду на преддипломную практику в Австрию!!!”

Don't go to Europe this summer! Don't spend your money there. Let them think how they can isolate Russia. There are a lot of other nice places for tourism. Let Europe pull the short straw. I would like to go to Spain or Portugal. Now I won't go on principle. I will survive this decision to ignore Europe [transl.] (MK Online, 07.05.2014).<sup>198</sup>

The more I know about Europe, the more distant I want to stay from it [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2014).<sup>199</sup>

The negative generalisations made Europe inevitably lead to a decidedly positive but no less generalised depiction of Russia. Russia is praised due to the belief that it preserves traditional values, a sense of community (*collective identity*), and a homogeneous national identity. This rather uncritical view encourages a sense of patriotism among Russian citizens. Russia is perceived as “being right” (*Rossii prava*) and “super” (*Rossii super*). Presenting Russia as a place of order is accompanied by a reframing of political terms such as *freedom* and *democracy*. It is often said that Russia is “a free and democratic country” (*Rossii svobodnaia i demokraticeskaiia strana*) or even the prototypical democracy with “Vladimir Zhirinovskii as the face of Russia” (*Zhirinovskii, eto litso Rossii*). Commenters at *Moskovskii Komsomolets* stated that they were “proud of Russia” (*gorzhus' Rossiei*) and believed in Russia as a “world power” (*velikaia derzhava*).<sup>200</sup>

With Russia depicted as a paragon of uniformity, morale, and discipline, it remains a bit unclear, however, why some readers' comments conceded that the reputation of the Russian Federation was not at its best at present or why it was necessary to “reconstruct the image of Russia” in the

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<sup>198</sup> Original: “Не ездите этим летом в Европу! Не тратьте там свои деньги, пусть подумают как Россию освистывать! Есть много других замечательных мест для туризма, а Европа пусть обломается! Я хотел ехать в Испанию и Португалию, теперь фигу поеду из принципа, обойдусь, переживу!!!”

<sup>199</sup> Original: “Чем больше узнаю Европу, тем дальше хочу от неё быть.”

<sup>200</sup> “А я так думаю, что пора России уже завязывать с Евровидением, участие в подобного рода мероприятиях не достойно великой страны, какой Россия является, тем более что сейчас она стремительно возвращает себе былую мощь и статус первой мировой державы. Да и деньги можно потратить на нашу культуру и организацию конкурса талантов из стран СНГ, а не участие в демонстрации европейской распушенности” (MK Online, 07.05.2014).

world (*vosstanovit' imidzh Rossii*). In comparison, calls for a Russian occupation of Europe, which would help re-establish order, were more consistent in this respect.<sup>201</sup>

The construction of the segregation between Europe and Russia, in which both spaces are represented as being in direct opposition to each other, is supported by the use of special deictic pronouns, which show different pragmatic and connotative values, depending on their use and, in particular, on the space to which they refer. Pronouns play an important role in the construction of identity and give hints to the actual perception of spaces. For instance, pronouns such as *tam* 'there', *oni* 'they', or combinations like *tam u nikh* 'there in their area' always refer to Europe and are used almost exclusively in a pejorative context. This pejorative tone becomes noticeable not only because of the context in which these pronouns appear, but also because of their indefinite character which suggests that a concrete reference or naming is not necessary. Moreover, context, syntactical position, and experience combined allow us to infer which part of their statement those commenting would have stressed if their statement had been an act of oral speech. There is an element of speculation and interpretation in this, of course, but it would not be hard to imagine that the emphasis would be on the pronouns which produce distance and segregation.

In contrast to the use of pronouns which refer to Europe, pronouns that refer to Russia mostly evoke a positive tone. Further, they are combined with concrete nouns which specify the referential object, like *u nas v Rossii* 'here in Russia' and *my v Rossii* 'we Russians, we in Russia'. However, the use of pronouns in a Russian context is relatively infrequent in comparison to their use in a European context. As is usually the case, a reference is established by using concrete nouns, like *russkie* 'Russians', *Rossia* 'Russia', or *nasha strana* 'our country'.

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<sup>201</sup> "После этого (в смысле "оно") уже со всем свыкшиеся европейцы пишут в своих блогах просьбы, чтобы Россия поскорее их оккупировала. Оказалось, что даже в насквозь толерастной и геелюбивой Европе мозги еще отбили далеко не всему населению, чтобы такое люди воспринимали за норму" (МК Online, 11.05.2014).

### 3.8 *Geiropa: the Use of Word Formation in Discourse*

The perception of Europe as a space that is disintegrated by homosexuality has shaped new terms and word creations. A very prominent noun which is frequently used today in the media as well as by the public in general is the blend word *Geiropa* ('Gayrope' – from *Gay* + [*Eu*]rope)<sup>202</sup>. Not only is this noun used to refer to a space, it also functions as a symbol and as an ideological concept. The merger of the two words *gay* and *Europe* reflects the symbolic merger of Europe with the queer identity and its disintegrative properties. The noun *Geiropa* is used pejoratively and expresses the speaker's intolerance for individuals with a "non-traditional sexual orientation" and for a legal and social system which is based on acceptance and equal protection under the law for all identities (symbolised, for instance, by institutions such as same-sex marriage or civil unions or by same-sex couples being given the right to adopt children in some countries) (Riabova/ Riabov 2013, cf. also Persson 2015). The personal noun used for a person from *Geiropa* is *geiropets* 'Gayropean man' or *geiropetsy* 'Gayropean men, Gayropean people' in plural respectively (Riabova/ Riabov 2013: 32).

Word creations like *Geiropa* mirror the ongoing and often tense relationship between Russia and Europe. For much of its history, Russia has discussed its identity in the context of its relations with Europe. Starting with the question of whether Russia belongs to Europe or is a part of Europe, every Russian generation and regime – from the tsars of the Renaissance to Peter the Great, from the Bolsheviki and the USSR to Yeltsin's and Putin's Russia – has looked across the Baltic Sea and the Ukrainian plains to the West in order to find an answer to the question of what it means to be Russian and un-Russian. The debates on Russian and European identity increased after the fall of the iron curtain in the late 1980s (*Rossija i Evropa* 2000). To be fair, Russian and European identity have been discussed in the context of sexuality for many years in both places. As Baer (2011: 173) states: „Russia has served as the sexual other of the West“.

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<sup>202</sup> It is interesting to note that the noun *Geimerika* ('Gaymerica' – from *Gay* + [*A*]merica) which establishes a similar connotative and associative dimension with regard to the United States of America, is used only rarely.

Obviously, *Geiropa* signifies a new era of estrangement between Russia and its Western neighbours. As Riabova and Riabov argue, this estrangement has a political purpose: the concept of *Geiropa* helps to support and to strengthen the collective identity of the Russian population (Riabov/ Riabova 2014: 3). The word contains a new national idea that is used to overcome Russia's crisis of collective identity and to position Putin's "new Russia" in the larger context of world history (Riabova/ Riabov 2013, cf. also Riabov/ Riabova 2014: 4). On the one hand, the noun *Geiropa* points to the actual and upcoming decline of Europe, on the other hand, it emphasises Russia's identity as a strong and therefore non-homosexual country which sees itself as the saviour of the world (Riabov/ Riabova 2014). *Geiropa* functions as a personification of the evil of the West and implies, in turn, the need for Russia's traditionalism and support.<sup>203</sup>

Words like *Geiropa* are used to open a wider associative space which helps to frame reality according to one's own discursive goals. Recently, Russia has tried to liberate itself from the role of being both, the victim and the accused by using Europe as its negative "other" because a very "negative assessment of Europe helps to give a positive sense of one's [i.e. Russia's] own identity" (Riabov/ Riabova 2014: 4).

Hence, the perception of issues which arise in the European sphere is always shaped by the predominant discursive frames. Critical issues such as the financial crisis, terrorism, or migration are interpreted as consequences of Europe's heterogeneity, the failure of its multicultural social model and its abandonment of traditional "mores and values". Furthermore, while many European countries have adopted a supranational orientation for solving international problems, Russia aims strictly at being a national formation with a national tendency which only forms an alliance with countries like Belarus and Kazakhstan which share its ideological perspective (Metzeltin/ Wallmann 2010). The propaganda against Europe which is widely spread by politicians and the media seems to be embraced by the Russian population.

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<sup>203</sup> The metaphor of the decline of Europe is not a new phenomenon. In his book *The Fall of the Occident* [Der Untergang des Abendlandes], first published in 1922/1923, the author Oswald Spengler (the edition used here dates from 1963) conjured up the end of Europe as well as of parts of the Occident in general. He was one of the first authors to do so. In addition, he stated that every culture exists only for a certain amount of time.



Words like *Geiropa* which show the deep division between Russia and Europe reflect this associative frame (cf. also the title of an article on the Internet “*Goluboi*” *zakat Evropy. Pederasticheskaia èpidemiia nastupaet* [The “Gay” Fall of Europe. The Epidemic of Paederasty Begins] (URL 117) or “*golubaia*” *chuma* [The Gay Plague] (URL 117). Considering this, it is no surprise that current European values and the European understanding of democracy are on occasion referred to as *gomokratiiia* ‘homocracy’ (Riabova/ Riabov 2013).

The conviction that the current climate of tolerance in Europe will lead to its certain downfall is expressed by compound nouns such as *evrosodom* ‘eurosodom’ and *evrosodomiiia* ‘eurosodomy’. Here, the determinatum signalises a strong aversion to queerness which is perceived deviant and perverted and which is often denounced as “sodomy”. This is in line with the use of the derogatory noun *sodomit* ‘sodomite’ which refers to a person with a homosexual or non-heteronormative sexual orientation.

The Eurovision Song Contest is also mentioned in this context, with the analogous word formation being *geirovidenie* (‘Gayrovision’ – from *Gay* + [*Eu*]/*rovision*). The association of the *Eurovision Song Contest* with gay performers, gay audiences, and as a gay event as well as its classification as a European music festival has contributed to the creation of this blend word.

In conclusion, one could claim that the current conflict between Europe and Russia is dominated by the question of who is gay and therefore deviant and who is not gay and, therefore, not deviant. The use of the word *gay* (Russ. *gei*) does not mean that one has exclusively a sexual orientation or a certain kind of sexual identity or desire in mind. The lexical unit *gay*-can expand its associative scope meaning that something corresponds neither to the norm nor to the traditional and well-ordered way of life (cf. *gei-politika* – literally: ‘gay politics’, often used as: ‘bad politics, weak political course’, *gei-strana* – literally: ‘gay country’, often used as: ‘weak country, country without a traditional political course, country without norms, (mostly a Western or Western-oriented) country which is completely different to Russia’, *gei-soobshchestvo* – literally: ‘gay community’, often used as: ‘non-traditional community, weak community, community which has nothing in common with Russian people’). The element *gei* expresses a general rejection, antipathy, weakness, and subordination and, hence, has a very pejorative connotation.

Negation plays an important role in this context. The principle of negation is a recurring theme throughout the entire Russian discourse on gender, sexuality, and nation. As has been previously mentioned, Russia defines its national identity according to what Russia is explicitly not. As Alicja Pstyga (2010) states, a negation always implies that a non-negated form exists which gives a clear idea of what the non-negated form or concept looks like or of how the non-negated concept can be imagined. The non-negated and therefore affirmative form is always seen as the prototype. So, *gay* is the deviant concept which functions as a negation of the norm, whereas *non-gay* and therefore heteronormative is the prototype that is the actual and “normal” concept (Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2011). Returning once again to the elaboration of Riabova and Riabov (2013, 2008), we can say that Russia gains its power and constructs its national identity on the basis of masculinity. And to be masculine means to negate everything feminine, which includes (male) homosexuality.

### *3.9 Respecting Diversity: on the Tolerance of Russian People*

Up to now, I have described the mechanisms and strategies of how Russia attempts to rekind and rebuild its national identity. Using the concepts of gender and sexuality and instrumentalising them for propaganda purposes in order to win the trust and the affirmation of the Russian people has proven enormously successful. This propaganda strategy which is mainly based on the reinterpretation of facts and the conscious use or even abuse of identity concepts seems to be paying off. It cannot be denied that at present, the Russian society seems to be swayed easily by propagandistic measures and ideological beliefs based on national demarcation. The perception of gender, sexual, and national identity is significantly influenced by the Russian media which play a very important and hegemonic role in this discourse and which a big part of the Russian society uncritically accepts. As a result, political measures and media contents are not only accepted and affirmed. Russian people also adopt the precise meaning of propaganda and circulate it. By doing so, they increasingly contribute to the spreading and establishment of ideas which are in line with the official propagandistic measures and ideological beliefs. As a consequence, the spreading of ideological ideas gathers a strong momentum which is fuelled

chiefly by an uncritical worldview which ignores the risks of foregoing democratic and social structures and destroying a humane social climate.

I have already alluded to the fact that it is neither justified nor fair to draw an over-generalised image of the situation in Russia. The attitude of Russian society towards the current political climate is not as homogeneous as it may seem. Not all Russians stand by these recent political and ideological measures with regard to identity policies or share the same opinion as to what gender, sexual, and national identities are “correct”. In order to take diversity within Russian society into account and to show that there are, indeed, varying opinions as to issues of identity, I wish to devote the last part of this chapter to ideas and opinions which differ from the mainstream.

One must keep in mind that identity is primarily constructed and perceived according to the predominant discourse and that it is the predominant discourse which has the greatest impact on our respective ideas of how we assess gender, sexual, and national identity. Nonetheless, it must be considered that there are Russians who are open to different types of identities and who do not categorise people according to traditional standards, ideas, or preconceived notions. Consequently, there are people who did like the performance and the song of the Austrian singer as well as the character or even the performer Conchita Wurst *per se*. They evaluated the performance and song exclusively on the basis of talent, music, voice, and show.

An unbelievable success, brilliantly contrived. A bearded lady sings about love. A charming, gracile, unbelievably sensitive woman. [...] Such a power of art. You see a bearded man who is absolutely not a woman, but you believe that it is a she. The music absolutely fills every cell of your soul and forces you to remember this painful thing which seemed to be forgotten for a long time. Amazing [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Original: “Невероятный успех, гениально задумано!!! Бородатая дама поёт о любви! Изящная, грациозная, удивительно-чувственная женщина! Но не нет, не женщина это. Такова сила искусства: вы видите бородатого мужичонку, который вовсе даже и не женщина, а верите, что это ОНА. Музыка полностью заполняет все клетки вашей души, заставляя вспомнить то больное, что уже, как казалось, давно забыто. Изумительно!!!”

All these worries here that – God forbid – your children may see this. But the carousals, rapes, and murders on TV every day, they don't worry you? Worried that they could see that a man in a dress has won? So what? Where's the problem? Look at Verka Serdiuchka before you talk about the fall of Europe. The song, I like very much. And it was super with the fire wings as show effects [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>205</sup>

Awesome, Conchita Wurst. You've earned it! A worthy victory. From the bottom of my heart: Congrats! [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>206</sup>

I absolutely loved the performance [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>207</sup>

Great job, Conchita. Bravo. Super voice. And so is the song. So much femininity, vanity, positivity, positive energy, and all combined in one performance [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>208</sup>

Even though I live in Russia, I do not share the overall enthusiasm about these girls [the Tolmachevy Sisters]. I didn't like the performance very much. The song was a bit boring. The performance is nothing special. It was like the rest of the dull mainstream. Even Ukraine, I liked more. But actually, I am a fan of the Austrian. I think he will be a worthy competitor for Armenia in the final [transl.] (MK Online, 07.05.2014).<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Original: “какие заботы тут насчёт того что "нидайбог" увидят дети.. а то что в телике каждый день пьянки, насилия и убийства- не заботит? подумаешь увидят что мужик в юбке выиграл. и что с того? где проблема? на Верку сердючку посмотрите прежде чем разглагольствовать о "загнивании европы". песня понравилась и ещё особенно классно вышло оформление с огненными крыльями...”

<sup>206</sup> Original: “Молодец Кончита Вурст,заслуженная и достойная победа! Искренне поздравляю!”

<sup>207</sup> Original: “Мне безумно понравилось выступление!”

<sup>208</sup> Original: “МОЛОДЕЦ,КОНЧИТА! БРАВО! Голос супер и песня тоже. Столько женственности, кокетства, позитива, положительной энергии и это все в одном образе.”

<sup>209</sup> Original: “Хотя я живу в России,я не разделяют всеобщей любви к этим девочкам. Мне выступление не очень понравилось,песня нудновата, и выступление не выделяется,сливалось со всей серой массой, даже Украина понравилась больше \*.\* А вообще я болею за австрийца) думаю,он составит достойную конкуренцию Армении в финале :D.”

Such a talent like Conchita has is very hard to find. But it's not only the talent, it's also the courage [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>210</sup>

Well, I liked Conchita Wurst. Wonderful feminine physique, nice voice and musicality, unforgettable eyes and hair. Okay, the beard should go, but it is not important. Our Netrebko also has a beard. I enjoyed watching the act and my ten year old son quite liked the wonderful diva, too [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>211</sup>

These comments show that there are passionate appeals in favour of more tolerance and acceptance for non-heteronormative people as well as in favour of a diverse society in general.

I am heterosexual and, nevertheless, I am not homophobic and I am not a barbarian. The reason of your phobia results, first of all, from your repulsive education at home and in school and, secondly, from your latent homosexuality [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>212</sup>

The Eurovision 2014 was won by the transvestite Conchita Wurst, the Austrian singer Tom Neuwirth, who has become the European symbol of tolerance and patience [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>213</sup>

It's a man in a dress – sounds like a great answer for a child. Consider furthermore that in real life Thomas doesn't see himself as a woman. And as to the question about a man wearing a dress, you could say that the world is diverse and that this rare incidence in our world has a right to exist. So, if everyone explained that to children this way, this homophobic hysteria

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<sup>210</sup> Original: “А вот таланта как у Кончиты раз, два и обчелся. И не только таланта но и смелости!”

<sup>211</sup> Original: “А мне понравилась Кончита Вурст. Великолепная женская фигура , приятный голос и музыкальность, незабываемые глаза и волосы. Борода , правда, лишнее, но ничего особенного. Наша Нетребко тоже в бороде. Смотрел с удовольствием, да и моему десятилетнему сыну эта великолепная дива весьма понравилась.”

<sup>212</sup> Original: “Я - гетеросексуал, и при этом - не гомофоб, и не варвар. Причина Ваших фобий, прежде всего, отвратительное воспитание и образование, и, скорее всего, латентная гомосексуальность.”

<sup>213</sup> Original: “А выиграл "Евровидение-2014" трансвестит Кончита Вурст – австрийский певец Том Нойвирт, который стал европейским символом толерантности и терпимости.”

would end as well as making fun of people who do not obey the rules which you have created yourselves and which you intend to foist on everybody [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>214</sup>

In this context, people take into account the constant construction and performance of identity and point to a blurring of boundaries which makes it impossible to define and to think identity in a hermetic way. Moreover, some comments challenge stereotypes and show that masculinity and femininity are concepts which undergo changes and never remain stable.

Well, do we actually need this misbelief? Actually your brain seems to be parched. You need to develop, to think, if possible, in a logical way. The norms which are made up limit your way of thinking. You don't see more than your own nose and you don't think about where all this comes from. Every limitation in the world is made up by people themselves [transl.] (MK Online, 26.05.2014).<sup>215</sup>

First, the song can be translated as Rise like a phoenix [...]. Second, all the anchormen on Russian tv-channels wear lipstick, half of them have artificial hair, and they are powdered. This doesn't mean that they are gay. Third, it is obvious that Thomas is a great actor. Moreover, all Russian tsars wore dresses, caftans, that means Arabian dresses. And the idea of a transvestite with a beard has already existed for a very long time, approximately since the 1990s. Even if they are not gay, but simply wear women's dresses, they paint beards on their faces. Thomas has at least a real one [...] [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Original: “Мужчина в платье, - прекрасный ответ для ребенка! Если учесть, что в обычной жизни Томас не считает себя женщиной. ) А на вопрос о платье на мужчине можно ответить, что мир многообразен, и что это редкое явление в нашем мире имеет право на существование. Вот когда все начнут так это объяснять детям, тогда и закончатся эта гомофобная истерия и издевательства над людьми, которые не вписываются в рамки, которые вы себе сами установили и пытаетесь навязать всем!...”

<sup>215</sup> Original: “Ох еп) надо же какая ересь. Как раз таки ваши мозги и высохшие. Развивайтесь, размышляйте, желательно логически. Придуманные нормы ограничили ваше мышление. Вы не видите дальше собственного носа и не задумываетесь откуда все изначально пришло. Все ограничения в мире придумано самими людьми.”

<sup>216</sup> Original: “По первым песню можно перевести Воскресни как феникс (а не словно феникс). Второе все ведущие российские каналов мужчины - с

Looking and analysing the “pro-gay-discourse” – obviously a “marginal discourse” as to identity diversity –, one cannot help but notice the interesting fact that identity and diversity do not play the major role in this context. Apparently, equal treatment and respect for all people, regardless of their particular identity, seem to be self-evident values to these readers. Consequently, they have turned away from the debates on identity concepts and gender ideas and towards the strategies which are used to influence and shape public opinion or, more adequately, the public’s negative stance on identity diversity. Some people realise that the negative views on diversity and non-heteronormativity are manipulated by the media. People virtually attack journalists, commenters, and the media in general for demonising those who do not conform to heteronormative norms. They see the media as perpetuating the current propagandistic political course and aspire to debunk the propaganda which is the basis for most media coverage.

Such a shit, I haven’t read for a long time. Either the author does not know Europe and has a superficial opinion which he has maybe formed from scandalous media coverage, or this is a commissioned piece. But please, do not think that we are all idiots. It is enough that the politicians think of us like that [transl.] (MK Online, 10.02.2013).<sup>217</sup>

In this context, parts of the Russian society criticise in particular the strategy of overall generalisation.

Albania and Switzerland – this is Europe or what? And what about Norway and Greece? England and Romania? Poland and Austria? Europe is so different. It is more diverse than Russia. Dagestan and Yakutia or Tuva and Ingushetia. The aim of this article is to make Russia be at odds with Europe

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накрашенными губами, половина в париках и напудренные - это не значит что они геи. в третьих видно что Томас превосходный актер . Далее - все цари русские ходили в платьях, кафтан - платье по арабски, А уж образ трансвестита с бородой это уже давно где то с1990 годов , - даже если не геи - а просто в женское платье переодеваются -они русуют себе бороду у Томаса хоть настоящая -то наложены черные тени на бороду - так такая мода уже 40 лет как.”

<sup>217</sup> Original: “Большей ерунды давно не читал. Либо автор не знает Европы и составляет мнение поверхностно и по скандальным медийных фактам, либо ... это заказная статья. Но не надо нас принимать за полных дураков (достаточно, что это это делают власти).”

and to persuade the Russian citizens of distancing themselves from the European culture and to let themselves fall into the arms of the spiritual masters of the author. You must decide what is better for you. Beethoven and Rembrandt, Newton and Shakespeare or... or... [...] As if there is nothing in Europe but fags<sup>218</sup> [transl.] (MK Online, 10.02.2013).<sup>219</sup>

Moreover, people unmask and even mock the strategy of dramatising and exaggerating the identity issue.

Oh, what a stupid article... There are not that many fags and lesbians in Europe [transl.] (Newsland Online, 16.02.2013).<sup>220</sup>

The strategy of exaggeration is hardly subtle and many people see through the persistent repetition of hyperboles right to its core of propagandistic intentions and ideological objectives. Consequently, some readers do not take articles and their contents seriously and ridicule the respective authors.

Oh, what a wise author. Knows everything about America. He has been everywhere, he has seen everything. [...] [transl.] (MK Online, 11.02.2013).<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> One has to admit that this comment is highly ambivalent and conflicted: on the one hand, the use of the noun *gomiki* 'fags' indicates the possible stance of the commenters on homosexual people and identity diversity. Obviously, the comment contains homophobia to a certain degree and can be interpreted as a homophobic, yet, at least as an impolite and discriminatory act. On the other hand, however, the commenter expresses a critical appraisal of the Russian society and of the role and function of the media for the political course of the Russian president.

<sup>219</sup> Original: "Албания и Швейцария, это Европа или как? А Норвегия и Греция? Англия и Румыния? Польша и Австрия? Разная она, Европа. Более разная, чем Россия. Дагестан и Якутия или Тува и Ингушетия. Цель этой статьи - посорить Россию с Европой и убедить граждан России отвернуться от европейской культуры и броситься в объятия к духовным наставникам автора. Решайте сами, что вам ближе. Бетховен и Рембрандт, Ньютон и Шекспир или... или... Даже не знаю кого и назвать кроме Омара Хайама. И когда это было? Ох, и хитер же этот Щевченко. Будто кроме гомиков в Европе и нет ничего."

<sup>220</sup> Original: "Ох.какая же тупая статья...педиков и лезби не так и много в Европе..."

<sup>221</sup> Original: "какой умный. Все про Америку знает. Везде был, все видел (с работы выгоняли за критику). Молодец..., ну просто усаца."



There is also criticism of the current Russian President Vladimir Putin and of his political course. It is known that his political goals form the basis for the respective media coverage.

I can't understand our politicians. Why all this wickedness? Why don't you accept Conchita with humour and just see her talent? Why did they keep silent when Tatu French kissed each other on stage in front of the whole of Europe? Our limited mentality makes me puke [transl.] (MK Online, 11.05.2014).<sup>222</sup>

I didn't understand what this is? A kind of satire? I cannot believe that the author of the article really believes in what he has written? The whole country is surrounded by barbarism, boorishness, bawdiness, thievery, corruption, ignorance and decadence like the last bastion of manhood. You, my dear, just go to Europe more often and see how people live there. In any case, you won't see any fat popes driving a Mercedes with flashing lights, you won't see any gangsters in the parliaments, you won't see policemen who are more afraid than the criminals, you won't see authorities who accept bribery, you won't see ostentatious funerals of thieves in law and presidential carousels. But well, if Europe is so bad why, out of nine million Russian people who have emigrated to Europe, only some hundreds have come back? Don't you think that you will feel embarrassed about your article five years from now, Mr Author? [transl.] (MK Online, 11.02.2013).<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Original: "Я немогу понять наших политиков. Откуда столько злобы? Почему бы не отнестись к Кончите с юмором, и просто увидеть ее талант? Почему же они молчали в тряпочку, когда Тату целовались взасос на сценах всей европы? Противно от нашего недалекого менталитета."

<sup>223</sup> Original: "Я не понял, это что, сатира? Не могу поверить в то, что автор действительно верит в то, что написал. Погрязшая в бескультуре, хамстве, развороте, воровстве, коррупции, невежестве, развале всего и вся страна как последний оплот человечества..., Вы, господин, просто почаще ездите в Европу и посмотрите как там люди живут. Во всяком случае нигде вы не увидите толстопузых попов на мерседесах с мигалками, гангстеров в парламентах, полицейских которых бояться больше чем бандитов, чиновников работающих за откаты, помпезные похороны воров в законе и президентские карусели. Ну а потом, если Европа так плоха, то почему из девяти миллионов русскоязычных иммигрантов в Европу вернулись назад наверное пара сотен человек? Не будет ли вам стыдно за вашу статью лет через пять, господин автор?"

Nevertheless – Asia! Only the Asians truckle to the people who have power. No European country would stand such a president, such a prime minister, and such a parliament for one second. And we are delighted, lick the arse, saying „Who if not he“? [transl.] (MK Online, 11.02.2013).<sup>224</sup>

Last but not least, one can observe that Russian society is criticised in general – mainly due to how Russians behave and their uncritical mindset. Russian society is seen as backward, too traditional, and not at all open for changes or transformations.

I have been living in Canada for 14 years and I don't regret that. Here, there are people, but in Russia not really. Here, you can find tremendous discounts on products during bank holidays, but in Russia, the prices rise increasingly. Here, charity is highly developed and people are uncomfortable with showing all their wealth, but in Russia, people must spit on tramps and demonstrate their diamonds on the hub caps. Here, the police fines the minister when he drives the car and exceeds the speed limit and the policeman will not be fired for it at all. So, where are the slaves? There are a lot of Russians here, Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian and so on. And everyone feels like a person with dignity. Not everything is as great as people would like it to be. But it's more quiet here and more just [transl.] (MK Online, 11.02.2013).<sup>225</sup>

You just make a remarkable act of self-display when writing such agitational comments? “They are ill”, “Normal people don't need to show of”, “Ko-ko-ko”. [...] You are such beauties, you protect your tribe. But you are not ill yourselves, if you agitate against them? It is such a mania to insult people of

<sup>224</sup> Original: “А всё же - Азия! Только азиаты пресмыкаются перед властью имущими. В любом европейском государстве ТАКОГО президента, ТАКОГО премьера, ТАКОЙ парламент не потерпели бы ни секунды. А мы восхищаемся, лижем зад, приговаривая "кто ж, как не он?"”

<sup>225</sup> Original: “Живу в Канаде 14 лет и не жалею. Это здесь люди-а в России не совсем. Здесь к праздникам делают огромные скидки на продукты, а в России задирают цены. Здесь развита благотворительность и стыдно кичиться богатством, а в России надо плевать на нищих и вставлять алмазы в диски колес. Здесь полиция штрафует министра когда он за рулем и превысил скорость и полицейского никто не увольняет. Так где рабы? Нас тут много-русских, украинцев, грузин, армян итд. и все чувствуют себя людьми с достоинством. Не все так прекрасно как хотелось бы, но гораздо спокойнее и справедливее.”

a non-traditional orientation. This is also a psychic deviation. You must also be cured in a closed hospital till the end of your lives, and this is painful, you are aggressive [transl.] (MK Online, 29.05.2014).<sup>226</sup>

#### *4 Final Remarks*

As a summary, I would like to reiterate my admonition that it is by no means a simple task to draw any definite conclusions on the current situation in Russia with regard to issues of gender, sexual, or national identity. On the surface, Russia, indeed, comes across as a society which rejects diversity, insists on adhering to traditional values, promotes a general homophobia, all the while embracing a general critical stance toward globalisation and all that which is associated with the West. Analyses of the readers' comments taken from the online issue of the newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets* make clear that this is the predominant climate in Russian society. One must refrain from overgeneralising, however, for two significant reasons: firstly, one must consider the tremendous influence of the political course and of the media which are heavily influenced by the governing Russian parties and the state which create the impression of a uniform public opinion simply by virtue of marginalising or ignoring opposing views. Secondly, one must take those Russians into account who do not adhere to mainstream opinion, who try to preserve their autonomy and regularly repudiate the different phobias accordingly.

Time will show in what direction Russian identity policies will evolve, what further measures will be taken on the part of politics in order to recreate Russian national identity and to establish Russia's "new" position in the world and, finally, how Russian society will develop and how it will deal with concepts of identity and the idea of identity diversity in the future.

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<sup>226</sup> Original: "А вы сами-то не показушничаете, печатая такие хейтерские комментарии? :) "Они больные", "Нормальных людей к показухе не тянет", "Ко-ко-ко". А единственному разумному человеку (Екатерине) наставили минусов. Ну да, ну да. Какие же вы все красавцы, защищайте свой род.) А сами-то вы не больные, раз так хейтерски к ним относитесь? Знаете, такая мания оскорбить людей с нетрадиционной ориентацией - тоже психическое отклонение. Вас бы в клинике закрытой запереть до конца жизни и лечить от этого, а то больно вы агрессивные. :))"



## Part 4:

### Eurovision Song Contest 2016

#### Russia vs. Ukraine? – the Changes in Discourse after Conchita’s and Jamala’s Victories

*Why, in the whole world, don't people like Russia at all? [...] And for what reasons should Europe like us? (Moskovskii Komsomolets Online, 15 May 2016)*<sup>227</sup>

To date, relations between Russia and Ukraine remain tense with no prospect of thaw in the short term. Against this backdrop, the finale of the 2016 Eurovision Song Contest in Stockholm provided an important discursive moment when Ukraine beat Russia by 43 points in the last minutes of the music festival and took victory. In the end, Russia was relegated to the third place because its results were not as good as those of Australian singer Dami Im, who came in second. Having remained quite impassive about the ESC in 2015, the Russian media once again exploded with outrage at this turn of events and rekindled the discourse about nation and identity. To be sure: this time, gender and sexuality were given a much less prominent spot in the debate. Yet, one is justified in asking the question: are there any parallels between this year and the year 2014 when Conchita Wurst won the ESC for Austria?

In her song *1944*, Ukrainian singer Jamala told the story of the deportation of her great-grandmother, a Crimean tatar, whom Stalin had deported to Central Asia. The song had already stirred a debate in the run-up to the ESC, with some parties arguing that the true motive behind the song was

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<sup>227</sup> Original: “Почему во всем мире так не любят Россию? [...] А за что Европе нас любить?”; online at: [www.mk.ru/culture/2016/05/15/itogi-evrovideniya-politicheskoy-zakaz-ili-publikadura.html#loaded-132](http://www.mk.ru/culture/2016/05/15/itogi-evrovideniya-politicheskoy-zakaz-ili-publikadura.html#loaded-132) [last accessed on 28 July 2016].

criticism of Russia's annexation of Crimea. According to them, the Ukrainian entry had to be excluded from the contest as the statutes of the Eurovision Song Contest prohibit any form of political partisanship on stage.

We won't account for taste, even though Lazarev is a brilliant singer. But his song is bad. But the most important fact is that Jamala's song is a political one and this contradicts the conditions of this competition. Consequently, one should not only have refused to give her the first place, but also to let her compete in this competition. Here, we talk about politics again. Another fact is that the whole contest is bad. There are no good songs [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).

The ballad was reviewed and eventually received clearance after the competent board of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which organises the Eurovision Song Contest, had not been able to find any evidence to support the views of Jamala's critics.<sup>228</sup>

In contrast to Jamala, Russian singer Sergey Lazarev did not shy away from appealing to the mainstream. He delivered a bombastic show with impressive special effects. Lazarev made sure to stage his body and male identity with an assured sense of style, combining stereotypical manhood with metrosexuality. Clearly, his performance and the song *You are the Only One* were geared to attract a fan base as broad as possible.<sup>229</sup> His acting on stage was so powerful and enchanting that it drowned out the kitschy lyrics and shallow music. In the end, the stage with its *über*-sophisticated design and the breath-taking effects produced by technology were the real stars of the Russian performance.

It is as usual: Lazarev is nothing. There are only special effects and even they would be fusty in anyone's performance. Jamala – this is something else!

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<sup>228</sup> The performance of the winning song at the Eurovision Song Contest can be found on the Internet, for example, on Youtube at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCG2rw4ZXTY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCG2rw4ZXTY) [last accessed on 28 July 2016].

<sup>229</sup> The performance of Sergey Lazarev at this year's ESC can be watched on the Internet, for instance, on Youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e94ds t20C9Y> [last accessed on 28 July 2016].

Her voice, her performance. The show effects were only a pleasant extra to her performance! [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016).<sup>230</sup>

One is safe in assuming that the national juries had noticed the questionable quality of Lazarev's performance when they awarded the second place to Jamala, a professional singer with a song she had composed herself (Dami Im from Australia was given first place by the juries). Her education and talent were also appreciated by some commenters.

Jamala's voice and her song are more professional. If one ignores the furore which was caused by the media, then it will become clear that this result was predictable. It is not possible that money buys talent [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>231</sup>

Lazarev, in contrast to this, came in fifth in the jury vote. The new voting system, which was introduced last year, led to some suspenseful final minutes when the results from the national televotes were added to the points the national juries had awarded. Under the new voting system, the points from the national juries and from the national televote are no longer averaged in order to determine the national vote. Instead, the juries announce their results to which the results of the televote are added during a second round. In the end, this led to Lazarev's defeat even though the Russian singer had been the favourite of televoters who ranked him first with 361 points. Jamala, on the contrary, came in second at 323 points.

Soon after the European Broadcasting Union had declared Ukraine's victory, some suspected a conspiracy. Participants in online forums, for example, argued that the decisions of the national juries had been politically motivated and that it was them who had deprived Sergey Lazarev of his rightful victory.

The most important voice is the voice of the audience. Due to the results of the audience's televote, Lazarev has won, Russia has won. The professional

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<sup>230</sup> Original: "Лазарев как всегда - никакой, только спецэффекты норм и то у кого-то спертые. Джамала - вот это другое дело! И голос и исполнение! Эффекты были только приятным дополнением к ее выступлению!"

<sup>231</sup> Original: "Голос и песня Джамалы более профессиональны. Если убрать шумиху, организованную СМИ, результат предскажем. За деньги купить талант невозможно."

jury is only a bunch of political prostitutes: they were told for whom they have to vote and they voted accordingly [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>232</sup>

The audience chose Russia. This is a victory. The professional jury – this is politics [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>233</sup>

According to this line of reasoning, if the televoters give the first place to a Russian singer and the juries don't, then the motive behind the juries' decision must be a desire to boycott Russia (apparently, aesthetic considerations of professional artists do not count in this context). As a consequence, the newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets* ran the following headline on 15 May 2016: *Grandiozni paradoks Evrovideniia: Pochemu pobedila Dzhamala* [the grandiose paradox of the Eurovision Song Contest: why Jamala has won].<sup>234</sup> Another op-ed asked the question: *Politicheskii zakaz ili publika-dura?* [Political order or a stupid audience?].<sup>235</sup> And the *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* published a report on the ESC in which the editors made no effort to hide their stance on the issue: *Kak evropeiskoe zhiuri ukralo u Lazareva pobedu* [How the European jury stole Lazarev's victory].<sup>236</sup>

In comparison with 2014, it is interesting to note that the media discussed and reported on Jamala's performance and her victory in a more objective and highly fair-minded way; the readers' comments (here: in the online issue of the *Moskovskii Komsomolets*), too, reflected a much higher diversity of opinion than after Conchita Wurst's victory in 2014. This runs contrary to expectations that, due to the current tense situation between Russia and Ukraine, the news coverage and the readers' comments respectively would have been more subjective and one-sided than in the case of Conchita Wurst's triumph. After the victory of Jamala, many

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<sup>232</sup> Original: “Главные голоса - голоса зрителей. По результатам голосования зрителей победил Лазарев, победила Россия. Профессиональное жюри - кучка политических проституток, за кого им сказали, за того и проголосовали.”

<sup>233</sup> Original: “Зрители выбрали Россию. Это победа. ПрофессиАнальное жюри - это политика.”

<sup>234</sup> Online at: [www.mk.ru/culture/2016/05/15/grandioznyy-paradoks-evrovideniya-pochemu-pobedila-dzhamala.html](http://www.mk.ru/culture/2016/05/15/grandioznyy-paradoks-evrovideniya-pochemu-pobedila-dzhamala.html) [last accessed on 28 July 2016].

<sup>235</sup> Online at: [www.mk.ru/culture/2016/05/15/itogi-evrovideniya-politicheskiiy-zakaz-ili-publikadura.html](http://www.mk.ru/culture/2016/05/15/itogi-evrovideniya-politicheskiiy-zakaz-ili-publikadura.html) [last accessed on 26 July 2016].

<sup>236</sup> Online at: [www.kp.ru/daily/26529.7/3545977/](http://www.kp.ru/daily/26529.7/3545977/) [last accessed on 28 July 2016].



readers declared that they were happy with the result and said that Jamala deserved winning the competition.

A Tatar has won and I congratulate her [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016).<sup>237</sup>

To substantiate this point, readers frequently pointed out the quality of Jamala's talent as a singer and composer. They praised her performance as elaborate and impressive, yet also modest. Moreover, many readers judged the resentment voiced in the comments' section of news websites with regard to Jamala as a reaction to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. To them, politics – and not aesthetic quality – was the true motive behind the opposition against the Ukrainian singer.

However, the more objective news coverage and the more balanced readers' comments stirred up debates on patriotism because some Russians felt offended by the lack of support for Sergey Lazarev, by the insufficient support for Russia and, in particular, by those who argued that Ukraine and even Australia performed better at the ESC and that the third place of Russia was justified. The author of the article *Itogi Evrovideniia: politicheskii zakaz ili publika-dura?* [The results of the Eurovision Song Contest: Political order or a stupid audience]<sup>238</sup> from 15 May 2016 had to deal with a lot of criticism from readers motivated by her balanced and definitely provoking news coverage.

Dear Mrs Fedoktina! Have you actually read your own words? [...] My godness! You are absolutely crazy! [...] [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016)<sup>239</sup>

The author of this report is either stupid or provocative. In both cases, she has no business writing for a newspaper. She has written such nonsense. Last

<sup>237</sup> Original: “ ПОБЕДИЛА ТАТАРКА ВОТ ЕЁ И ПОЗДРАВЛЯЮ!!!!!!!!”

<sup>238</sup> Online at: <http://www.mk.ru/culture/2016/05/15/itogi-evrovideniya-politicheskii-zakaz-ili-publikadura.html#loaded-132> [last accessed on 17 July 2016].

<sup>239</sup> Original: “Товарищ Федоткина! Ты сама-то хоть прочла то, что написала? "Бессмертный полк", Вторая Мировая война, "День победы"... и все это в статье о конкурсе Евровидения! Мама дорогая! Совсем опупела! Если кого-то где-то не любят, нафиг туда переться, а потом, сопеть, пыхтеть и надувать щёки?!”

year, they insulted Gagarina and this year – Lazarev. You are politicising yourself, but you blame others [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016).<sup>240</sup>

Fedotkina has written such crazy stuff [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016)<sup>241</sup>

Tanya, tell us: what do you smoke [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016)<sup>242</sup>

Consequently, some of the arguments which were brought forward during the debate about Jamala tie in seamlessly with the discourse on nation and identity which surrounded Conchita Wurst's performance in 2014. Once again, the final result was said to be motivated by politics. Readers deplored that the ESC was no longer about music, songs, and entertainment. In their opinion, the competition had ceased to be an entertainment programme and had transformed into a stage for politics.

In any case, Lazarev was the best singer. Yet, politics won [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016).<sup>243</sup>

One should take note of the fact, however, that much of the praise and support Jamala received in online forums was not only motivated by the quality of her song but also by suspicions that Russia's actions during the ESC were also motivated by political considerations. Several readers of the *Moskovskii Komsomolets* speculated that people in Russia had been quick to denounce a political boycott against Sergey Lazarev but were blind to the fact that the Russian jury had delivered a partisan vote, too, by boycotting Jamala.

Russians gave Ukraine and, therefore, its singer Jamala awesome ten points. But the juries of both states gave zero points to each other! Draw your own conclusion as to this! [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016).<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Original: “Автор статьи, толи дура, толи правокатор и в том и том случае ,ей нечего делать в газете, такой бред написала. в прошлом году обидели Гагарину, в этом Лазарева. вы сами все политизируете, а вините других.”

<sup>241</sup> Original: “Какой бред у этой федоткиной.”

<sup>242</sup> Original: “Таня, поделись тем что куришь.”

<sup>243</sup> Original: “Лазарев конечно спел лучше, но победила политика.”

Of all countries, Russia is talking about justice? Larisa Rubalskaia, member of the Russian jury and a so-called 'expert', ranked Ukraine as 26<sup>th</sup> (!) in the competition and Australia as 25<sup>th</sup>!!!! [transl.] (MK Online, 15 May 2016).<sup>245</sup>

Overall, readers' comments appear to be more thoughtful and balanced than two years ago. Hence, it would be unjustified to say that one position has been particularly prominent this year or that one side was predominant. Evidently, readers' were divided as to Jamala's victory which is demonstrated by the succession of argument and counter-argument, opinion and opposition. In contrast to this, readers' condemnation of Conchita Wurst seemed to be more uniform, with only a few exceptions among readers supporting the Austrian performer.

Nevertheless, some readers used Jamala's victory as an occasion to address topics and aspects which have almost nothing to do with the Eurovision Song Contest and have almost everything to do with Russia's current national and international situation. Again, the Eurovision Song Contest serves as a discursive moment to voice one's own discontent. Some readers saw a connection between the ESC and Russia's current disadvantaged position in both Europe and the world in general. From their point of view, the contest had become a metaphor for Russia's place in the world.

Jamala makes politics, she doesn't have a hit. [...] And no one really doubted that politics will definitely win and that they shoot against Russia [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>246</sup>

However, the same issue, this means defining Russia's position in the world, can also be observed from a different angle as it is shown by the next reader's comment.

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<sup>244</sup> Original: "Граждане России поставили Украине и ее певице Джамале высокие 10 баллов, а жюри обеих стран выставило друг другу нули! Выводы делайте сами!"

<sup>245</sup> Original: "И это Россия говорит о справедливости? Лариса Рубальская, член российского жюри, якобы, "профессионал", ставит Украину на 26(!) место, а Австралию - на 25!!!!"

<sup>246</sup> Original: "[...] У джамалы политика а не хит. [...] А что победит именно политика и выстрелит против России в этом никто не сомневался [...]."

Everything is clear without words. Europeans voted against the cursed empire of evil. Russia has always been evil. And it remains evil. By the way, Russia is typically Asian, but there are a lot of Asian countries which live in a very human way. But Russia means evil and envy towards all humanity. Although I am born in this Russia, I hate this country from the bottom of my heart [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>247</sup>

This statement – and the division between Asia and Europe it contains – leads us directly to another familiar aspect. This aspect, which has never been central to the Eurovision Song Contest but which was mentioned (again) nevertheless, was the question of what Europe is and what Europe is not. This question had already been discussed when Conchita Wurst won the ESC and returned to the foreground when Jamala won. On the one hand, many readers argue in their comments that Europe is a purely geographical space. It is hardly surprising that from this perspective Australia's entry in the contest irritated many readers and that many were ignorant of the reasons behind the EBU's decision to let Dami Im participate even though the EBU had published them repeatedly.

What a strange competition. In the eyes of the juries, the Australian singer has won (*where is Europe here?!).* The majority of the audience voted for Lazarev. And Jamala (!) has won. One can organise this kind of “competition” in [the Ukrainian city] Berdychiv, where I propose to organise it in 2017. By the way, as to music, Jamalas song is such shit that you cannot listen to it without harming your own body! [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>248</sup>

This definition of Europe as a hermetic and uniform geographical space betrays a worldview based on *svoë-chuzhoe*-thinking which draws a clear

<sup>247</sup> Original: “Все ясно без слов. Европейцы проголосовали против проклятой империи Зла. Россия всегда была злом. И злом остается. Кстати Россия это типичная азиатчина, но есть масса азиатских стран, которые живут как люди. А Россия это зло и ненависть ко всему человеческому. Хотя я и родился в этой России, но ненавижу ее всем сердцем.”

<sup>248</sup> Original: “Странный конкурс. По мнению жури победила австралийка (*при чём тут Европа?!).* Большинство зрителей проголосовало за Лазарева, а победила Джамала(!). Такому "конкурсу" место в Бердичеве, где и предлагаю его провести в 17 году. Кстати, песня Джамалы, в музыкальном отношении - такое дерьмо, которое без насилия над организмом, невозможно слушать!”

line between what should be regarded as European and what should be regarded as un-European.

Soon, Congo, Angola, China, and Chile will also belong to Europe. One should no longer call it the Eurovision Song Contest then, but the Global-vision Song Contest [transl.] (MK Online 15 May 2016).<sup>249</sup>

On the other hand, and as one could see looking at some comments above, Europe is once again conceptualised as a cognitive and associative construct. Europe is not viewed as a geographical space – as this would imply that Russia (or at least a part of it) is European. Instead, it is seen as a sphere with its own values and stereotypes which differ from the values and standards upheld in Russia.

And this is the European democracy. And the European values are the same [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>250</sup>

From this point of view, Europe is primarily synonymous with the European Union and, moreover, with countries which feel attracted to the European Union and have turned their backs on Russia. The EU has shown an increasing interest in Ukraine for a long time and continues to punish Russia with sanctions. In the opinion of many readers of the Russian news websites I have studied, the EU and Ukraine have much more in common with each other than with Russia. Jamala's victory is nothing but a further metaphor reflecting the present situation. Like in 2014, some readers consequently pleaded for Russia not to take part in next year's competition. Some commenters said, that this would turn the ESC into a "moldy and boring event" (*tukhloe i skuchnoe meropriatie*) because it would be missing Russia's energy, innovative spirit, and creativity – qualities which the EU seemed to be increasingly lacking. As a concept, Europe is increasingly challenged, with some readers even doubting that Europe still exists or that one can still speak of Europe.

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<sup>249</sup> Original: "Скоро, наверно, и Конго с Анголой, Китай и Чили признают Европой. Тогда конкурс надо назвать не Евровидение, а Глобалвидение."

<sup>250</sup> Original: "А это и есть европейская демократия, такая же как европейские ценности ;-)"

Yet, many so-called European countries have demonstrated their lack of professionalism and shown to the world that this song contest is extremely politicised. It is not that Ukraine has won, it is that all of Europe has lost. And if Russia still has some self-respect, it should stop taking part in this display of shame and politicians and its big TV-channels should stop broadcasting it. Europe ceased to exist a long time ago. There is only Russia, the USA and their willing minion Turkey. [transl.] (MK Online 15.05.2015).<sup>251</sup>

While Ukraine is regarded as a part of Europe – a part which is supported by the EU – Russia is apparently viewed as a country which does not and does not want to belong to Europe. In this context, it is often said that Russia is a homogeneous society which maintains its traditions and values and in which there is no place for all those who do not wish to respect these values and traditions. Attributes like un-Russian and anti-Russian – and their mirror images European and pro-European – are assumed to signify that something is dangerous to the continuity of Russian society and that effective counter-measures must be put into place to protect society against their harmful influence.

The show of Lazarev is very expensive. The song will be played for years, and the singer Jamala will be forgotten in a week. It was not successful to bite Russia, we do not need this contest in Russia, and a citizen of Russia with an African look has to be sent to Ukraine in 2017 with a song about slaves who were deported to America in thousands in the middle ages. But we can doubt that the contest will be organised in Ukraine, it's dangerous, because it is not clear, what it will be like over there in half a year. [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Original: “Однако ряд так называемых европейских стран не только проявили свой непрофессионализм, но и продемонстрировали всему миру, что данный конкурс сильно политизирован. Так что тут не Украина победила, а проиграла вся Европа. И если Россия себя уважает, то она вообще должна отказаться участвовать в этом зрелище позора и политиканства, как и показывать этот конкурс по центральным каналам. Европы уже давно нет, есть Россия, США и приткнувшая к ним шестерка - Турция.”

<sup>252</sup> Original: “Номер Лазарева очень дорого стоит в плане денег. Её будут крутить годами, а певицу Джамалу забудут через неделю. А укусить Россию не удалось, нам этот конкурс в России не нужен, а вот гражданина России с африканской внешностью послать на Украину в 2017 году надо, с песней про рабов, которых тысячами вывозили в Америку в средние века. Но есть сомнения, что

Europe continues to be associated with a loss of values. Its critics concede that it may be a highly advanced and innovative region. Yet, its defining characteristics are decadence, deviance, and weakness. Many readers argue in their posts that Europe lacks inner strength and power and is still on a slope towards its own decline because of this lack. Again, the concept of a gay Europe (*geiropa*) is called upon by many who think that Europe's gayness is a symptom of its lack of power, energy, discipline, and order. Consequently, the blend words *geiropa* 'Gayrope' and *geiropetsy* 'Gayropean people' or – more colloquial – *geiropovtsy* 'Gayropean people' respectively entered the discourse once again after Jamala's victory.<sup>253</sup> In this context, it is worthwhile to take note of the phenomenon that Sergey Lazarev himself was also ridiculed as a representative of "Gayrope". The singer's play with metrosexuality was clearly interpreted and denounced as European.

At the bottom of his heart, Sergey Lazarev is – due to his looks and his music – a typical representative of decadent Gayrope and it is really weird to read all this praise honouring him here. But maybe it is not really that weird if one remembers the lesbians of Tatu or the cute Bilan and other stars of our show business who have nothing truly Russian in their soul. Nevertheless, they have always been able to capture the attention of their Russian audience, who [...] were always prepared to virtually lick no matter what disgusting singer from head to toe, if only he was able to win first place in this Gayropean competition and gives them a new excuse to speak of the „glory of Russia“ [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>254</sup>

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конкурса на Украине может и не быть, опасно, да и не известно, что будет там через полгода.”

<sup>253</sup> See for example: “Украина уверенно побеждает за голосами публики, а Россия – за оценками жюри. Комментарии российских патриотов. Мы еще в 2014 году говорили, что голосование публики – это поддержка разлагающейся Европой артистов-извращенцев. Пример этому – Кончите Вурст гейроповцы отдали 311 баллов, а Сестрам Толмачевым (Россия) – 132. Совпадение? Не думаю. Потому поддержка публикой – показатель, что артист скрытый извращенец (или явный). А вот поддержка Лазарева профессиональным жюри – это реальный показатель. Они реально оценивают талант человека. Итого. Настоящий победитель – Лазарев.” (MK Online, 15.05.2016).

<sup>254</sup> “Сергей Лазарев - и по духу и по внешности и по музыке - типичный представитель разлагающейся Гейропы и в высшей степени странно читать хвалебные отзывы в его честь. А может и нет тут никакой странности, если

Who decided to send Lazarev to the Eurovision Song Contest? How can one send someone like this?! He is absolutely nothing! He is too plain and has no balls! [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>255</sup>

Discourse after Jamala's victory also revealed a paradoxical understanding of the concept of democracy. In principle, democracy is not understood as a fixed concept. Rather, its definition is flexible and can be adapted to the requirements of the situation. When Conchita Wurst won the ESC in 2014, readers of the news sites included in this study considered Russia as a democratic country, governed by democratic politicians who make democratic decisions for the benefit of the people – a claim which even today would be worthwhile debating. After Jamala's victory, readers denounced the democracy (or rather lack thereof) at the ESC, with some of them comparing the voting system of the song contest to the state of democracy in Russia. For many readers, the jury vote at the ESC 2016 corresponds to the decisions made by politicians, whereas the televote is framed as the voice of the “common people”.

But where is democracy here? The people voted for one, but the public servants voted for another? [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>256</sup>

Thus, the respective comments do not only convey frustration with the outcome of a song contest. They also imply dissatisfaction with a political system in which the elite makes decisions and enforces them with the help of powerful propaganda without ever listening to the opinions of ordinary citizens.

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вспомнить лесбиянок "Тату", смазливового "Билана" и прочих звезд нашего шоу-бизнеса, которые не имея за душой ничего русского-национального, тем не менее неизменно вызывали ажиотаж у российской публики, которая на словах ратует за скрепы и духовность, а на деле готова облизать любого самого непристойного исполнителя, лишь бы он занял первое место на гей-ропском конкурсе и дал новый повод говорить о "величии России".

<sup>255</sup> Original: “Кто выбрал Лазарева на Евровидение? Как такое можно посылать?! Он вообще никакой! Ни кожи, ни рожи!”

<sup>256</sup> Original: “А где же демократия - народ выбрал одного, а чиновники - другого?”



Well, this is like in Russia. The people vote for someone, but in the Duma there are others. This is Russian democracy. Why are you surprised? [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>257</sup>

Normal people were more benevolent and just than politicians. It is very good that this is like this up to now. [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016).<sup>258</sup>

The reluctance to question democratic structures in their own country and political system finds an odd mirror image in an energetic drive to challenge the democratic procedures at the ESC which is then projected onto Russia and the readers' themselves. This means: on the one hand, readers welcome undemocratic structures and pseudo-democratic measures, because they benefit the people. On the other hand, they reject the same structures as undemocratic in a different context. This paradox was not that obvious after Conchita Wurst's performance in 2014. In May 2016, however, these voices had become considerably more vocal.

I know for sure that everything Russia is proud of these days is what remains of its Soviet legacy which was created in the USSR and has somehow been lost and been repainted with imported varnish. Even the immortal regiment is a legacy of Stalin and Molotov. Apart from good-for-nothing drunkards and a Kiselev with yachts at the Côte d'Azur nothing has been accomplished in the past 25 years. Watered down vodka, cheese with butter, drug addiction and hundreds of thousands of HIV infected people in 2015 do not count. [transl.] (MK Online, 15.05.2016)<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Original: "Ну это как в России, Народ голосует за одних, а проходят в Госдуму другие!! Демократия по российски!! Чему удивляетесь?"

<sup>258</sup> Original: "обычные люди оказались добрее и справедливее политиков, как хорошо, что это все еще так!"

<sup>259</sup> Original: "Но знаю точно, что все, чем сейчас так гордится Россия-это останки советского наследия, созданного СССР, где-то потерянное, где-то подкрашенное импортной краской. Даже Бессмертный полк- наследие Сталина и Молотова. Кроме поющих трусов и киселева с яхтами на Лазурном берегу за 25 лет ничего создано не было. Паленая водка, сыр с маслом, наркомания и сто тысяч заболевших СПИД в 2015 году не считается."

After Jamala's victory, many readers declared their solidarity with Ukraine as a country and with Jamala as a singer. Next to the solidary readers' comments, however, statements can be found which remind us of the statements published in 2014 after Conchita Wurst's victory. *Geiropa* 'Gay-ropé' is resuscitated and turned into a relevant entity. Due to its strong traditions and normative way of dealing with life, Russia does not belong to Europe according to some readers. Countries which feel attracted to the European Union and covet membership are automatically defined as weak, decadent, and hence gay. As a concept, "gay" still plays a role when it comes to signifying the deviation and otherness which are central to the Russian definition of Europe. In summary, readers' comments cannot be read in the same manner as comments posted in 2014, despite some obvious parallels. Yet, it is clear that events in Europe are never interpreted in isolation. Instead, their meaning is always established against the backdrop of current European and global affairs. We could see this in the discourse surrounding Conchita Wurst in 2014 and in the discourse surrounding Jamala in 2016.

Analysing the readers' comments and, therefore, the dimension the discourse on identity has taken after the victory of Jamala needs a much closer look as I have done it here. It was my sole intention to give a few insights into the discourse on identity today and to make clear that some facts and dimensions have changed over time. I wanted to show some connections between the discourse on identity after Conchita Wurst had won the competition and after the victory of Jamala because here again, some very interesting and highly promising parallels become visible which invite us to analyse them in more detail in the future. Consequently, a more detailed and profound investigation is needed here in order to give well-grounded, profound, and, in particular, reliable results.

## Part 5:

### Russian Gender and Queer Linguistics:

#### A Critical Introduction in a Difficult Context

*To clarify – academics can't walk away from a chance  
to talk about definitions – this is all about sex.  
Gender is something else:  
the property of nouns in many languages to belong to classes  
that look like sex but aren't. [...]  
Sex is part of the real world,  
as are male or female,  
or – now – “non-specific”.<sup>260</sup>*

#### *1 General Observations and Critical Remarks*

Central to this book is the concept of identity as an essential part of our reality. Reality constructs our identity. And identity, in turn, constructs our reality. Identity and the diversity of identities have a tremendous effect on society and social structures. Concepts of identity shape significantly the idea of society and lead to altered or modified social structures. Identities exert influence on politics and political measures; they challenge the implementation of social policies, and they affect cultural life in multiple ways. Identity diversity can broaden our horizon, contribute to a more profound understanding of what it means to be human and thus, make us aware of the many facets of equality and inequality. Last but not least, concepts of identity affect language and language affects identity concepts *per se*.

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<sup>260</sup> Taken from the article “Our linguistic lag on all things sex”, in: *The Drum*, 9 April 2014; online at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-09/sussex-our-linguistic-lag-on-all-things-sex/5376756> [last accessed on 14 April 2016].

For over two decades, the identity structure of Russian society has undergone significant changes the most important catalyst of which has been the ongoing globalisation of its business and society. New identity concepts have entered Russian society and therefore the Russian reality (one may question whether these concepts are really new or have simply returned) and challenge Russian politics and society markedly. Non-heteronormativity in particular has attracted much attention in this context. The pan-European spreading of diverse non-heteronormative identity concepts as reflected by some political measures of the European Union has not stopped at the Russian borders and has affected Russian society as well (Kirilina 2015).

This trend has also affected academic life and research in Russia: identity diversity, non-heteronormativity, and queerness have been studied in Russian cultural studies, literary studies, or sociology and continue to be an object of study (e.g. Baer 2009, Healey 2014, 2010, 2001, Kon 2010, 2009, 2007, 2003, 1998, 1995, Kondakov 2014, Scheller-Boltz 2015, Sozaev 2010, Zink 2015). However, efforts to develop gender-queer linguistics – meaning the process of implementing queerness in linguistic research – are considerably less pronounced in Russian academia although the relation between queerness and language contains enormous research potential for Russian linguistics.

The last part of this monograph aims at encouraging linguists to focus more on developing and establishing the discipline of Russian queer linguistics.<sup>261</sup> At least, it aims at encouraging linguists to consider that linguistic issues can be addressed from different perspectives and that a different (i.e. queer) focus on language can enrich studies of linguistic issues, in particular with regard to gender linguistic research.

Queer linguistic research must first and foremost be adequately understood in line with the poststructuralist assumption that reality and language are closely linked and influenced by discourse (Weedon 1996): from this perspective, language contributes to the reflection and the construction of our reality and, in turn, our reality influences the ways in which people use language and perceive linguistic expressions.

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<sup>261</sup> Parts of this part of the monograph have been published in Scheller-Boltz (2015d, 2014).

Unfortunately, there is widespread confusion and misuse of the word *queer* (probably due to its use in everyday language) which has led to misunderstandings and inaccurate interpretations of queer linguistics and, especially, of the aims and issues which characterise queer linguistic research. Queer linguistics must not be equated with linguistic studies on homosexuality or gay language, as already stated by Motschenbacher (2011). The focus of queer linguistic research is on deconstructing heteronormative language use and heteronormative structures in language and on exploring their effects on non-heteronormative identities. A queer perspective on linguistic structures aims at disclosing traditionally established androcentric and with that patriarchal and heteronormative structures and attempts to make clear how these structures affect language and language use and how they shape a certain consciousness which is reflected in and by language. A queer linguistic perspective makes clear that language has the power to exclude people, in particular people with a non-heteronormative identity, or to make it difficult for those people to express themselves, to refer to themselves, and to give themselves an identity through language, because the heteronormative system of language may not comprise the necessary options for using language in a non-heteronormative context.

Sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual normativity play a more important role in language than is usually assumed. Due to the pervasive influence of heteronormativity, heterosexuality is the identity concept which is constantly reconstructed in and by language. Therefore, heterosexuality or heteronormativity must also be discussed from a queer linguistic point of view: firstly, one cannot separate heterosexuality from homosexuality or, more precisely, heteronormativity from non-heteronormativity so easily as the lines between heterosexuality and heteronormativity are often blurred and cannot be regarded as a uniform and hermetic identity concept in which all individuals share the same characteristics and behaviour patterns (Motschenbacher 2010). Secondly, analysing heteronormative structures against the background of the existing non-heteronormative realities is necessary in order to understand, for instance, how heterosexuality distinguishes itself linguistically from non-heterosexuality.

Queer linguistic research is strictly based on a deconstructivist approach. It takes heteronormativity or the criticism of heteronormativity as a starting point as it is heteronormativity which dominates our societies

and lives. Hence, it is heteronormativity which is the lynchpin of queer linguistics, and it is the linguistic construction of heteronormativity which is opposed to the linguistic construction of non-heteronormativity.

By now it has hopefully been made clear that it is necessary to study the construction and perception of identity from a discourse linguistic perspective. Discourse analyses are helpful when it comes to investigating the mechanisms, strategies, and circumstances which govern the ways in which we create and perform our identity and the way we construct our gender (as shown here, mainly, with regard to the discourse on Conchita Wurst). Also, the perception and acceptance of gender and identity in general can be made visible by analysing discourses. Discourses influence and affect us and our understanding of identity. Heteronormative frames which are very common and seemingly necessary in almost all socio-cultures, make it interesting to analyse queer identities, their construction and perception (cf. part 2). However, queer linguistic research does not or should not tackle discourse linguistic problems exclusively because it is not only discourse *per se* which offers interesting and highly relevant research opportunities as to language and language use. It is also promising to shift the perspective on another aspect of discourse, namely on how discourse influences and shapes certain linguistic phenomena and structures. Language plays a major role in constructing, performing, and perceiving identity – and language – especially language use, but also language norms – is always the result of discourses. We cannot establish language norms without being influenced by the discourse because language norms are never objective and free of a discursive impact. Thus, it is essential for queer linguistic research to consider the main discourse on identity as it contains necessary background information which must be taken into account in order for the respective linguistic research questions to reveal significant results.

Let me begin with some critical remarks as to the current state of Russian gender linguistics as this is useful with regard to my upcoming comments on queer linguistic research. Generally, it is very gratifying to state that Russian gender linguistics has developed rapidly during the past 25 years. It is also pleasing to observe that gender linguistic research today is more differentiated than ever. However, scholars of Slavonic gender linguistics will need to take a closer and, in particular, a more critical look at this research field (cf. Scheller-Boltz 2015d for more details). If they wish to study certain issues and aspects in more detail, they will need to

shift their research perspective and to diversify their approaches when investigating issues pertaining to gender linguistics. Today, new, innovative, and fruitful findings can only arise from a merging of different approaches to research. But above all, the latest theories must be effectively applied in order to produce reliable research results (see here Gradinari 2015).

One of the observations which are addressed in this context is the common practice of using the terms *sex* (Russ. *rod*) and *gender* (Russ. *gender*) interchangeably for the sake of research. It just seems to be *de rigueur* now to avoid the use of *sex* (commonly understood as *biological gender*) and to use the term *gender* (known as *socio-cultural gender*) instead. Seen from this angle, it is simply fashionable to replace the term *sex* with the term *gender*. This is a disturbing trend as it suggests a lack of understanding concerning the difference between *gender* and *sex* (cf. Robinson/ Richardson 2015 for more detail). The use of the term *gender* seems hardly more than a change of labels for after closer analysis it becomes abundantly clear that the term *gender* often refers to the (biological) sex of a person and/ or that the term is used with the rigid and invariant categories of the biological male and the biological female in mind. Consequently, it is useful to take a closer look at the actual usage of the terms and at the application of the concept of *gender* in Russia.

The general assessment and assumption of what *gender* really means in Russia, has a great impact on the use of this concept in Russian linguistic research. Debates in the Russian media and within Russian society begin with the implicit or explicit notion that *gender* exists as a stable and – biologically or naturally – (pre)determined concept which is immune to change, variance, and continuity. Indeed, if one defines *gender* as an

aspect of the self-concept of a person which describes the self-awareness of this person as a member and a representative of a certain sex [transl.] (Kletsina 2009b: 201)<sup>262</sup>

or as “the first category in which a child experiences their own I” (Kletsina 2009b: 201)<sup>263</sup>, one can only conclude that the concept of gender consists

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<sup>262</sup> Original: “аспект самосознания, описывающий переживание человеком себя как представителя определенного пола”. For a more critical stance, see here also Rumiantseva (2009).

exclusively of strict categories and mainly of the categories of man and woman. This kind of assumption locates gender in an essentialist context and presents it as a natural and predetermined concept. Consequently, gender is neither associated with performing identity nor with (re)producing and (re)imitating identity. Hence, gender is not seen as a construction. This basic hypothesis stands in striking contrast to notions of gender widely accepted by the international academic community today. Moreover, it raises the question: is there a difference between *sex* and *gender*, if *gender* is used and thought of in this traditional way?

Last but not least, it must be mentioned that Russian gender (linguistic) research focuses primarily on women and on women's situation in a cultural, social, or even linguistic context. However, gender (linguistic) research does not aim at investigating only women and femininity, because gender research is not at all women's studies. Gender (linguistic) studies go far beyond this research topic although focussing (primarily) on women is undoubtedly a necessary research approach as it forms the basis for further areas of research and leads directly to new research fields.

Russia's approach to gender is geared towards the experience of so-called *cis-people* who accept and live their gender in accordance with the sex they were assigned at birth. However, this assumption of two hermetic concepts – namely woman and man – which are characterised by traditional ideas, stereotypical generalisations, and, mainly, by their heterosexual orientation (Kletsina 2009a) ignores other, that is to say, non-heteronormative identities, which are no less important for gender linguistic research (Mehlmann 2006: 350). For example, intersex people, in general, do not identify with a certain sex or gender. Trans-people cannot so easily be located within the binary gender system, either. Members of the third sex “whose gender identities and enactments fall outside of socio-cultural norms for women and men” (Zimman/ Hall 2010: 166) fulfil a social role and identify themselves with their socially determined assignment to a certain gender although they obviously have a differing sex. This highlights the notion that identity can be multiple, variable, and unambiguous. What a socio-cultural community perceives and defines as masculine or

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<sup>263</sup> Original: “первая категория, в которой ребенок осмысливает свое собственное Я.”



feminine is always the result of interpretive ascriptions and can never be defined in a universal sense (Kroll 2002: 357).

Non-heteronormative identities play a very marginal role in current Russian gender linguistics, if they play any role at all. Although Temkina (2009: 34) hints at “something” which might exist beyond the dichotomy of man and woman, this “something” is not addressed in research. This uncritical approach to *gender* and *identity* stymies research advancements. It assumes that man and woman are fixed concepts and, as a result, it does not call into question how gender is constructed, performed, and perceived in and through language as well as within and by society. Consequently, gender linguists run the risk of overlooking the fact that the gender of a person can actually differ from their sex due to the fact that people can be assigned to a certain sex but construct and perform their gender in ways which often resist traditional divisions between men and women.

Moving from sex to gender can make the investigation more subtle: gender categories are not restricted to the male/female dichotomy, females need not be feminine, and femininity can be a matter of degree [or, as I might now put it, take many different forms] (McConnell-Ginet 2011: 41).

Thus, a more modern approach to gender linguistics would be to avoid using research methods which rely on traditional heterosexuality and the gender binary. Focussing exclusively on man and woman means to consciously ignore “intermediate”, that is to say non-heteronormative identities. Rather, a modern approach would deal with identity in general and with the way in which identity is constructed (Butler 1998, 1997, 1991). Consequently, the differentiation between *gender* and *sex* is essential and forms the basis not only for gender linguistics, but also for queer linguistic research. Alla Kirilina (2015) is right in appealing to Russian linguists to take poststructuralist approaches more into account and to stress the importance of including other concepts of gender in their research. It is not surprising that Russian gender linguistics is based itself predominantly on heteronormative assumptions given the current socio-political climate in the Russian Federation which has been described in the previous parts of this book. However, there are also other factors which seem to hinder a more detailed gender linguistics line of research and, in particular, the establishment of queer linguistics. For instance, awareness of political

correctness and, in particular, politically correct language use has not taken foothold in Russia as of yet. Consequently, an awareness of language use which is sensitive to individuals' gender, identity and ethnic origins is neither widespread nor understood.

## *2 Russian Gender Queer Linguistics: Challenges and Approaches*

When Professor Lann Hornscheidt from the Centre for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies of the Humboldt University in Berlin presented the – as I call it – *x-theory* in the media in 2014, Hornscheidt caused a general uproar and complete bewilderment (URL 118). Lann Hornscheidt suggested that, in German, all gender-specific endings could be replaced by an *x*. The theory is strictly based on a deconstructivist approach which basically abolishes gender categories and rejects the existence of a heteronormative binary gender division. Hornscheidt critically questioned whether there really were different gender identities. According to Hornscheidt, gender identities were merely constructed by allocating specific meanings to the respective identity, a process which leads to demarcation and exclusion. With reference to Judith Butler's (1998, 1991) deconstruction of gender, Lann Hornscheidt tried to deconstruct gender from a linguistic perspective and drew attention to personal appellations which constantly construct gender according to existing binary categories (Hornscheidt 2009, 2006). In order to avoid the process of categorising people according to a gender binary, Lann Hornscheidt argued with regard to the German language that it was logical to eliminate gender-specific endings in personal nouns and to replace them with a gender-unspecific *x*. This way, the noun could keep its essence and functionality and continue to refer to a person, whereas the gender of the person to whom the noun referred would remain unspecific. After all, the gender of a person was mostly unnecessary and irrelevant so that there seems to be no need to exhibit and “mark” gender. According to Lann Hornscheidt, this linguistic strategy required a certain kind of creativity as no concrete or general word formation rules could be given for applying this approach due to the complex and diverse process of word formation in German. Selected examples which illustrate Hornscheidt's approach can be found below.

Examples:

Schül <i>er</i> ‘male pupil’	→ Schülx ‘gender unspecified pupil’
Schül <i>erin</i> ‘female pupil’	→ Schülx ‘gender unspecified pupil’
Profess <i>or</i> ‘male professor’	→ Professx ‘gender unspecified professor’
Studierend <i>er</i> ‘male student’	→ Studierx ‘gender unspecified student’

On hir official website, Lann Hornscheidt explicitly draws attention to the necessity of avoiding gender categories in spoken and written language in the following statement:

If you write to Lann Hornscheidt, please use respectful forms of address which do not evoke the gender binary. Please do avoid gender binary forms of address, such as “Herr \_\_\_” [Mr], “Frau \_\_\_” [Mrs], “Lieber \_\_\_” [Dear.Masc], or “Liebe \_\_\_” [Dear.Fem]. There is not the one and only correct and good form of address. Instead, new respectful forms of address are needed – I am looking forward to your creative non-discriminatory ideas. If you don’t want to communicate, but just throw all your irritation at me, instead of using it as a new impulse to rethink your own norms and your world view, then you have the opportunity to send this to the following e-mail address: [hatemail.an.hornscheidt@gmail.com](mailto:hatemail.an.hornscheidt@gmail.com).

Or use your time for writing something nice and respectful to a person of your choice – and see what such an activity feels like [transl.].<sup>264</sup>

This is not the place to discuss Lann Hornscheidt’s approach or to explore hir theory and its practical realisation. What I want to point out here, instead, is the fact that German linguistics has already taken deconstructivist approaches into account (Motschenbacher 2014a). Moreover, the aware-

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<sup>264</sup> Original: “Wenn Sie mit Lann Hornscheidt Kontakt aufnehmen wollen, verwenden Sie bitte respektvolle Anreden, die nicht Zweigeschlechtlichkeit aufrufen. Bitte vermeiden Sie zweigendernde Ansprachen wie "Herr \_\_\_", "Frau \_\_\_", "Lieber \_\_\_", oder "Liebe \_\_\_". Es gibt nicht die eine richtige und gute Anrede, sondern es bedarf respektvoller neuer Anredeformen – ich freue mich auf Ihre kreativen antidiskriminierenden Ideen. Falls Sie nicht kommunizieren, sondern nur Ihre Irritation zurückwerfen wollen, statt sie als Impuls für sich zu benutzen über eigene Normen und Weltbilder nachzudenken, dann schicken Sie dies bitte an folgende Mail-Adresse: [hatemail.an.hornscheidt@gmail.com](mailto:hatemail.an.hornscheidt@gmail.com). Oder – Sie nehmen sich die Zeit, um was Nettes und Respektvolles stattdessen an eine Person Ihrer Wahl zu schreiben – und schauen mal, wie sich eine solche Handlung anfühlen würde” (URL 119).

ness of a politically correct language use is widely established although possibilities which guarantee a politically correct language use vary depending on the context. One can observe the same with regard to the English language (Motschenbacher 2014a). Here, an increasing use of gender-neutral constructions can be observed (e.g. *if someone would like to join the party they can come around, \*the chairman → but: the chair*) as well as the use of “innovative” pronoun forms (e.g. the – more occasionally used – possessive pronoun *ze, zir, hir* (King 2014). And moreover, the *x*-form, as presented by Hornscheidt, has been also introduced to the English language. One can observe a tendency to use the pronoun *Mx* as a form of address instead of *Mr* and *Mrs* in order to make a reference and address possible, but to avoid this way a sex-based classification. In Swedish, a gender-neutral person pronoun is also highly used: *hen*. It was especially – and artificially – created and introduced to the Swedish lexis and is widely and, in particular, officially used today.

As already mentioned, in Russia, the general awareness that language may discriminate and marginalise people due to their gender and sexual orientation is not as developed. Official initiatives to implement a politically correct language use are still absent. Obviously, there must be an increased awareness that language

is a form of ideological practice that mediates, influences and even constructs our experiences, identities and ways of viewing the world (Benwell/ Stokoe 2006: 44).

Moreover, Russian gender linguistics is noticeably lacking poststructuralist and deconstructivist approaches to the adequate analysis of identity, as stated by Kirilina (2015) and Scheller-Boltz (2015a). Although researchers often drop terms like *gender*, *postgender*, or *poststructuralism*, most of them actually do not apply these terms meaningfully or sensibly, if they apply them at all (Scheller-Boltz 2015e).

The issue of gender offers a variety of areas of research and issues which have not been dealt with up to now. Including a queer perspective on gender issues will inevitably lead to further understandings of how gender and identity are constructed. Consequently, Nina Degele (2008) is right when she uses the term *gender-queer research* to clarify the idea that research on gender identities cannot be separated so easily from sexual

identity or sexual desire and that sexuality cannot be investigated without taking gender identities into account. The concepts of non-heteronormativity and sexual identity play such an important role even for the Russian society that it would be unjustifiable not to include such phenomena in this sort of research. Russian gender linguists are invited to explore gender linguistic questions in more detail and in a more differentiated way. They will find a broad range of instruments and approaches available in international queer academia. This would also help to establish solid approaches to queer linguistic research in the future.

### *3 Queering Linguistic Disciplines*

According to Motschenbacher (2011: 149) queer linguistics wants to “provide a critical investigation of the discursive formation of heteronormativity”. Queer linguistic research takes all sexualities into account, including heterosexuality since this identity concept, too, is constructed against the background of heteronormativity and its rigid separation from non-heteronormativities (cf. Motschenbacher 2014b). The aim of queer linguistic research is not to criticise the established androcentrism in language. Rather, queer linguistics challenges the issue of gender-marking itself and asks the question why it is necessary to make gender and identity visible at all. Consequently, it seems more appropriate to say that queer linguistics intends to deconstruct gender and identity and advocates strategies to neutralise and avoid gender and identity.

In the following section, I will present a number of important issues worth exploring from a queer linguistic perspective. Of course, it is not possible to give a complete overview here (for a very detailed and profound overview, see Motschenbacher 2010 as well as Scheller-Boltz 2014 for Russian). That is why I will limit myself to some of the most important linguistic issues. The aim of this chapter is to show that linguistic questions may be explored using other, more contemporary methods of research, which are more in step with the modern world.

Interesting and highly promising questions arise, for example, when shedding a queer light on the morphological system. With reference to Lann Hornscheidt, one could examine the inventory of gender-specific or gender-related morphemes for the construction of gender and identity. For this purpose, one would have to analyse how speakers make use of this

inventory in order to mark and construct gender and how this inventory can be used to construct identity in general, including non-heteronormative identities. Morpho-pragmatic factors are important in this context, too, as they illustrate the actual use of morphemes or the intention of their use. Morpho-cognitive factors can be studied in order to analyse mental processes that show factors, structures, and processes of perception, data processing, and understanding, which occur when a morpheme is activated. Interesting results can also be expected with regard to queer analyses of pronouns which are said to be gender-neutral, yet may turn out to be gender-specific and are thus caught in the field of tension between structuralist and poststructuralist tendencies.

As for word formation, it remains yet to be seen if it will be possible to create or to use new terms or word forms which avoid a strict gender marking.<sup>265</sup> Of course, using the masculine generic forms when referring to people in general – even when one might be talking about women – is still a widespread practice in contemporary Russian. A cognitive investigation of this practice could lead to results which could help us understand to what extent the use of masculine forms as generic expressions can really include all gender and identity concepts.<sup>266</sup> Moreover – and looking at international standards in this context which are widespread and applied today – it could be a useful exercise to analyse – or even to create – spellings which avoid a rigid gender-marking and focus more on helping to ensure a gender-neutral language. In many languages, there exist special language guides which offer variants for a gender-neutral and therefore non-discriminatory language use. Such guides provide suggestions for alternative terms, word forms, or spellings. A broad range of such guides can be found, for instance, in German or English.

Examples:

Spieler/in ‘player m/f’ (gender binary)

Lehrer/innen ‘teachers m/f’ (gender binary)

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<sup>265</sup> See here the creation of the Swedish person pronoun *hen* and its official introduction to language (system and use).

<sup>266</sup> For other languages, similar studies indicate that the generic masculine form may not be so generic after all. In other words: using masculine forms does not accomplish the objective of including women and other identities.

mit den Spieler/inne/n ‘with the players m/f’ (gender binary)

Lehrer(innen) ‘teachers m(f)’ (gender binary)

Spieler\_in ‘player m\_f’ (gender gap, diversity)

Spie\_lerin ‘player m\_f\_o’ (gender gap, diversity)

Lehrer\*innen ‘teachers m\*f’ (asterisk, diversity)

Spielende ‘a group of players / playing x’ (participle, gender not specified)

Lehrende ‘a group of teachers / teaching x’ (participle, gender not specified)

Spielx, Lehrx, Profx ‘player, teacher, professor’ (“x-theory”, gender not specified)

Similar ideas have been voiced by other Slavonic linguistics such as Serbian (Rajilić 2015), Croatian (Kersten-Pejanić 2015, Motschenbacher 2015), and Polish (URL 120). An increasing number of scholars argue that it is necessary today to compile such language guides in order to raise awareness for gender-neutral language and to change androcentric language norms. New language policy issues challenge those norms which are generally based on structuralist approaches. They draw attention to the everyday construction of sexism, discrimination, and the marginalisation of people as well as to ways in which linguistic sexism and discrimination can be avoided.

The exploration of the processes by which words are formed and of options within word formation falls in line with a general analysis of the lexis from a queer linguistic point of view. It is still unclear which lexical units of designation are actually available for referring to people of all identities and for constructing gender and identity in general. We need to analyse how people usually go about referring to individuals, in particular to individuals with a non-heteronormative identity. For instance, personal nouns which refer to homosexual men are widely used and generally well-known (Baer 2015). Nouns that refer to lesbians are lesser known and seem to be available to a lesser degree (Baer 2011). Furthermore, we must look into the question of how personal nouns can be assessed and categorised. In

this context, it is not only necessary to challenge the sexist, discriminatory, or marginalising potential of lexical units, but also to call into question the general cognitive potential of lexical units in a gender or identity context.

This leads us directly to the question of why the Russian noun *donzhuan* ‘womaniser’ has a (relatively) positive meaning – it is at any rate not categorically negative –, whereas the feminine counterpart (e.g. *shliukha* ‘slut’), considering the same (situational and contextual) factors and (social) circumstances, is always categorically negative, pejorative, and excluding. Semantic analyses can help to resolve this contraction and obvious double standard. It is worth investigating – especially in a queer-linguistic context – to what extent meanings, traditionally embedded in a heteronormative context, may reveal themselves as variable and fluid (e.g. *sem’ia* ‘family’, *muzh* ‘husband’, *zhena* ‘wife’), or, respectively, to what extent non-heteronormative lifestyles require new meanings which could lead to semantic differentiation or semantic diversity (e.g. *soiuis* ‘connection’ → *soiuis* ‘union, cf. civil union’ ≠ *brak* ‘marriage’). In this sense, queering semantics means to challenge the arbitrariness and conventionality of meaning and to point to the fact that meaning and sense structures are discursively constructed and can, consequently, be deconstructed again.

As to pragmatics, in-group- and out-group-perspectives can reveal contrasts in the perception and understanding of gender and identity. What do men express, when they use the Russian noun *baba* ‘chick’? (cf. Zaitseva 2006). How do women or homosexual men use this noun in an in-group-conversation? What do people do, when they use the word *sodomity* ‘sodomites’ in Russian to refer to the homosexual community? (cf. part 3 of this monograph). And what effects does the use of *tetka* ‘fairy, fag, queen’ produce when it is used to refer to an effeminate man? In the context of gender and identity, intentional speech or intentions of speakers, influenced by the discourse of gender and identity, play an important role. Consequently, more studies are required that focus on pragmatic factors. In this context, it is also highly relevant to analyse how word choice or intonation can influence the performance and the construction of gender and identity during a talk or a conversation. Moreover, pragmatic factors often give a hint as to how the performed identity is perceived by a group. This is a very important issue in a queer context, too, for example, when considering trans-identities, intersex people, or bisexuals. Consequently, there



is a close connection with sociolinguistic research. Analysing discursive elements, investigations of pragmatic and, furthermore, sociolinguistic factors in spoken language and conversations from a queer linguistics perspective will not only enrich research on conversation analysis, but also research on pragmatics and socio-linguistics which have hitherto ignored the construction of non-heteronormative identities in and through spoken language.

Another issue which has been ignored in linguistics thus far is the relationship between identity and lexicography. Here, an initial question to consider might be whether we can find and apply criteria to describe and define words that make it possible to overcome the principle of androcentrism in dictionaries? To date, it is still very common for descriptions and definitions found in dictionaries to be based on the principle of heteronormativity. A new approach, which would more adequately reflect the realities of a heterogeneous society, might be to create dictionary entries explicitly based on a hetero-deconstructivist approach. A few words such as the prototypical *svad'ba* 'wedding', *flirtovat* 'to flirt', *muzh* 'husband', *sem'ia* 'family' could be accompanied by queer-oriented definitions. Dictionaries are mostly understood as a medium that only reflects the lexis of a language or merely gives equivalents in the target language. A queer-oriented stance could expand this narrow approach and could be seen as useful especially with regard to bilingual dictionaries.

Language is a complex, multifaceted, and, most of all, multi-layered medium which provides different inherent strategies, functions, and means to construct identity. By challenging androcentrism in language and by following a deconstructivist approach with regard to gender and identity, almost every linguistic discipline offers the possibility for queer linguistic research. To this end, a combination of interdisciplinary approaches is unavoidable. Starting with an analysis of discourse, different linguistic disciplines and means could be included in one study. This would not only illustrate the ways in which the morphological system is discursively shaped, in which new lexical units or words in general are formed or in which words are finally used, but also such investigations would make clear how we understand words, how words should be understood, how we use words in order to meet our goals and how words should be used. Queer linguistic research not only discloses the strategies and mechanisms which determine how language is actually applied, but it can also challenge the

established mechanisms and in particular the uncritical automatism which visibly governs the ways in which language is generally used.

Russian queer linguistics is in its infancy. Very little work has been done; very little progress has been made. There remains a wide range of research options for the inquisitive scholar. To what extent queer linguistic issues will be addressed in the future or how long it will take queer linguistics in Russian studies to catch up with international queer linguistic standards, remains to be seen.

## **Some Final Remarks instead of a Summary**

Our reality offers much more opportunities for linguistic – including, in particular, gender and queer linguistic – research than one might have assumed up to now.

At this point, I hope that it has become clear to the reader that gender linguistic questions as well as questions concerning the relation between language and identity in general must not be limited to research questions which – only – deal with man and woman, especially with man and woman in a heteronormative constellation. Gender linguistic questions must be asked in a broader sense, which integrates non-heteronormative identities, too. Only by adopting this approach can we hope to arrive at more profound and meaningful findings in the end.

I have stressed throughout this book that there is a deep connection between gender and queer linguistic studies – as shown, e.g., by Nina Degele (2008). Due to this connection, it is useful to integrate both disciplines into research on language and identity and to examine questions of identity in general. In doing so, we should avoid separating heteronormative and non-heteronormative perspectives. We actually live in a non-heteronormative world. This reality must be integrated in linguistic research, too. We cannot look at languages only from a patriarchal and heteronormative perspective. If we did, we would fail to recognise the diversity of and in our lives. This would inevitably lead to prefabricated research findings.

It must be stressed that gender is not the same as sex and that sex must not be equated with gender. Of course, one can ask about the influence of sex and the body on language behaviour and language perception. However, one cannot limit gender and queer linguistic questions only to this approach. Gender and queer linguistics is mainly about identity and identity construction. Hence, researchers who deal with gender and queer linguistic questions have primarily to ask the question of how our identity influences both, our own language use and that of others, and what we actually do and perceive by using language. Moreover, and as shown in this monograph, sex is not that clear, separable, and monolithic as mostly assumed.

Hopefully, the reader has understood that it is neither useful nor fruitful to investigate gender and queer linguistic questions just from a strict language systemic and normative perspective – not least, as normativity is indisputably a clear discursive construct and the result of social agreement. Consequently, it is more promising to integrate gender and identity discourses into research and to ask gender and queer linguistic questions against the backdrop of those discourses. Then one will inevitably see that it is, on the one hand, authorities, like politics, church, educational institutions, and, of course, the microcosm of the family, which have great influence on gender and queer questions as well as on the perception of identities and, on the other hand, that it is the discursively shaped common-sense understanding that has an impact on how we see and interpret gender, identities and, in the end, our reality. As a consequence, it will become obvious that language and the discursively shaped language use and understanding have a significant impact on how we – actively and passively – construct identities.

It is worth to study how gender and sexuality are further used to construct other identities. As shown in the study at hand, gender and sexuality are used – and to some extent misused – to construct other identity concepts and, furthermore, to construct spaces. As one can observe in today's Russia, there are two contrary tendencies: on the one hand and according to an understanding of reality which is based on a postgender approach, there is an obvious tendency to eliminate the gender binary in a heteronormative frame. On the other hand, one can observe the tendency of reinforcing the gender binary with the traditional idea of gender roles at its core. This has been demonstrated by Kirilina (2015) and her ideas have been further developed in the study I have presented in this monograph. It is interesting to notice that the traditional gender model is used to characterise a strong society, a strong nation, and a healthy state, whereas a non-heteronormative construction is interpreted as deviant, decaying, and weak. Constructing gendered and sexualised spaces this way, has an enormous impact on the construction of the Russian national identity as well as on the self-concept that Russians should have of their own culture, nation, and country. It would be interesting to analyse how gender and sexual identities are further used in order to praise Russia and to degrade other spaces.

## Abbreviation List

Alban.	Albanian
Bosn.	Bosnian
cf.	compare to this
coll.	colloquial
Croat.	Croatian
EBU	European Broadcasting Union
ESC	Eurovision Song Contest
esp.	especially
etc.	et cetera
EU	European Union
f	female
fem	feminine (grammatical gender)
Germ.	German
Hawaii.	Hawaiian
m	male
masc	masculine (grammatical gender)
MK	Moskovskii Komsomolets
Montenegr.	Montenegrinian
o	other gender identities (beyond heteronormativity)
Pol.	Polish
Russ.	Russian
Samoa.	Samoan
Serb.	Serbian
Tahit.	Tahitian
Tonga.	Tongan
transl.	translation (by the author)
VTsIOM	Russian Public Opinion Research Centre



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