

THE EMERGENCE OF A SEXUAL MINORITIES MOVEMENT IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

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Abstract

After a long period of oppression of individuals and the absence of organizations, a movement of sexual minorities in Russia began in 1989. I analyze the initial period of the movement, arguing that the public organizations and groups of the initial period realized agenda and interests of the previously existed nation-wide community. On the basis of interviews with activists along with analysis of the early gay and lesbian press I show manners of their public self-presentation, agenda and specificity of the leaders' attitude to the organizational activity in that period. I describe the three main perspectives that structured the movement and show differences between the first and the second (current) period in the movement's post-soviet history. Besides better known organizations in Moscow and Leningrad/St.Petersburg, similar groups appeared in other parts of the country simultaneously, that I explain as an effect of the deep social and political transformation of the period. I demonstrate also that attempts to politicize the movement in the early 1990s were unsuccessful, and that they resulted in a deep de-politization of the movement in the second period. In the last part, I offer a case study of an activist's attitudes and ways of organizational activity in early 1990s, which illustrates how these organizations have been established and how one activist perceived the urgent aims of the community. I also show that the Russian movement, in general, hardly came close to appropriating a collective identity as part of the "global LGBT movement."

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Introduction

In this research I describe the emergence of sexual minorities' movement in Russia. I discuss public emergence of the sexual minorities' community and its self-organization in the late years of the Soviet Union (since 1989), and in 1990s. In the previous period, no open community of people with non-normative sexualities has been possible in the country. My research question is what were distinctive characteristic features and inner structure of Russian sexual minorities' movement in its initial period?

To answer this question, I offered a historical description of the movement's development, especially considering shaping of its identity, inner system of social relations and their relation to the context of post-soviet social transformation.

This topic should be interesting because of several reasons. Russian society does not have a tradition of "politics of identity". Thus, the historical sociology and anthropology of LGBT movement in this particular cultural environment gives possibility to see how sexual minorities may form a social movement, utilizing particular social and cultural circumstances of a given society.

There are other reasons to study situation with no-normative sexuality in Russia. During last two years, the political situation of Russian LGBT community has changed. From the one side, homosexuality has been politicized by right-wing and conservative politics that began to stigmatize homosexuals' in their public speeches and law-making discussions. Homophobic attitudes are rather popular in the country, but they have entered the discourse about making the state policy only recently. From the other side, gay prides, projected and organized by new LGBT leaders in Moscow, were banned and severely dispersed by municipal authorities. Thereby, the concept of "gay pride" suddenly received nation-wide publicity. The status and condition of gays and lesbians in the country suddenly have become widely disputed by mass media and citizens of the country. Simultaneously, the community itself is being challenged by this boosting of state homophobia as well, which partially

reflects activity of the leaders of the gay pride, whose tactics of self-presentation is not wholly approved by the community. The situations changes considerably quickly. As a citizen of the country I see that during the last year, non-normative sexuality suddenly became a matter of public discussions and a subject to political decisions. This ongoing situation may be compared with the period lesbigay community entered the public discourse for the first time (fifteen years ago).

The history of the homosexuality in post-soviet Russia is a part of encompassing history of transformation of sexual politics and gender politics in the country. The social attitude to the non-normative sexuality may help a lot to understand the norms and patterns which support the ongoing regime of sexuality in general. The sexual minorities may effectively participate in the gradual transformation of the regime of sexuality.

The social history and anthropology of sexual minorities in the post Soviet Russia has not been studied properly yet. Detailed histories of non-normative sexuality and same-sex sexuality often did not pay attention to history of this region (Adam et al., 1999). There is only one social anthropological monograph dedicated to the subject (Essig, 1999). In Russia, there have been several dissertations where the community and public movement was described, but they are not systematic and have not been known to the a wider audience; thus, up till now, the most popular and widely used works are Igor Kon's overviews written in mid-1990s. Thus, I think that every new work in this field is important both in terms of development of anthropology and gender sociology of Russian society, and in terms of helping the community to advocate their rights, because it is important that production of rational knowledge about the community legitimizes its claims for rights and acknowledgement.

My research must offer a general view at the history of the movement which may help to figure out the process of self-establishment of the sexual minorities' community in this particular social and political context. I discern repeated patterns of self-determination of the organizations, which I have named "trends." They have been shaped in the initial period but are still discernible today. I argue that the whole process of emergence was pre-defined by the conditions of the society that had been before

first group and social “comings out”. Hence, I concentrate on three main questions among other secondary ones about the sexual minorities’ community:

1) What were the social and political conditions of the forming and existence of the community before its public “coming out” in 1989-1990? This question is considered in the 1st chapter.

2) What was the “community” in general, as a complicated but united object of research in the historical period I look at? I would discuss this in the 2nd chapter.

3) What were the characteristic features of the movement which would help to understand its social, cultural and political self-organization? This question is very complicated, therefore in the three parts of the 3rd chapter I concentrated on three aspects of it: 1) political self-positioning of the movement (with the inner trends reflected by different relations to political activities among the very community), 2) its self-positioning in national and global cultures, and 3) ways of individual participation in the public activities in that initial period. In the Conclusion, the findings are summarized.

The first methodological problem I encountered in the research was how to theorize the very subject I dealt with. Above, I already used the term “community”. However, it was not always possible to use this word in relation to a group of people who have almost nothing in common beside a sexual orientation which is considered “abnormal” and thereby “outlaw” in the given society. It is necessary to have evidence in taking this group of people for a community, at least potentially. By “community” I mean an analytically defined set of individuals and their groups who practice the same social practice (in the particular case of the group I deal with, the practice is the same-sex sexuality and homoeroticism), who are connected by formal and informal relations, have a sense of group solidarity and are socially defined (by others and by themselves) as belonging to one category. These features allow them to form a collective identity. Even if these people do not actually know each other, and have no feeling of solidarity, they have sufficient reason to unite with other people who are able to share the same social experience. Thus, a “community” may be defined as a group of people who have similar attributes, maintain a group identity and are (or potentially easily may be) mutually

connected. More than that, I argue that long before the end of the soviet regime, a real homosexual “community” has emerged in the country, considering a distinct cultural style, specific sociolect and widespread underground networks around which the community has clustered itself.

It is important to note that several persons from the group produce a specific attitude to the group, which I will call an “ethos”, after Mark Blasius (1992). These persons imagine the group (any big group is an “imagined” one, the same must be said about any nation-wide community (Anderson, 1991)) as a set of people who share the same social experience, have common social and political interests and, consequently, may organize a social movement to promote these interests. The community has needs and problems, which should be satisfied and solved. In the section 3.3. I analyze an example of personal history of participation in the movement’s development.

In this research, various activities of groups there people with non-normative sexuality gathered is conceptualized as “movement” The “social movement” is a set of publicly acting groups, who have their agendas and programs, and try to realize their social, cultural and political objectives in the favor of the community. The movement is based on a community, and represents its “interests,” as the movement’s activists apprehend them. Simultaneously, the community is being (re)formed and (re)shaped by the movement.

I argue that the quick development of a sexual minorities’ movement at the end of the Soviet period was possible due to the developed and complicated community which had existed before in underground. However, in order to mobilize the community’s participants, a “movement identity” should emerge in the movement. It is a “collective identity based on shared membership in a movement” (Polletta, Jasper, 2001, p. 289). I study how the movement identity has emerged in the groups that have appeared as personal projects of certain individuals, and how this identity relates to the social situation of post-socialist transformations of society.

“Coming out” is a fundamental process in which the movement identity appears. One always can participate in the community without public disclosing (this part of) his or her identity. However, to act as a social activist, working on behalf of sexual minorities’ community, one obviously should

come out. It is possible to consider the emergence of sexual minorities' movement an effect of mass coming out of many people who previously participated in the movement or was intended to do it (but could not due to the lack of information or too high social control they suffered). I overview the movement as it has emerged and self-organized in the process of its leaders' coming out (since 1989). In this period, community's transformation into the movement happened.

The main social context in which all these events have happened is framed by the deep transformation of Russian society. In 1989, the first public "Association of Sexual Minorities" established itself, and the first officially admitted (registered) specialized newspaper appeared. The collapse of the USSR, ending of Perestroika and two coups (unsuccessful in 1991 and successful in 1993) followed soon after. I argue that the first period of the movement's development has been finished by 1996. During this period in the country's social and political life, unusually high level of political participation and spontaneous emergence of mass movements were typical (Finifter and Mickiewicz, 1992; Weigle and Butterfield, 1992). At the same time, the deconstruction of pre-existing social-political system and the economic system of the state both led to mass impoverishment and disappointment. The history of the movement was framed by this transformation. The period of social activity was followed by a period of anomia (in Durkheim's sense) along with mass withdraws from any social activism. In the following, I speak about "post-Soviet" Russia, signifying these specificities of the period in the life of the society.

The international LGBT community should be considered another crucially important context. Participants in the Russian movement could understand themselves as participants in a wider community. The whole movement was highly dependent on donations and promotion from abroad. Surely it would not have been possible to realize many of these activities without the international support. At the same time, the country, opened to the international exchange and travels after a long period of self-closure, attracted a lot of interest from abroad. The Russian community and activists, representing it in front of the public eye, had to define themselves in the bigger international context.

In the section 3.2., I outline the role that the new information and financial possibilities, provided by the international community, both have played in the designing of the movement.

To summarize, I have described a particular historical period, which is finished now, and its experience may be used today by another generation of “sexual minorities”. The research shows the trends that go back to early 1990s and still are discernible in the community activities and structure.

Theoretical framework

In my analysis of activities of the set of organizations and groups who worked in the favor of sexual minorities in Russia I use the concept of “social movement”. Below I define the term more precisely and overview existing literature about sexual minorities activities in Russia in the described period.

The essential feature of movement is its dynamics: a movement proclaims its intention to achieve certain social, political and cultural objectives. To do it, the movement should form its infrastructure that consists of organizations with internal separation of responsibilities and (more or less) routinely professionalized activities and groups with often uncertain inner structure and loose membership. Crucially important is the relation between the movement and community on the basis of which all the activities are grown up. This relation is one of important objects in gay and lesbian history studies. John D’Emilio, who has studied the development of American Gay Liberation movement especially emphasizes that the gay and lesbian movement cannot be understood without analysis of its relation with the community it represents, although the community often is not so visible (1998). Janice M. Irvine point out that the (lesbian and gay men) communities grow up the collective identities that gradually become the movements’ identity (1996, p.224). In my research I try to discern this relation between publicly proclaimed objectives of the movement’s activities and position of the community’s participants.

The social activities of sexual minorities were conceptualized as a social movement, especially in the “new social movement” paradigm. They served a bright example of so called “politics of identity” (Calhoun, 1994). It may be argued that sexual minorities organized in a social movement may propose as their claims more radical claims than just acknowledgement of their life style (Blasius, 1992). These social movements vary in their radicalism and preferable position in politics and thus the strategies they choose to make their public image may compared according to their attitude to the political activity (Klandermans, 1993). At the same time, it may be argued that “sexual minorities” may not form effective political movement, at least unless they have strong support of a community and stand for its mutual interests (Sherrill, 1996; Woods, 1995). I think that inn the case of Russian movement, these relations between communities’ expectations and the real results of the activists’ deals help to understand shaping and transformation of the movement identity.

The activities of sexual minorities in Russia were studied by Laurie Essig. Her *Queers in Russia. The Study of Sex, Self and other* (1999) provides a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the uncertain set of non-normative sexuality based activities that became possible after liberalization if the society. She argues that the activities developed by the first generation of activists since 1989 fade away until mid-1990s, and the specific regime of practicing the non-normative sexualities came instead. She offers the term “queer” to signify this regime, and compares it with images of “post-identity” sexual politics that may be found in contemporary queer theory. Kevin Moss mentions that Russian sexual minorities’ situation, on the contrary, must be understood as pre-“identity politics” (1995, 2001). Their practices are based on social techniques of closeting, partial closeting and informal organization, developed by the population in the Soviet period (1995; Nartova, 2004). Thus, the Russian community gives an example of a relatively early stage of movement emergence, which was overcome in Western countries in 1960-1970s. I follow Moss’s accentuation of the importance of national social culture and traditions of informal cooperation. Essig’s work is the main theoretical and factual contemporary source on anthropology of Russian non-normative sexuality.

Other important works are overviews of Igor Kon (1994, 1995, 1997). He has been an active advocate and consultant, thus his descriptions of the sexual minorities' public activity are very detailed and offer important facts. However, the community's life before 1989, as well as various non-political activities of the groups and organizations out of the capitals is not explained. Other important sources are Sonya Franeta's collection of interview with gays, lesbians and transsexuals from Siberian cities that show the life of the community in province (2004); Vladimir Kirsanov's collection of biographies helps to reconstruct several less known activities of the period (gay business, "gay art," publisher's enterprises) (2005). David Tuller's book with his "included participant" observations of events in Moscow and Leningrad/St. Petersburg "queer life" include a number of important details useful for reconstruction both the life of community in the period before and right after decriminalization of homosexuality, and of the movement's activities.

However, there still is no developed anthropological conceptualization of the emergence of sexual minorities' public activities in Russia, and I suggest looking at it as a kind of social movement. In my work I concentrate on the analysis of historical facts and try to construct a concept which would explain the features of the movement and dynamic of its inner development.

Methodology and research design

My research consisted of two main parts. First of all, I needed an overall view at the whole situation with sexual minorities in the country. Although I was not writing a history of the community and how it had given birth to the movement, I had to reconstruct the chronology of events and describe development of certain organizations I spoke about. My aim was to reconstruct intentions of the movement's actors. My theoretical presumption was that activists who realized (in their own ways) needs and interests of the community, utilized situational options and produced the community; thus, I needed their own interpretation of their behavior in that time and how they had apprehend their

conditions. At the same time, the community in general, as the operative context of their activities, was to be described as a complicated system. There were three levels of the analysis:

1) The history of the community which gave birth to the movement.

2) Transformation of the symbolical system of representation, that shows how the community and movement was shaped and reshaped over time,

3) Individual intentions of the activists as they may be reconstructed on the basis of present-day interviews and publications of that period.

Thus, I tried to make a chronologically organized reconstruction of the movement's emergence and organization following these three levels simultaneously. As I could not reconstruct the whole history, I chose its several aspects that would effectively demonstrate the specificity of this "Russian" case.

The main sources of "historical" part work were published historical descriptions (Essig, Kirsanov, Kon, et al.), and "thematic" editions of that time where the ongoing process was depicted. Igor Kon kindly gave me his collection of these editions, so I had a unique opportunity to work with these rare materials. I also studied materials of Moscow Archive of Lesbians and Gays (**ALG**), a private collection of primary and secondary sources about the history of the community.

Besides using of the gay and lesbian press as a (narrative) historical source, I made content analysis studying their usage of different terms for the sexual minorities' community; on the basis of the research, the section 2.1. was written.

The fieldwork consisted of interviews with the movement's participants of different ages. Due to the conditions of my travel grant, received from CEU Gender Studies Department for this fieldwork, and time limitations, I concentrated on the interviews in the two main centers of the sexual minorities' community in Russia: Moscow and St. Petersburg.

In my search for the respondents I was interested primarily in interviews with the active participants, organizers of groups and organizations. In general, I made 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Conducting the interviews I tried to provide my respondents an opportunity to tell me their stories as they could reconstruct them now. Thus, the first part of the interview consisted of their

self-introduction. The second part of the interview was grounded on a uniform questionnaire that I had constructed after my preliminary readings. It covered the following topics: 1) preferable categories to name the community and persons with no-normative sexuality; 2) important chronological dates, 3) the condition of the community before the emergence of the first public organisations about 1989 – if the respondent knew at least anything about it; 4) personal story of “coming out” and entrance into the community (this topic often was the first one to discuss), 5) Condition and characteristic features of the community in early 1990s, its structure, relations between the organisations and their leaders, 6) history of the particular organisations and groups the person belonged to with accent on the intra-organizational dynamics and the results of their activities, 7) the typical cultural features of the community(s) – books, songs etc., relation to symbols and signs of “global LGBT community”, 8) social context of their activities and their interpretation of main political and social trends in the society of that time; 9) ideology of the movement, who and how discussed it and how the interests and aims of the movement (could be) defined, 10) relations with grant givers and strategies of financial support, 11) (other) leaders, personal relations with them, and (retrospective) estimation of their activities.

I made 13 interviews with follow-up questions and several short exchanges with other participants of the community. There were 2 experts (Kon and Nartova who was a lesbian and studied the community as an anthropologist). All respondents beside two had higher degrees, and belong to three generations of the community. The average length of the interviews was 2, 5 -3 hours, except for Krauze’s interview which was longer. Not all interviews were possible to record (three interviewees asked me not to do it). I also made notes. All recorded interviews were turned into transcripts for analysis. I also made follow-up questions by e-mail. This way of communication needed more time than I actually had and several activists I needed to contact were, perhaps, too busy with preparation for the Gay Pride (that took place in 27 of June) to keep in regular contact.

In the search for interviewees I used the “snowball method.” In Moscow, I made interviews primarily with lesbian women from the circle of ALG. The activists I spoke with, being “public

figures” agreed with mentioning of their names (two of the had regular nicknames and were mentioned here by these nicknames); in several cases the respondents did not want to be mentioned by their full names, so I used only first names in my text. The list of the interviewees is in the Appendix.

Chapter 1. Homosexuality in the Soviet Union before its de-criminalization

“Sexuality” in the Soviet Union

Sociocultural status of homosexual practices and intentions among its citizens is affected by the whole systems of ideas held in the society about sexuality and its proper and improper forms. Therefore, it is necessary to survey the situation with regard to sexuality in the society in the period before the legalization of homosexuality in order to understand the broader socio-cultural context in which homosexuals had to decide about their identity and begin to organize themselves.

In this section, I outline the main features of the regime of sexuality established in the Soviet society. It is important to study them before looking at the specificity of the “Russian” case of introduction of non-normative sexuality in the public life of the society.

In terms of sexuality in the Soviet Union one should mention three features, important for this research:

1) The state openly tried to put the whole run of private life of its citizens under control, and succeeded in it to a high degree. Sexuality was an important aspect of individual’s life, that was hard for officials to control (Kon, 1995; Zdravomyslova, 2001). However, its public expressions were prohibited, and even intimate matters were proclaimed to be a legitimate site of party care for the citizens.¹ Igor Kon conceptualized this relation to sexuality as an attempt to build up “sexless

¹ In Russian discussion of this topic, the song “Red Triangle” written by the semi-underground singer of that time, Alexander Galich, is often mentioned. The song described, naturally, how a woman wrote a report about her husband’s

civilization” where not only expressions of sexuality but also any hints to it were excluded from public (Kon, 1997). To knowledge about homosexuality was tolerable under that condition.

The criminalization of homosexuality, combined with its medicalization, functioned effectively as effective tools to erase it from the citizens’ minds (Gessen, 1994). This regime of total “closeting” of homosexuality may be compared to Western societies before the “sexual revolution”; however, Russian society never had such a strict prohibition of homosexuality before (Healey, 2002, Kon, 1998). At the same time, the USSR had the biggest prison population in the world, and huge number of men were actually involved in homosexual acts while their imprisonment (Kon, 1997; Kozlovsky, 1986).

2) Any information and knowledge about sexuality was excluded from media and literature. Although the authorities never could stop circulation of knowledge about these matters and (illegal) distribution sexuality-related materials continued, people often had no scientific knowledge about sexuality. This circumstance even had been considered a social problem by specialists in sociology of family, because it influenced relations in families and between adults and children (Golod, 1996). In the 1970s, in the period of late socialism (“*Brezhnevism*”), a slight movement to discuss such matters could be detected but it was not sufficient enough to transform the regime of “sexless civilization”.

3) Nevertheless, the country’s population could not avoid sexual life. It was shown that the history of sexuality in the Soviet Union came through basically the same periods as “Westerners’” sexuality did (Kon, 2002, Rotkirch, 2002). Anna Rotkirch, for example, discerned three generations in the Soviet population, gradually moving from condition constrained and oppressed sexuality to more free and “experienced” sexuality; this generational transformation may be compared with simultaneous transformations of attitude to sexuality in other European societies, as she had shown by her comparison with Finnish society (2004). Kon (2002) suggested that Russian society underwent the same deep transformation of relation to sexuality, that became conceptualized in the West as the “sexual revolution”, but in the specific discursive regime of Soviet society this revolution became a

infidelity to their factory’s Trade-Union and party committee. The husband’s behavior was discussed in the Communist’s

kind of “stalled” one. It meant that, to the end of the Soviet period the citizens of the country already were not “desexualized,” and the state already could not control their intimate life as effectively as it had tried to do it decades before. But the “regime of solitude” was still enforced. Distribution of sexuality-related materials was still illegal; but up to that time, a well-maintained and complicated system of production and distribution of various self-made printed issues (*samizdat*) was established in the country, and it would not be wrong to say that sexuality-related materials were produced and distributed the same way (Tuller, 1998, p.84). Besides of illegal pornography, these issues had to include self-made translations of foreign sexual manuals and erotic literature. “Samizdat” had connections with Western publishers and journalists. The same must be said about homosexuality-related issues. For example, the Leningrad gay poet and writer Gennady Trifonov was imprisoned in 1976, his verses were published abroad but never in the USSR (Gay, slaviane!, 1993, pp. 21-27).

We can summarize that until the 1980s there was a palpable contradiction between the real state of things with a sexual life that caused social demand for information and knowledge about sexuality and its “officially approved” non-existence. The lack of such knowledge was recognized as a feature of the general regime of knowledge established in the country. This regime was juxtaposed with “western” openness and freedom. Gorbachev’s Perestroika, had, as one of its main mottos, asked for *Glasnost`*. Besides other meanings (Remington, 1989), this motto implied freedom of speech and freedom of the press to “erotic materials” too. Masha Gessen showed how this freedom had been quickly utilized by (mainly young) publishers and journalists in the country (1995). The extremely fast development of “sexing media”, as she calls it, was caused by the long period of its absence in the state-controlled media. This process of “sexing media” gave an advantage to emerging gay and lesbian press.

meeting, after which he was publicly reprimanded.

The official discourse: criminalization and medicalization

In this section, I describe how the homosexuality was treated under the Soviet regime. It was the state criminalization of homosexuality that made its history in the Soviet Union so painful and, at the same time unique among other national cases. The criminalization followed after a period of freedom and simplification of family relations in the USSR in 1920s. The criminalization of homosexual relations was a powerful tool in the general trend of putting all the private life of Soviet citizens under the state control (Edge, 1995; Gessen, 1994(rus), p.6; Healey, 2002). By the law, officially published as “the Law of 7 March 1934”, played a crucial role in the history homosexuality in Russia. An act of homosexual intercourse was led to four or five years of imprisonment. This law effectively introduced the idea of homosexuality as a crime into mass consciousness. Homosexuals knew that their activity was unlawful by definition and this knowledge often prevented them from engaging any activity to seek protection of their rights as citizens and humans.

The decriminalization of homosexuality became the first and main demand of the self-constituting gay and lesbian movement in the late Perestroika period. The article 121.1 was reposed along with the process of reformation of the penal legislation, not as an answer by the state authorities’ to the activism, but as a part of a routine bureaucratic procedure. The key figure was Prof. Aleksei Ignatov. He was engaged in the preparation of the new law’s draft and used this opportunity to eliminate the infamous article from the code. Since 1991, he kept in touch with sexual minorities’ activists, advocating their interests with authority of a law expert. In the end, consensual homosexual acts between adults were decriminalized (Gessen, 1994; Kon, 1995; Petrov, 2006). The decriminalization had been widely discussed and protested in the community, but the very action happened without direct participation of the movement. Although there were uncertainties in the legislation about sexual crimes, known and disputed by the experts, for the majority of the community the problem was totally solved.

It is not know up till now, how many people were factually sentenced by this law. These data would help to estimate distribution and shape of homosexuality in the USSR, but there are several

obstacles in such an investigation. Firstly, homosexual men very often were not imprisoned but rather blackmailed and forced to cooperate by the KGB that gathered information about homosexuals. Many homosexual men could stay free only if they agreed to cooperate with the KGB. They were forced to work as secret informers, provocateurs etc. (Gessen, 1994, p. 18-20; Kozlovsky, 1986, p.155-156; Scherbakov, 1993). Secondly, this “obscene article” was sometimes used against dissidents to усугубить their “guilt” and put them in hard situation in the prison. Thirdly, as prof. Alexei Ignatov insisted on, there were many more crimes because of this article than under this article (blackmailing, slander, extortion). One specialist in Russian criminal world wrote that the average number of men sentenced according to the article was about 0.1% of all the prisoners that would mean about a thousand every year. (cited in: Gessen, 1994(eng) p. 10). After elimination of the law at 29 April 1993, about two hundred of people accused of “sodomy” were in jail, among them 73 who were there solely because of this crime (Gessen, 1994(rus), p. 23). One of Sonya Franeta’s respondents described her militia’s “operations” against homosexualists that took place in Siberian cities as late as in 1986 when more than 130 men were imprisoned. (Franeta, 2004, p.69).

Regardless of the precise number arrested under it, this law obviously was a big danger for Soviet homosexuals. It made any public movement of homosexuals absolutely impossible until the very collapse of the Soviet system (but even the first public, “open” gay activists began their activity under pseudonyms considering this danger to be prosecuted among other threats (interview with Ortanov)). The law further kept the ideological connection between “homosexuality” and “crime” in the mass consciousness.

At the same time, this common danger unified people with non-normative sexuality and produced the feeling of affinity and solidarity between people with homoerotics intentions. It was an important factor for development of their community. People of older generation of the community spoke and write about importance of informal help to each other. “Our” people, as they referred to themselves (look the section 2.2.) helped “our” people. A certain experience in avoiding the prosecution was certainly accumulated, at least by “influential” persons in the community. For example, Alexander

Kukharsky describes different ways of behavior at militia and interrogation. He especially studied the procedure and laws to be able to consult "thematic" men. He recommended different strategies for different people in the early 1980s, and studied the Penal Code especially for this aim.

This informal network of "our people" was sustained by the permanent threat of prosecution. These connections did not disappear after the elimination of the law: my respondents mentioned relations with the "our people" in present times as set of people they can call on in case of urgency. In the late Perestroika era, the first official organizations of homosexuals were organized by small groups of people who used these informal network channels to find allies.

Thus, the experience of dealing with the law and the security service was accumulated in the community under pressure of this constant danger. This experience obviously was used in the development of group and individual tactics of being a homosexual in an intolerant environment that was just one particular example of "double life" techniques. As Kevin Moss (2002) has shown, in such a highly politicized society as Soviet society, the citizens were trained to have a double life, what he called the "underground closet." The same individual social techniques were applied to hide unorthodox political views and non-normative sexuality as well.

To summarize this, I suggest that the well-known prohibition of male homosexuality accompanied by consistent medicalization of female homosexuality as pathology played an ambiguous role in its history in Russia. It destroyed lives of thousand of people, and forced them to understand their unity. Russian sexual minorities, being an oppressed social group, established a subculture, which came out in Perestroika time. Thus, the state oppression was a factor of creation of the subculture.

Homosexual community in the USSR in late Soviet Union

Long before its "emergence in the public discourse" in 1989, homosexual men as well as groups of hem did exist in the Soviet Union. The nation-wide "community" I speak about consisted of many small groups as well as individuals, often having no information about each other or connected only by personal acquaintance between "old" participants of the groups. Many small communities were

established by socially active persons and consisted of members of their own everyday environments². The very usage of the word “community” in relation to Soviet homosexuals would not be too precise because it implies a certain amount of solidarity between members of a community and, from the researcher’s point of view, a possibility to distinguish between the community and the environment in a more or less consistent way. It is more correct to think about sexual minorities in the Soviet Union as an indefinite network of people, unified only by their hidden sexual preferences (one could not allow himself to be an “open” homosexual even being well-known to other local homosexuals). There may be applied the definition of the community, used by Chris Woods in his analysis of Britain gay life: “[the community is a set of] series of communal identities based on various elements (such as gender, sex preference, geographic location, musical taste or class) which coincide in varying degrees under the nebulous label of “homosexuality” (Woods, 1995). These people should not think about themselves that they personally belong to “a community,” but they feel affinities with people of a certain kind; they all are also interested in the special infrastructure for particular practices. They also are aware about the possibility to use this infrastructure, that sustains the solidarity in the group.

In the following, I outline infrastructure of this hidden community. The biggest cities of the country and its regional centers had informal gay and lesbian infrastructure –a set of special meeting and cruising places (usually called “*plashkas*”, *плешки* – the word is known to all members of the community, although its etymology is unclear (Kozlovsky, 1986)); city institutions - cafés and public toilets appropriated by the community; and a hidden system of informal communication.

The symbolical centers of the local urban communities’ infrastructures were cruising sites – *plashkas*. Even the oldest members of the community do not know how the *plashkas* appeared. The main cruising place in Moscow were a big square in front of the Bolshoi Theatre³ (according to

² For example, Olga Krauze told about several lesbian groups that consisted of women who were employed and resided together. These women met together regularly, and they still do it now without any need to cooperate with other groups of their kind.

³ On the cover of her “Queers in Russia” (1999), Laurie Essig is depicted as a man in drag standing on this place; Moss ironically mentions this gesture of demonstrating true national way to behave in a queer way (Moss, 2001).

legends, this place was used in this way, "queered", known as cruising site already in the beginning of the 20th Century (Lychev, 1993)), memorial square near Kitai-gorod metro station. In Leningrad homosexuals met in the famous "Catherine's garden" in Nevsky prospect. In Novosibirsk, cruising places were Pervomajsky park (along with café "Sputnik") (Franeta, 2004, p. 124). I do not mention here public baths and street public toilets that were certainly were heavily used as meeting places. Another characteristic *loci* of the community's infrastructure were nude beaches that began to emerge in the USSR in that period. Gay beaches often were combined with nude beaches, as Chkalovsky beach in Odessa. Nude bathing was tolerated only in certain places (certain parts of beaches or separate beaches); homosexuals could get in the same "zone of tolerance" although the majority of nudists were not homosexuals.

In Moscow, sexual minorities met in famous cafés *Artisticheskoe* and *Sadko*. Dmitry Lychev explained that there were gays in the staff of the café, who used to invite their friends, and gradually the whole café was appropriated by gays. Laurie Essig calls *Sadko* "the only public shelter in which queers could gather... somehow the place was "known," not only among those who gathered there but among many in Moscow's nonqueer population as well" (Essig, 1999, p. 84). Going to a new town, a homosexual could easily acquire information about "pleshkas" there getting possibility to find company, lodging and sexual distractions. In big cities could be several cruising places and persons who regularly showed themselves up at one place could know nothing about others. For example, Krauze mentions "tram park "Konyashino," – a municipal transportation enterprise, where were many lesbian as well a female transsexuals employed. Some of them surely were influenced in their sexual scenarios by prison experience. They had a traditionally masculine job and certain masculinization was "allowed" to them. This community of working class women sometimes had connections with groups from upper classes.

There was a struggle for symbolic leadership in the community. Vladimir Kozlovsky's informants provided him a detailed description of relations at *pleshka*, emphasizing inter-generational exchange and contradictions. It is worth mentioning that Vladimir Kozlovsky's lexicon includes the critical

remark of an anonymous homosexual, who severely criticized the lexicon, because it was filled with words produced by a considerably small company of aesthetes who tried to present themselves as an intellectual centre of the “pleshka community” (Kozlovsky, 1986, p.75). The leaders were the necessary to gather the “our people” together; in fact their figures were a necessary element of fixing the subculture style and spirit. In Barnaul gay café, as a local community’s participant describes it, “...this society has its stars, and the rest hung around them. It happened often that is some of the “soul of the society” did not come the circle just left the place saying “I see nobody came today”, although there was a considerable number of people” (Lazarev, 1992).

To summarize, the *pleshkas* along with nude beaches, cafés, (of course) certain public toilets and were the primary infrastructure of homosexual community in that period, localized in the urban and suburban space; not always recognizable for an outsider the infrastructure existed as a set of sites for particular practices (as Deirdre Conlon described the similar infrastructure in New York (2004)). This infrastructure makes the community based on these practices alive, sustains it; the community is based on this infrastructure. The practices are reproduced in certain places and these places receive additional cultural and social meaning thereby (Brown, 2000, Conlon, 2004). More sophisticated socializing was possible in companies were hosted by people having separate apartment (not every citizen could enjoy it then); these companies were more or less exclusive. Other parts of the infrastructure were networks of information exchange via “their” people, distribution of literature and visual materials (there were collections of erotic materials gathered by leaders, for example, Aleksandr Kukharsky had one). Libraries about homosexuality were collected by enthusiasts. Later, first specialized editions used these collections for completing their content (interview with Ortanov)⁴. As soon as it became possible, Western organizations used to send their editions for these collections, very often – for free.

Besides, semi-underground homoerotic art existed. Eugene Kharitonov and Gennady Trifonov were considered the most prominent gay poets. Simultaneously homosexual themes appeared in

works of writers who did not belong to the community (Vishnevsky, 2002) Olga Krauze would remember transvestite home-staged shows in Moscow. Stories and poems, published in gay and lesbian media soon after their emergence, sometimes are dated back to the 1970s. The audience was not open exclusively for “sexual minorities”, and she considered it a big advantage of that actions.

This infrastructure could not effectively exclude “our people” from hostile environment. All these activities were more or less illegal or paralegal. However, its existence signifies that there was a set of interconnected homosexual groups in Russia with their own subculture, and even if these groups did not constitute a bigger community, they were gathered by solidarity and information channels. Therefore, the later activities of the first LGBT organizations were grounded on these previously existing networks and smaller communities and the agendas of these activists were articulated before their official emergence. The activists tried to politicize the community and to create a more consistent political body⁵.

Pleshkas provided possibility to meet a mate (informational and socializing function), to participate in collective cultural practices (socializing function), and were, factually, separated space inside of urban environment where socially unaccepted (and even prohibited practices) were tolerated by the environment. Symbolically, *pleshkas* could not help but ghettoized homosexuals. Nowadays, *pleshkas* have lost their importance significantly after the legalization of homosexual activities. The majority have shifted to specialized clubs and discos. Cruising places - open-air places in the central parts of town and cities continue their existence but they do not have the meaning of unique *loci* for special “queer” activities. Younger representatives of the subculture, speaking about contemporary gay and lesbian community, would refer to clubs and discos (Sasha; N.I. [Ivanova]; Nartova). I think nowadays the community does not need to have such a central and stable place for meeting and

⁴ As Vladislav Ortanov explained to me, almost every formalized (institutionally) group of later period had a collection of homosexuality and AIDS-related materials.

⁵ These attempts failed, as I would show below. One should consider the on-going events around gay-prides in Moscow and St. Petersburg, organized by a new generation of gay political предпринимателей (as Nartova defines them), the second wave of politicization of homosexuality in Russia. However, this self-establishment of gay and lesbian identity politics nowadays, fifteen years after the first wave, takes place in sufficiently different environment, with open state support of homophobia.

socializing because a Russian city's downtown public places and the internet together fulfill these functions.

According to Dick Hebdige (1979), subcultures are produced by subordinate groups and try to protest the overarching dominance by producing their own group culture. They make their own set of symbols and remarkable patterns of behavior – the “style” of the subculture. Looking from this side, one can consider the set of homosexuals' communities in late-socialist Russia a subculture, as far as it had the recognizable culture style. One of specific features of the style was surely its special language.

Besides slang, a specific subcultural speech practice developed in it as late as mid-1970s. There was a specific manner of speaking and communicating among members of the homosexual community, called “*khabal'stvo*” («хабальство»; the verb – хабалить, “*khabalit*”). As far as I could figure it out, “*khabal'stvo*” would imply an overt expression of sexual arousal, and interest, jokes about “perversion”, and a complicated play with gendered expressions in language.

“*Khabal'stvo*” as a kind of speech practice was used in special places, among “thematic people” – at “*pleshkas*,” special parties, at social gatherings. Its function was to create the special closed space that sustains the regime of sexual relations used in the communities. I would consider “*khabal'stvo*” an important part of subculture system of cultural patterns: the capacity to speak and communicate in this manner functionally reinforced the in/out divide and sustained group solidarity.

Several of my respondents used the term “*khabal'stvo*” as a synonym for a vulgar and unpleasant manner of homosexual behavior. Closer to the point, precise, “*khabal'stvo*” is often related to feminized homosexuals performing a female mannerism and mentioning themselves in feminine gender. Persons performing this style are a rather recognizable part of the homosexual community but many gays and lesbians try to have nothing to do with them. Yet they share acquaintance with this type of speech practice and thus keep belonging to the community.

“*Khabal'stvo*” may be compared with another homosexual subculture slang languages, such as Britain “*polar*” (Baker, 2002, Denning, 2002), although I failed to find any comparative research.

The main obvious difference is that “polari” has its own vocabulary, whereas “khabal’stvo” has almost no special words⁶. Many words are used with transformed meaning, but there seems to be no room for a “khabal’stvo” dictionary; thus it is not slang, but rather a sociolect. Its usage was and still is a performative, used in special situations and contexts, and the fact of the existence of the manner I consider a feature of a developed and complicated (as far as “khabal’stvo” is attributed to a subgroup inside of the bigger subculture) social group. This speech practice was used primarily not to hide relations and intentions by re-naming them (that is slang’s function), but to reframe relation to gender and sexuality by their ironical alienation.

Many special nicknames that were in use exclusively inside the community are included in the dictionary of Kozlovsky (1986). These nicknames secured anonymity, and were a feature of prisoner culture’s influence. Kozlovsky provides a list of these nicknames, the majority of which is transformed or appropriated female names. There were regional differentiations in the usage of the nicknames – for example, in Omsk were used almost exclusively female names, while in Barnaul – foreign male names (Lazarev, 1992, p.7). In Omsk, an organization of homosexuals entitled “Klub Poisk” produced newsletter “Omskaja Tema”; in its 9th issue (1991), the list of members of its publisher is included; it consist of 45 names, all of which are female nicknames or pseudonyms.

An interesting fact may be mentioned to argue for the level of self-organization of the community. In this period lesbians managed to have secret marriages. Two girls who decided to live as a couple – “family” – could not go to the state registration house (ЗАГС), but they used another ritual instead of it: secret marriage in a church. They could bypass the social norm by employment of an alternative social norm. Religious "wedding" would be employed as a symbolic alternative to the “secular” marriage. In Vladimir Kozlovsky’s book, “lesbian marriages” are mentioned in the interview as a typical and not very rare event with a special recognizable ritual (1986, app. VI). These marriages used to happen at a private flat, music was played, and an invited priest “made it all for the girls, each of them wore the marriage ring on her left hand (in countries with Orthodox Christianity traditions

⁶ There is a special internet-resource gathering examples of “khabal’stvo” and related materials: <http://xabalka.gay.ru>

married people usually wear wedding rings on their right hands). The girl said she could recognize girls with this ring in the street crowd. Essig mentioned these marriages once as well (1999, p.41). Among my respondents, only one Julia Certlich could remember such custom.

There were other signs used by homosexuals to recognize each other. Olga Krauze had an earring in her ear in 1981 because, said she, “I heard that lesbians wore one earring”; similarly, one of Essig’s respondents mentioned one earring as a feature of an “active” (butch-like) lesbian⁷. There were also special patterns of behavior and acquaintance, only some of which could be recognized by outsiders.

In this chapter, I tried to argue that the primer manifestation and showing-up of the sexual minorities’ movement was shaped by its development in the previous period. Although officially homosexuality was prohibited it did not prevent people with non-normative sexual orientations from forming a nation-wide subculture. The emergence of this public movement and its features were shaped by an “opening” of sexuality to public discussion and a sudden rise in tolerance of its markers.

Chapter 2. The emergence of the Russian sexual minorities movement after 1989

How to name the community? The problem of relevant naming

In this section I explain my approach to naming the described community. I will also analyze self-description through names being used in the community, and connotations of the names. In the last part of the text I am going to explain how international terms for non-normative sexuality based communities are used in this particular national context.

There never was any commonly accepted name for the community based on non-normative sexuality in Russia, although there certainly were special terms to signify persons, attached to these

⁷ Essig, 1991, p. 116.

practices. As a researcher, I can not all the time use the “native” terms as far as they relate to a part of the whole community, even if the community was analytically reconstructed by me. And these “native” terms have different connotations that sometimes cannot be controlled. The community consisted of groups and individuals sharing similar identities, included in common social nets and aware of their possible similarity and common interests with other groups of their kind. In the text below, I use the term “sexual minority” in order to avoid as projecting of Western categories, such as “gay(s)”, “LGBT” or “queer” to this community which does not have any united self-description and has accepted these terms only recently. I also try to avoid references to the theoretical perspectives these terms had been attached to. “Sexual minority” is a neutral term widely used in this community, through mainly by men (in this case it complies with “lesbians” as gendered term for females), having no openly gendered connotations and signifying the basic characteristics of the community: their orientation to same-sex sexual practices⁸. Then I write about the whole community which may include people with any “non-normative” sexuality, whether such a community actually exists or not, I use term “sexual; minorities”. However, in fact I mainly write about male and female homosexuals.

The most often used “native” term is *tema* that means “theme”; it is easy to say about somebody that he or she is “thematic”, “she/he is about the theme”. The first official Soviet newspaper for homosexuals was entitled *the Tema*.

The most often used manner to imply involvement in the community, if only potentially, was to signify (to speak about) a certain person as *ours*. Surely it was a common way to speak about member of the same community or society. My respondents used to signify by this expression a “hidden” homosexual (who could join the community be he or she aware about his or her “nature”). The third meaning of the word was to signify a “helper” - a person, who feels sympathy for people with non-normative sexuality and may help to get a social advantage, regardless of the person’s own sexuality. In short, *our* related to any person who possibly could participate in the community’s life. It did not

⁸ One of my respondents, Ortanov, defined the community through “homoerotic interests” as opposed to “heteroerotic” among the majority. I think this approach is very fruitful but too complicated to be used in this work.

necessarily mean that the person used to practice same-sex sexuality; the person could only sympathize to sexual minorities and somehow enhance the community.

The terms, most often used for homosexuals were “blues” for men, and “lesbians” for women. In the speech of “blues” themselves this word had no humiliating connotations and was neutral. This term was introduced after the Great Patriotic War, because, according to one “veteran”, it was not used in the Leningrad blue community before the war; As one Franeta’s interviewee from Novosibirsk explained, the term had replaced offensive prison argot that had domineered before (2004, p. 131)⁹.

In his English-language article which basically repeats his earlier texts (not without new details) Igor Kon mainly uses the term “blues” (1994); in Russian-language books of the same period he prefers to use “gays”, possibly in order to facilitate the introduction of the term into Russian ordinary language (1995, 1997). In contrast, the gendered equivalent for “blues”, “pink,” was rarely used by homosexual women for themselves, and was more distinctively humiliating. The word “lesbian” has always been used for homosexual women. The word “homosexual” is not usually used in relation to a woman in the Russian language.

The word “gay” gradually became used in English speaking homosexual communities and societies in the 2nd part of the 20th Century (Speirs, 2000). In the Russian context it was introduced in 1980s. Kirsanov suggested that the word was used for the first time by the first official Soviet newspaper of sexual minorities *Tema* (Kirsanov, 2006, p. 479). In this newspaper, however, the word “gay” is used relatively rarely. If we compare usage of words “gay”, “homosexualist” and “blue(s)” as synonyms in three leading “blue” editions of that period – *Tema*, *1/10* and *RISK*, a slight difference may be discerned. Terms “homosexual” along with “homosexualists” (a more strict distinction between the terms was produced later) preferably were used in abstract cases, then the speech is about a person with “non-traditional” sexual orientation, or in pieces of information about homosexual life abroad. The word “blue” tends to be used in relation to the community itself (not exclusively), its history (for

example, Tchaikovsky was preferably characterized by his gay biographers as “blue” than as “a gay”) and foreign issues. “Gay(s)” is used in the texts published in that early gay and lesbian press with the least alienation, and in contexts that make it possible to think that they speak about themselves or “our people” as a members of an imaginary Russian sexual minorities’ community that was *in becoming*. If an article was written about history of “western” gays, the word “homosexual” was used more likely than “gay” but, speaking about contemporary events or communities which would be used as cultural samples, they would use the words “blue” or “gay.” The latter word has more obvious positive connotations. For example, in one issue of “1/10” (1993, #4 (11)), the word “blue(s)” is used 29 times, “homosexualist” - 13 times, and “gay(s)” -15 times, but the word appears in news, in a report about the Founding Conference of an Association, and in a descriptions of communal life (p.7). In various issues of the newspaper *1/10*, “blue(s)” almost all the time goes in quotation marks, that alienates this word, whereas “gay(s)” is used without quotation marks, although the word has been adapted relatively recently.

The community was in the process of making a new identity for itself, complying with new possibilities to speak about homosexuality publicly and to act in political field. The term “gay” signifies reference to this positive image of a new (imagined) community, gathering people with non-normative sexual orientations, who would be free of constant social oppression and could socialize as they liked.

The oppressed groups, communities, and individuals try to redefine their position and legitimize their social and political activities through solidarity. It is important for their leaders to establish a social ground for their activities, and the more different groups and practitioners they would gather, the better. Needless to say, the term ‘sexual minorities’ may include in itself not only homosexuals but, potentially, other non-traditional sexuality-based identities, such as bisexuals and transvestites. This term was known to all of them, therefore it would be relatively easy to politicize it. As Laurie Essig has discussed the term, it “does not rely on a simple binary opposition – hetero/homo. Instead,

⁹ The same is stated in an anonymous interview: “I was a shy boy...” – in: Tema 1992, #4, p. 18

non-normative sexualities are multiple and can easily overlap with heterosexuality (e.g. prostitution)” (Essig, 1999, p. x). I use the term “sexual minorities” as an umbrella term which includes not only lesbians and gay men, but other non-normative sexualities as well.

Russian non-normative sexuality based community used "sexual minorities" as an umbrella term; however, it never was commonly accepted by them. My respondents preferred not to use it, although Ortanov, co-founder “Association of Sexual Minorities” in Moscow told me he liked the term for its universality. They accepted its meaning but were not inclined to use it, speaking about their community(s). For me, this is a term of description, available for an outsider-anthropologist; thus it stresses specificity of the movement as presenting interests of people with different non-normative sexualities (not only “gay men” and “lesbians”). However, it is worth mentioning that the status of the term illustrates one feature of the community, which became visible for the fifteen years of its public development. It consists almost exclusively of homosexuals –gays and lesbians; other possible non-normative sexuality based identities (transvestites, transgender persons, BDSM and swingers) are not visible as separate groups. The popular Western term LGBT is not widely used in the Russian community. This term is an apparent appropriation of identity belonging to another cultural area. It is used nowadays by activists who try to emphasize their participation in global LGBT networks (and to get access to the recourses of the network). None of my respondents accepted this term. In fact, there was no reason to accept it. Classic Western definition of the term implies different groups aware of similarities of their situations and interests cooperating in social and political struggle. In Russia, “gays” and “lesbians” seem to be two dominant groups, encompassing other (existing or virtually possible) groups like “bisexuals,” “transgender” persons and others. As Nadezhda Nartova found in her research of a St. Petersburg middle class lesbian community, it’s shape and mode of existence was highly normalized according to heteronormative models; it happened to be possible to normalize “lesbians”, but not persons whose sexual identities problematize gender contract as such (for example, transsexuals) (Interview with Nadezhda Nartova). Thus, the usage of this term may show a level of politization of a group or activist (or at least the presence of a political claim): to proclaim

oneself “LGBT” is to try to present one’s agenda as part of global political agenda of “sexual minorities”; that’s why a national political association established in summer of 2006 in order to act together against homophobia and discrimination in Russian society, was entitled “LGBT Network Russia”¹⁰ (MSM..., 2007)..

The process of introduction of the names continues nowadays. The term “queer” used by Laurie Essig as a term of theoretical description is used neither in the publicized materials about/of the community, nor by any of my respondents, it is not even appreciated by them (although it is interesting that Ortanov gave me an interpretation of his favorite term “sexual minority” strikingly similar to mainstream meaning of the term “queer”¹¹). But as soon as a popular gay journal is entitled “Queer” (Квир), it would possibly become more popular in younger generation.

To summarize this, I should state that there has never been one definite way to speak about people with non-normative sexuality as a group. In the time of “underground life”, they developed a way manner to mention people belonging to the community. In the period after 1990, a slight appropriation of the name “gay” could be discerned. This term related to the imagined “community” which would be shaped on the basis of the pre-existing one. The term homosexual(ist) was in use, too. The terms used for self-description among Western communities of people with non-normative sexuality (LGBT, queer) have not been appropriated (this fact should be interpreted together with the statement about reluctant and weak appropriation of “mainstream” western gay identities by the Russian community, as I discuss it in section 3.2). The best term that may be used in the description of the community and its movement is “sexual minorities”. It does not hide the presence of other

¹⁰ <http://lgbtnet.ru>; text of foundational agreement (in Russian) is placed at URL <http://lgbtnet.ru/news/detail.php?ID=2431>; English page is still under construction.

¹¹ It was interesting for me to find that he defined as “sexual minority” any person whose sexual practices do not fall under ideas and attitudes to “normal” sexuality of his or her environment. I thought he equated “sexual minority” and “queer”. When I asked him about his usage of the term “queer” he said that he practically did not need it.

groups like transgender peoples who participate in the life of the community but have not formed groups based on a separate identity of their own.

The periodization of the movement in the context of late-Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia

In this section, I try to make a general chronological framework for analyzing the emergence and development of the gay and lesbian movement in contemporary Russia. I look at a possible periodization of the movement, and explain the specificity of the period I concentrate on.

A periodization is important for research of this kind because it helps to frame the observed process. One possible periodization is provided by Igor Kon (1997, p. 354). It is based on the degree of “publicity” of the sexual minorities and their activities. The chapter with this text from Kon’s book is being repeatedly reproduced on Russian sexual minorities groups’ web-sites; therefore it stands to reason that it influences the self-understanding of the groups. Kon discerns four main periods in history of sexual minorities in the USSR/Russia:

1934-1986 period of discrimination, penal prosecution and silencing;

1987-1990 beginning of open, public discussion of the problem by scientists and journalists;

1990- June 1993 sexual minorities enter the “public scene”, “human rights” are accentuated in the discussions, the problem is transformed from medical to political one; and the first organizations emerge. After declining of the article 121.1 in May, 1997, the new period follows: the situation for gays and lesbians gets better, “the homosexual underground” has begun to transform itself into a “blue” subculture” (Kon, 1997, p. 362), and more options for struggle against homophobia and for legal guarantees of non-discrimination appear.

The disadvantage of this periodisation is that the 2nd and 3rd period are not distinctively emphasized. The first organization of sexual minorities has appeared in the USSR as soon as in 1984,

and it already formulates its political demands. It seems to me that these two periods should be combined into one. In the broader social frame, that time was the time of late Perestroika and the collapse of the USSR. Social activities and identity-building of the community utilized opportunities that existed in that certain period. Although any generalization of this kind is inevitably shallow, I try to connect the community's transformations with broader transformations of the Russian society in that period (post state-socialist transition), and in the global context (intensification of globalization processes) as well.

The initial period of sexual minorities' activities has begun, I think, formally in 1989, when the first newspaper (officially registered only later) and the first public organizations of the sexual minorities have appeared. Before, "coming out" did not happen in public sphere and could not become a basis for any political program. Since that time, the real movement is being reinforced by "coming out" of its leaders. In the next two years, the movement institutionalizes itself remarkably fast. This "initial" period finishes in 1995-1996. In this time, (1) social activity of the population in general becomes weaker, and the whole situation in the public sphere changes (becomes more normalized), (2) organizational models of the organizations are exhausted, and their leaders often decide to give up public activity, thus many organizations, if they even still stay alive, give up active participation in the public space, and (3) the new generation of gay-business entrepreneurs emerges. In short, the country changes, thus the way how the community was structured and organized, mutated in this period. The last point in this chronological transition is the sharp economical crisis in Russia in August, 1998. At that time many social activities were abandoned because people became impoverished and could not continue them. As Ortanov has explained it,

This period was about its end in 1995, but I was absolutely sure, that the breakdown was in 1998. I knew many people who had interests in activities, and projects, but after 1998 they just gave it all up. Firstly, they become poorer. Secondly, the democrats' power betrayed us then for the first time. We had a great deal of optimism before 1998, but then...

At the same time, (4) the generational change took place. Certlich distinguishes between the "old guard", who came into the community already in the time of the USSR, or just in time of its collapse,

and could easily remember that sad experience of total “closet”, in contrast to the “young” or “new guard” who came in after 1993 and already could not share that experience of being against the state and the society. This “new guard”, representing mainly younger generations, behaved themselves differently, had another image of the community and another expectations. She argued that at least in the lesbian community this difference was realized and openly discussed. Laurie Essig, who finished her observations at just about that time, concluded that the (first) period of gay and lesbian self-organization was almost over in 1994; she even entitled the related section in her book “the fall of queer politics/the rise of queer subjectivities” (Essig, 1999, p. 67). For her, the transformation of the society she spoke about perfectly conformed to her theory (characterized above). She argued that the first period was over, and

“...there were still many organizations and groups based primarily on sexual identity but few of them were as successful and hopeful as they had been in the past... [t]he fissures that appeared early among queer activists have only deepened... Disillusionment with Western models of organizing and identity, a sharp decrease in interest and funding from Western sources, and a general feeling that the politics of sexual identity was not meant to flourish on Russian soil have all dampened the early glow of queer activists.” (Essig, 1999, p.68-69)

Finally, the rapid development of internet solved the information problem which was so crucially important before the late 1990s, and provided new recourses for new leaders¹².

The level and social sense of the loss of the main organizations’ influence should be discussed separately. Here I just state that the “new guard” population could not socialize in these organizations because of their disappearance; thus, the “new guard” had to re-invite the communities again. (The reasons of this rupture are discussed in the section 3.1.) This third period still continues nowadays. Several main leaders of the contemporary community have acquired their influence in this period. It does not mean that all leaders of the previous period lost their influence; rather, now they have to continue their activities in a reframed field.

¹² A bright example of them, according to all of my respondents, is the owner of www.gay.ru Ed Mishin (Mikhail Edemsky). He was repeatedly mentioned by my respondents as an example of the new generation’s leader.

The first public homosexual organizations, their interests and aims

In this section I describe the emergence of the first organized groups and true organizations, not only in the capital, but in other Russian cities as well. I look at the details of several activities of that time and try to discern differences of their approaches to the future of the community. These differences may be effectively used for typologization of these public activities. In the end of the section, I make a comparison of their activities.

The first stable group of activists, working for the interests of sexual minorities, was organized in Leningrad in 1984 by Aleksandr Zarembo. It was called “the Blue laboratory”. Its history was described by one of the key figures of St. Petersburg’ gay scene, Aleksei Scherbakov (Scherbakov, 1991). Zarembo was a qualified linguist and could communicate with foreigners. It was remarkable in this organization that its activity included all the main topics of future organizations of homosexuals in Russia. There were about 30 persons of both sexes in the “Laboratory”¹³ (Zarembo’s wife was characterized in the article as “lesbian”). From the very beginning, this group achieved contacts with western organizations. Zarembo wrote to the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), and in July 1984 representatives of ILGA visited Leningrad. It was at that time that the ILGA’s international conference was held in Helsinki (so that they did not have to travel a long distance to get to Leningrad). The Finnish organization SETA worked as the groups’ representative at the conference. The “laboratory” also tried to establish contacts with other “thematic” organizations in order to receive not only moral support but information useful in the organization of political struggle. As Olga Krauze remembers about this group,

I knew an astonishing story of how they established contacts with the Netherlands: one of them had written a letter to “Izvestia” [leading national newspaper] asking if any political movement of homosexuals existed [abroad] and how one could learn about it. Thank God, the letter came into the hands of one of “our” people, and they gave them the address of Dutch Communist Party, or forwarded the letter...

¹³ Laurie Essig mentions this group as “gay laboratory” (Essig, 1999, p.) The same does Igor Kon. However, as Olga Krauze pointed out in interview, the word “gay” absolutely was used in the community in that time. Scherbakov wrote about “group” without giving it a particular name.

I think that the “blue laboratory” anticipated the perspectives and interests of later LGBT organizations. Among their activities were:

1) Studies in history of homosexuality and distribution of information about it.

2) Search for contacts with foreign organizations and centers, using personal and informal (via “our” people) channels.

3) Attempts to combine activities in cultural and political areas. The group began to submit correspondence to Finnish newsletter “SETA”. Unsurprisingly, the group fell under KGB observation from the very beginning, but it continued its activity until the first threats from the KGB till August of 1984; is not clear, why they were let to be active for so long, more than two years.

It was mainly project of one bright personality, Aleksandr Zaremba. He moved to Kiev (he would become a distinguished academician there), but other members of the group, Scherbakov and Olga Zhuk would play an important role in the later establishment of “thematic” associations in Leningrad/St. Petersburg. The “blue laboratory” did not establish any tradition, and was almost never mentioned by other activists in their stories. However, its importance was in this anticipation of future activities of this kind. Just as the “laboratory” was, all the subsequent organizations were dependent on the will of their founders and leaders and did not become independently living projects.

Moscow and Leningrad (St. Petersburg since 1991), two main cities of the country, were the two main centers of the sexual minorities’ community in the USSR. Therefore, researchers usually paid their main attention to events and processes in these two central cities. At the same time, self-organization of the sexual minorities’ community was happening in many places in the country simultaneously, and the groups in the capitals’ were not the only national pioneers in it. Different groups had similar agendas and presented themselves to their environment in similar manner, because (1) Sexual minorities’ movement was an organic part of a broader and more general rise of social self-organization of that time. The Perestroika effectively stimulated mass activities all over the country. As my respondents, along with authors of different works about these events have mentioned, there was a feeling of new and hopeful opportunities, opened by the social transformation, and this mass enthusiasm made experiments and enterprises possible. The political system was

considerably tolerant in that time. As Ortanov told me, “one can say that gays began only because the Perestroika had begun. If it hadn’t begun, as it had not in the time of Zaremba, all the activism would be finished in the same way by the KGB. As the Perestroika began, the gay’s movement started to move itself ahead”.

(2) The nation-wide community was already ready to begin public self-organization. There was a common agenda that had been realized and formed inside the community in the previous period. Consequently, as soon as the sociopolitical environment had changed, groups in different places began to emerge. Activists (potential leaders of the community) utilized these new options opened by the social transformation, and., the “community” produced the movement by their activities.

A prominent expert played fundamentally important role in the early shape of the movement. It was Igor Kon, the most well-known Russian specialist in sexology and sociology of sexuality¹⁴, who paid great efforts for it. His role was not only of an authoritative consultant and public advocate of the movement, but also a point of connection to the international intellectual community in this field (his own unique library of related literature must be mentioned as an important recourse). As an expert, he provisioned the activists with necessary scientific knowledge, references and facts (he would still do it nowadays). Thus, the movement’s leaders had an influential advocate and consultant who helped them find their way to organize.

The event that triggered self-organization and collective coming out of the minorities was international scientific conference “Minorities and society. The changing attitudes towards homosexuality in 20th century Europe” that happened in Tallinn, Estonia, in 28-30 May. 1990. It was the first public discussions of homosexuality on the territory of the USSR. Many future leaders of the movement were invited to the conference after personal recommendations of Igor Kon. The conference effectively encouraged them to come out publicly.

A concise outline of the period’ history below is based on the interviews, ALG materials and works of other researchers (Essig, 1999, Kirsanov, 2006; Kon, 1994, 1995, 1997; Tuller (1998) provides

¹⁴ His *Introduction to sexology* (“Vvedenie v seksologiyu”(1988)) was the most well known work about sexology, consumed by the Russian audience in this historical period. His influence was characterized in: (Gessen, 2002).

interesting notes of an “included observer”). It was commonly acknowledged that the first group of sexual minorities’ activists was the “Association of Sexual Minorities” (ASM) established by Eugenia Debryanskaya, Roman Kalinin and Vladislav Ortanov. This organization appeared as a collective action of a group of persons, everyone of whom his personal political aims. Eugenia Debraynskaya already had experience of participation in oppositional political activity (Tuller, 1998, p. 73). She was among the co-founders of the “Democratic Union”, the first public movement for political reformation of the Soviet system and, at the same time, was in intimate relations within the circle of A. Dougin, one of the most influential pro-fascist, reactionary intellectuals in Russia; thus, she simultaneously participated in the emergence of two opposite political perspectives in the country¹⁵. In that time, her flat in Moscow became a meeting place for political discussions and conferences. Thus, Debryanskaya tried to enter the field of political production. He turned herself into a “public character,” as Mitchell Duneier defines this social actor, quoting Jane Jacobs: “a public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. A public character need have no special talents or wisdom... he just needs to be present, and there need to be enough of his counterparts...” (1999, p. 6). It is important for survival of informal networks that certain persons function as an interconnection of different societies and information flows; they also facilitate growing up of different concrete groups.

Among other co-founders of ASM were Ortanov and Kalinin, who began publishing of the first officially registered newspaper for gays and lesbians “Tema”. Ortanov was a scientist with a stable social and professional status. He was intended to participate in criminalization of homosexuality, he was interested in specialized editions for gays (due to his personal interests in gay erotica and depending on his personal acquaintance with foreign samples of it), and he also tried to facilitate counter-AIDS activities. In a sense, Ortanov is the key figure in the early gay movement of post-Soviet Russia, for these three trends of his personal targeting of his activities –political struggle for

¹⁵ Kirsanov, 2006, pp. 411-413; Laurie Essig (1999, p. 141-143) characterizes her political visions as conservative-nationalistic, that is, according to Essig, unusual for lesbigay activists and should be thought of as a specific feature of Russian movement.

decriminalization and antidiscrimination¹⁶, development of national “gay culture”, anti-AIDS programs (development of sexual education, in broad sense) – would become the main aims of the movement.

Roman Kalinin, who was a student at that time, was a socially active person not afraid to “come out” and become “the first open gay in Russia” (Kirsanov, 2004). He was acquainted with Debryanskaya, who promised him help in his activities. Before commencing the whole enterprise with the *Tema*, Kalinin worked in a new political newspaper *Novaya Zhizn'* (“New Life”), and had the necessary experience in newspaper-making. Following an announcement in that newspaper, Ortanov had got in touch with Kalinin, and in the very end of November they completed the first number of *Tema*. Thus, initially it was a result of cooperation of two enthusiasts, who checked the just-transformed social situation whether it was tolerant enough for display of such unusual identity. They experienced that this initiative could acquire success in the new circumstances. It was printed in Riga by Kalinin. In that time, the three (still Soviet) Baltic countries were a recourse base for emerging publishing and journalist projects from all over the USSR¹⁷. In terms of network building, these countries were a site in the informal system of information exchange that provided the possibility for printing. The first issue was distributed by vendor merchants in Moscow –by those of them took on themselves the risk to sell this kind of printing stuff – it was more dangerous than to sell pornography. As Ortanov explained, if they wanted to register the newspaper officially, they should be an organization running the newspaper (one private person could not have a printed edition). Thereby, ASM) was established at the very end of 1989. It was made as an “umbrella”-organization for any public activities in favor of sexual minorities. It did not have a fixed membership: anyone who worked in accordance with its ideas could proclaim himself or herself a member of the organization. Soon after, Moscow Association of Gays and Lesbians came instead of ASM. The group was not better formed or organized. The transformation of name was significant: it became

¹⁶ In the interview, he stated that the struggle for legislative prohibition of discrimination must be and actually is the main political objective for Russian sexual minorities' movements since the decriminalization.

¹⁷ As Ortanov put it, “Everything was printed there. It was cheaper, and it was easier” (Ortanov). The first Russian edition of Edward Limonov's scandalous novel, which introduced homoerotic images to the broad national audience was printed there, too.

more defined and more "presentable", I would suggest, for Western partners. The years 1990-1991 were time of experiments and self-determination for the group of activists. At that time, they were in the center of public attention (Essig, 1999; Kon, 1997, Robinson, 1992, Tuller, 1998,).

The group that had established ASM and several other similar ephemeral "organizations" after it, constituted one perspective in the self-organization of the Moscow sexual minorities' community. They tried to constitute the tradition of "openly gay activist". As far as there was no tradition of identity politics in Russia before, they were able to find their analogues in the West. They were mainly oriented at the USA (with "American" models of tough political conflict for recognition of the identity), whereas "cultural" line was in more closer contact with European (Germany, the Netherlands) activists.

The activity of the same group of leaders led to the emergence of an organization which possibly would become the first official and publicly legitimized organization for representation the interests of non-normative sexual identities in Russian society and public sphere and advocating their (presumed) group interests. It was called "Russian Gay, Lesbian and Bisexuals Organization Center 'Triangle'". Leaders of the previously existing "Union of Coming Out"¹⁸ and the "Moscow Gay and Lesbian Center", as well as editors "thematic" press representatives of anti-AIDS organizations joined it. The Center 'Triangle' was established at Founding Conference in August, 1993 in Moscow.

This organization was planned as nation-wide. A woman from Novosibirsk was elected as the President. The real activity of the Triangle was in the responsibility of the Coordination Committee (about 10 persons, almost all of them Moscow residents). The organization developed various activities (I partially characterize them in the section 3.1.) It was important that the Center 'Triangle' was already planned as a professionalized NGO, promoting interests of a particular social group in the nation scale. They even hired a director (Andrey Maimylakhin), who was chosen for his

¹⁸ In Russian, this group was named verbatim "Union of Liberation" (Союз Освобождения), while in English presentation texts they used term "coming out", perhaps, adapting themselves to the expectation of their Western addressees.

professional qualifications as a person able to manage the organizational work. I considered this fact a sign of a new approach to organization building¹⁹.

The Center's main foreign partner was ILGA, which was interested in having a united center for managing different projects in the territory of the country. The Center Triangle became a full member of ILGA in January of 1995²⁰. Unfortunately, the regular fundraising was not developed yet when the fund received from ILGA was exhausted, and the organization did not yet get official registration. If it had, it would have been the first organization representing interests of the LGBT community in the country. The personal conflicts between the organizers combined with its financial difficulties, and as late as the end of 1996, the Center Triangle disintegrated. A successor organization, the LGBT Network Russia, would appear only in 2006.

In Leningrad/St. Petersburg, the emergence of the movement came another way. This city had its own long traditions of underground homosexual life (Rotikov, 1998). The groups' relation to traditions was much more reflected in this site than in other movement sites of the country. An active participant of "Blue laboratory", Sergei Scherbakov, joined groups established in this period.

The most well-known and popularized organizations were St. Petersburg Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Center (initially -Association of Gays and Lesbians) Krylia, lead by prof. Aleksandr Kukharsky, and the Tchaikovsky Fund for Cultural Initiatives lead by Olga Zhuk. They did not have any mutual cooperation, although there was no principal contradiction among them; however, the both organizations were distinctively one-leader styled, and their activities were driven by single active person. Like other less recognizable groups in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, their leaders paid special attention to official organizational forms.

Names of both groups were reclaiming of the Russian homoerotic "tradition" (which they were re-inventing). The Krylia was named after the book of the Silver age poet Mikhail Kuzmin, which had been fetishized among certain groups already in Soviet homosexual underground. It was one of the main homoerotic texts in Russian tradition. "Tchaikovsky Fond" received its name after Petr

¹⁹ After the termination of The Center Triangle activities, Maimulakhin moved to Ukraine and became a leader of a health care organization in Lugansk.

Tchaikovsky, a Great Russian composer, whose (closeted) homosexuality was a subject of discussions and numerous researches. He was a hero and key historical figure for that who tried to reconstruct the “tradition” of non-normative sexuality in Russia. At the same time, the fund’s name was a signal for “thematic” people. As Olga Zhuk explained it later, when they attempted to register the organization,

[While registration] we had difficulties with mayor. They did not want to allow us to use the name of the composer, because it would offend him [his memory], but for us it was a principal position. We wanted to say by that: “you had acknowledged that gay composer, so take all the rest of us, gays, now!” In papers we were officially entitled “Fund for Cultural Initiative and sexual minorities’ promotion”, but in media we appeared exactly as “Tchaikovsky Fund” (Anmegikjan, 2005)

²⁰ The Letter of confirmation of full membership in ILGA, signed 18.01.1995 (ALG, File 65).

The Krylia may be described as an interesting (and almost unique) case of LGBT organization in Russia, having existed and been active for such a long time. From the beginning it was oriented at juridical consultations and help for gays. Kukharsky had been successfully practicing this for a long period before the official establishment of the organization. He was always proud for his personal contribution to the development of regional “blue culture” (Tuller, 1998, p. 108-111). The organization organized seminars and lectures by different specialists and regular meetings²¹.

There was also a particular experience of cooperation between the movement and feminists organizations. The most well-known case was in Leningrad/St.Petersburg. It was the site of the most developed “tradition” of feminist organizing in Russia. The first Russian underground feminist organization, “Maria,” appeared here as soon as in 1979 (Gessen, 1998). In 1988, Olga Lipovskaya began editing and publishing self-made feminists journal *Zhenskoje Chtenie* (“Reading for Women”), and in 1991 began to manage different feminist activities, the most successful of which was St. Petersburg Center for Gender Problems. Lipovskaya cooperated with sexual minorities’ activists, although this cooperation was not always successful²². Nevertheless, her Center should be mentioned among the organizations that promoted lesbian activism in the country. It was a rare case of feminists working together with sexual minorities’ activists.

Another key figure of the Leningrad/St. Petersburg movement was singer Olga Krauze, whose story is analyzed in section 3.3. At the same time, there were other local initiatives. A group of girls calling themselves “Sappho Petersburg” began to organize disco parties for sexual minorities. It was necessary to have negotiations with the administrators of clubs, and to inform the rest of the community. Both tasks were not easy (a disappointing description of their parties can be found in: Essig, 1999, pp.77-78). The group did not acquire official registration, but was lucky to be officially invited to Berlin and to Omsk to participate in festivals. “Sappho Peter” also appeared as an answer to the need gathering people together. One of its objectives was to provide them information and help.

²¹ St.Peterburg’s lesbians with whom I spoke had no interest in “Krylia”’s activities. I can suggest these activities are oriented mainly at a relatively closed circle of gays, belonging to one or closer generation and who use them as a site for regular meeting with old friends. The effect of such activity for the whole local community is not clear.

Established by lesbians, it was primarily oriented at this audience, but not exclusively. Young lesbian activists who participated in these actions kept working in next years, then the leaders of the previous “generation” ceased their activity.

Simultaneously, sexual minorities’ organizations emerged in regional cities. In Omsk, a group of homosexuals tried to establish itself as an unofficial organization. Its history could be partially traced by their self-made newsletter *Omskaya Tema* (“Tema in Omsk”)²³. Initially, that organization was entitled “ОГОПИУД” (?), but in July it was re-named “Klub ‘Poisk’”. There was a list of its members in issue 9 (September 1991), including 45 names with 4 “enlisted forever”. The content consisted of descriptions of visits to other cities (mainly Novosibirsk), club news (not understandable for an outsider); the issue 6 had a reprint from Moscow gay editions “Tema” and “RISK”. It was remarkable that the description of the “club” changed with every issue. In the beginning it was represented in a manner, aping official Soviet reports about various official meetings; in later news, besides the change of the name and the motto of the newsletter (from the parody “gays of the world, unite!” to the less alienated “I no longer want to hide my love...”). Obviously, there was a rapid process of self-determination in that local community. Extracts from the *Tema* and *RISK* shown that this group was connected with other sexual minorities’ communities in the country.

In Krasnoyarsk, Siberian Association of Sexual Minorities was established about 1990 by a group of gay friends. A gay man, who was interviewed by Franeta, thought that the main result of the Association’s existence was to establish the acquaintance and friendship between gays and lesbians in the city. According to Franeta, this man considered his organization the third one in the country by the time of appearance (2004, p. 75). Again, its establisher knew about organizational processes in other cities but was autonomous in commencing this activity. Valery Klimov, an activist from the Urals regional center city Nizhniy Tagil, facilitated information exchange among sexual minorities in his region. Since the late 1980s, he has been consistently involved himself in information search and

²² For the instance, she encouraged my informant Natalia Ivanova and her friends to organize, and created obstacle for Olga Krauze’s organizational efforts at the same time (according to interviews with them).

²³ There were 14 issues in the collection of Moscow Lesbian and Gay Archive. The newsletter is typewritten. The language is very colloquial, and I consider it must be classified as a “fanzine” targeted to a small and close company.

promotion of help for imprisoned homosexuals and later (since 1993 till 2000) published a special newsletter for them (Lasarenko, 2004a)²⁴. Similar activists soon showed themselves up in Tver', Novosibirsk, Barnaul and other centers. Unfortunately, they usually did not have much public visibility or constant possibility to participate in activities in the center. Three persons from Barnaul and Krasnoyarsk visited Moscow and St. Petersburg in the summer of 1991 and after returning began their local initiatives. Natalia Ivanova tried to begin a "thematic" radio in Krasnoyarsk (Essig, 1999, p. 67), and two activists in Barnaul established a regional NGO "Siberian Initiative" as soon as in 1993. They both participated in the Triangle conference in 1993, but their interests were targeted towards anti-AIDS programs. This NGO should be still active today²⁵.

Thus, the emergence of sexuality minorities' organizations took place in different parts of the country simultaneously. The capitals had the biggest concentration of these activities, and their comparison would help to discern main trends of the community's development.

It is possible to discern three main trends in the shape of the organizations' activities. The first one, a "radical political trend", is surely represented by the ASM, which was a product of activities of a close, though not closed group of cooperators. They were in search of a proper organizational form, which would be a vehicle for their public activities.

Another discernible trend in the movement should be attributed to the activities of groups such as the editing collective of RISK and "Argo" journals (with Ortanov and Dm. Kuzmin as leaders), Tchaikovsky Fond in St. Petersburg, and regional groups like the one gathered in Tver' by Aleksei Vinogradov. These groups were based on the previously existing network but they were less politicized and targeted at the urgent needs of the community. They tried to avoid any open confrontation with the authorities and possibly were not ready to make full "coming out".

The third trend I would define as orientation at "purely cultural" projects. They were most characteristic for lesbian organizations, like "MOLLI" (Moscow Association of Lesbians in Literature

²⁴ In ALG, among other materials of the 1993 Conference, Klimov's registration form for the conference is kept.

²⁵ Its website: www.sibin.ru. The analogous organization was officially registered in Tomsk 20.09.1993; it was Regional Organization Astarta.

and Science), or Olga Krauze's projects, and various small short-lived groups. They avoided politization; an active cooperation with anti-AIDS and medicine organizations was not an urgent and important issue for them (since health issues were not so important for lesbians). They concentrated on the establishment of communicative space for people with non-normative sexuality. This trend may be named "the line of community's culture development". These three trends should be understood as ideal strategies of possible group activities of the described period, and used as typology of these activities.

It may be seen that the struggle for human rights did not have a strong support in the community at that time (although it was proclaimed as an aim of their struggle). Among the organizations in the capitals', it was only the Krylia that insisted on the necessity to work over the legislation and to communicate with the officials in order to have adequate representation of the homosexuals' position in law making. The development of the community, with its (homoerotic) culture and facilitation of information exchange were the most important perspective of work for the majority of the activists, especially after 1993. The human rights discourse was not demanded at that time at all (possibly, partly due to the "democratization euphoria" of the early 1990s).

The history of this period reflects main features of group emergence in that time:

1) As I have already pointed out, the organizations were grounded on the basis of small communities and informal networks that existed before the period of legitimation. The fast and simultaneous emergence of sexual minorities' activism all over the country would not have been possible without this community.

2) The organizations that appeared at that time were made by individuals and existed only by these individual's personal efforts. The leaders openly looked at their registered and (more often) non-registered organizations as a vehicle for realization of their own projects. At the same time, the international context provided them considerably easy opportunities to connect to international funds and nets. The organizations effectively promoted their founders to have an access to the "world LGBT community". Almost all the leading figures of the movement lacked solid social and cultural

capital, but in that situation they could invent their own new social practice. This statement won't relate to everyone of them equally – for example Ortanov and Kukharsky who from the very beginning were more “modest” in their political claims and followed another strategy: they needed to socialize their interests, to get an opportunity to develop their “preferable” practice. Ortanov took part in emergence and design of three main publications: *Tema* (with Kalinin), *RISK* (continued by Dmitry Kuzmin) and *Argo*. Although the two latter projects certainly had political importance, Ortanov's main aim was to develop a new kind of edition – an art journal for gays resembling the samples he had seen abroad²⁶. This activity was terminated²⁷ by the economic crisis of 1998. Kukharsky successfully continued his cultural and legal initiatives: having high social status and cultural and social capitals, he was able not to depend on the help from abroad too much. These two leaders (as well as the initiators of that may be named “classic” gay business like Shatalov (“Glagol” publishing house) and Abaturov (gay clubs)) had another strategy of socialization of their activities in favor of homosexuals. They avoided additional politization of their activities. It was interesting that they had both been abroad before and had mutual relations with foreign LGBT life. This stage of acquaintance with possible models of behavior of a LGBT movement leader was not so crucially important for them as for “younger” leaders.

3) In many cases, it would be easy to discern a gap between the leaders in the community, who could afford international travels (funded by foreign LGBT funds), and “mere” members of the community. The Perestroika opened new opportunities and chances but not everybody could use them equally. The new field of grant-based activities in mutual cooperation with foreign partners needed new techniques of cooperation which were not accessible to part of the community. From the perspective of a participant of the movement, it seemed that the several main organizations and their leaders were in constant competition for foreign grants. Their activity did not acquire legitimacy in the community which was outside of the fund-raising activities that were more or less “normal” for

²⁶ He even managed an official registration of “Argo” as “gay erotic journal” in 1994; that registration was mentioned as a feature of factually high level of tolerance to sexual minorities among officials in that short period.

²⁷ Another popular gay erotic edition, *Partner*, disappeared at the same time because of the same reason (Kirsanov, 2006, p.404).

the management of these new organizations. At the same time, the lack of organizational experience lead to the wasting of received money. Perhaps, we should suggest that in that situation, it was easier for the young organizations to find financial support than to use it properly. The stage of professionalization of NGO activity came later, and then the main organizations described above were over. Thus, then the participants of the community of that time would speak about the realities of organizational projects, regrets of the improper expenditure of money often would have been heard.

4) Many organizations of that time had similarities in their agenda: political unification of the community in struggle for decriminalization, information support of the community life combined with introduction of new norms of lesbian and gay culture. In 1993, the first aim was achieved. Next political objective, which would continue mobilize the community to movement - struggle against discrimination – was not even formulated in a commonly accepted way. The task of information support would be more effectively solved by the Internet. The initial severe lack of information was not so important to the mid-1990s. That's why these activities, nurtured by the Perestroika, had to undergo structural transformation.

In my analysis, I decided not to discuss one important aspect of the sexual minorities' coming out in the post-soviet Russia, which should discussed in details in any historical research of this period. It was the set of problems of anti-AIDS activities and programs. In fact, the emergence of AIDS that fundamentally changed the LGBT community existence all over the world just in that time (as well as humankind's relation to its sexuality in general), no less influenced the forms of the movement's self-organization. In the Soviet Union, the first official registration of AIDS happened on 1 of March 1987, but the state officials were not ready to discuss preventive measures or to invite any new methods to fight against the epidemic (Allova, 1988). Unlike in other countries, homosexuals were mentioned relatively rare, mainly because they were not "recognizable" for the public eye in that time. However, this group played an important role in distribution of the knowledge about the disease. These activities relate to the second trend.

In this section I made a general overview of the movement. Three main trends of the organizations and groups' public activities were discerns, along with characteristic features of the movement, implied by the previous history of the community. Having this general framework, in the following I can concentrate in several expressions of the movement's activities. It helps to understand how the leaders conceptualized its social position and aims.

Chapter 3. Aspects of Russian sexual minorities' movement

Russian sexual minorities' movement and national politics

If there are no gays in Duma [Russian State parliament],
the Duma is not representative.
Igor Kon (cited by Ortanov)

In the previous chapters, I have presupposed that the first period of the sexual minorities' movement in the post-Soviet Russia came to its end after 1994, although it does not make sense to try to define a date of the ending precisely. Laurie Essig takes the disintegration of the Center Triangle in 1996 as such landmark event, whereas some of my informants would rather mention the financial crisis in the summer of 1998. The movement was gradually transformed along with the transformation of the whole social system. Thus, it would make sense to compare different aspects of the first period activities with these that have appeared in the second one and still continue to exist nowadays. Leaving aside the overall transformation of the post-Soviet Russian society, I will concentrate in this section on the movement's attempt to participate in national politics. This perspective of their activity was the most visible for the citizens of the country and, at the same time, forced the community to reflect on its identity and public presentation.

One of the obvious distinctions between the first and the second period of the movement is their relation to (virtual) intervention into state inner politics. In its initial period, the movement was more politicized, then in late 1990s. There were activists and organizations who tried to present themselves

in the political field. This cannot be said about the second period. Below, I outline the political activities of the first period. I speak about different trends in the movements' self-organization (as they have been characterized in section 2.3.), with a special attention to the "political" trend, and compare them. Above I have concentrated on the organizational process in the community, thus now I would look at their relation to the political process. In the last part of the section, I characterize the second, ongoing period as "depoliticized" one.

In the Moscow part of the community, the politization was developed by the representatives of the "radical" trend, and it culminated in the Center Triangle's efforts to receive cooperation with political parties and social movements. The "radicals" did not have a chance to develop any long-term strategy of working with other political actors or the state apparatus. One can say that their politics was to construct a political position of sexual minorities' community as such. The second line in political activity, oriented towards cooperation with state power and gradual improvement of the condition of homosexuals in the society, represented in that period almost solely by the Krylia. Its main targets were (and would be) anti-discrimination and resistance to various projects of discriminatory laws.

The whole politization of the movement began as consolidation in the struggle for decriminalization. The aim of non-discrimination was articulated at the same time, too, but its possible legal decisions were not strictly defined at that time. Surely, the very public appearance of people who came out, demanding for the abolition of the legal prosecution was important. This political claim received its social support while signatures gathering processes. One of effects of struggle for decriminalization was temporary unification of lesbian and gay groups in their political struggle. In the moment of the article's release, this powerful factor of gathering and cooperation vanished. The next and perspective aim of the activities would be struggle against discrimination. But the next ten years would not see any rise of social resistance on the side of sexual minorities.

There were several campaigns of signature gathering, in which different strata of elites were involved. The most well known action was an act of gathering signatures for decriminalization among

musicians, organized by Vladimir Veselkin (artistic pseudonym)²⁸. Vlad Ortanov did the same among scientists and academics, and Olga Krauze – among middle class intelligentsia in Leningrad/St Petersburg. It must be noted, that gathering signatures under open letters and proclamations was a typical form of political participation since Soviet period. It obviously had an affirmative effect in constituting elites' positive opinion for the decriminalization.

Authoritative journals and newspapers supported this demand in their publications. An open letter to the state authorities with the demand to decriminalize homosexuality and guarantee the rights of sexual minorities was published in a popular newspaper²⁹ in 1989 soon after the establishment of ASM. It was, possibly, the first public statement of political interest and objectives of the sexual minorities, an apparent feature of their coming out.

A great part of the community distanced itself from any open political claims. For example such leader as Mila Ugol'kova, co-founder of MOLLI (obviously the most important purely lesbian group of the early 1990s) tried to concentrate on the development of "lesbian art" and avoid political confrontations (Essig, 1999, p.73; Certlich's interview). The majority was satisfied by the decriminalization and thought that the homophobic attitude of the population should be transformed primarily by cultural and social introduction of the very idea of non-normative sexuality (homoerotics) into the life of the country. It meant that they concentrated on the development of their particular activities without any attempt to offer common political agenda for the whole community.

There was no person who would try to make a political program based on the sexual minorities' claims (possibly, included into a broad political agenda). The only attempt was made by Roman Kalinin. In 1991, he announced that he would be a candidate in Presidential elections from the Libertarian Party (established soon before on the basis of Russian branch of the Transnational Radical Party). In fact, he even could not participate in elections because of his age. This demonstrative

²⁸ Veselkin is a bisexual independent rock-musician who came out in early 1990s. Although he is not often mentioned in articles about the history of the movement, his openly queer performances were important for the legitimization of public queerness in Russian "independent" culture in 1990s (Kirsanov, 2004, p. 462-68).

²⁹ It was "SPID-Info" (AIDS-Info), not an official newspaper, but the one that was popular and read all over the country (Gessen, 2002). fast development of media sphere along with its liberalization created a situation there the sexual minorities even did not have to struggle to appear in mass media. Nobody would seriously stand against it.

“coming out” was widely discussed in the national press³⁰. Until the First gay-pride in 2006, this case was, perhaps, the most well known case of gay’s political participation (Kirsanov, 2004, p. 481-483; Lazarenko, 2004). Simultaneously, a reckless interview with Kalinin was widely distributed by national mass-media and that publication was even discussed in a court as offensive. Kalinin and his friends also managed the first Russian festival of sexual minorities in the June of 1991, whose initially projected motto was “Turn Red square into pink triangles!” As Kon rightly mentioned that motto reflected the “radical” trends’s and their American partner’s ignorance and could become a pure provocation³¹.

Since 1993, the main agent of the political positioning became the Center Triangle (since 1993), which gathered together the main activists of Moscow homosexuals’ community. At this period, Roman Kalinin left the field of public political activity for his own project, the first Moscow gay club “Underground”; thus he embodied the common trend to de-politisation and concentration on private business enterprises which is characteristic for the activists of his “generation”.

The Center Triangle’s strategy was to influence the political decision making in fields which were important for the community. On 9 of June, 1996, they sent at least one letter to State Duma Committee for Women, Family and Youth with demand to consider the same-sex families in the project of the new State Family Code³². On the same day, a national conference about LGBT issues had to take place under Triangle’s management³³. The Triangle even sent a congratulation letter to newly-elected President of the USA Bill Clinton³⁴. Quite expectedly, none of the letters was answered or otherwise commented by the authorities.

³⁰ Ortanov remembers that a student of his, who was far from any politics, told him she would vote only for Kalinin. In my interview, he retold this story including it into his own re-evaluation of Kalinin’s activities of that time. For him, the student’s utterance was a sign of the public acknowledgement of Kalinin’s activities.

³¹ IGLHRC leaflet, 1991. The motto was disclaimed after protests of many authoritative activists like Ortanov and Kon himself (Interview with Kon).

³² The letter is in ALG, file 65. It is written there that there were about 8 millions of homosexuals living in the same-sex couples in the country. I consider this number very overestimated, but I cannot say whether it was an attempt to influence the officials (i. e. conscious disinformation) or the Triangle simply did not care about the factual number.

³³ The information leaflet is in ALG, file 65.

³⁴ ALG, file 65.

While the Third conference, an unusual ally was found among Orthodox Christian priests. A small religious group calling itself the Russian Orthodox Catholic Church sent a letter with blessing and congratulation to the participants of the conference³⁵. Although this religious group was highly marginalized in Orthodox Christianity, the act of communication possibly could be used as a precedent of cooperation between sexual minorities and a division of the Christian Church.

The Center Triangle had a wide range of activities aimed to position itself as a political actor. In this activity, it fully developed the “political orientation” of the Moscow sexual minorities’ community. The first issue of its newsletter, “The Bulletin”, included “the opinions of gay activists about the October³⁶ events”.

As was mentioned above, ASM was established by the same person that founded the Democratic Union (DS) two years before. This mutual cooperation with a leftist (in that period) political movement was an exceptional case, that happened because of warm relation to the sexual minorities’ struggle from the part of the DS leader Valeria Novodvorskaya. She publicly approved their activities, although did not participate in them. Another democratic politician who publicly supported them was St.Petersburg politician Galina Starovoitova³⁷. They both were exceptional politicians with highly individualized political positions. Nobody else dared to follow them: as the Center “Triangle” proclaimed in the end of 1995, none of influential politicians from left and right camps alike agreed to support the movement and include its claims into their political programs³⁸.

³⁵ This “Church” was established by Mikhail Anashkin and Manuil Platov, both of whom later were accused of pedophilia and attempts of homosexual rape (unnamed news at <http://www.rusk.ru/newsdata.php?idar=200580>; last accessed 21.05.2007). There were many homosexuals in its community. According to a well-known specialist in history of church in Russia Yakov Krotov, this “church” has not and is not being acknowledged among other church officials in Moscow, and did not mirror the Orthodox church’s position at all.7). It must be stated, further, that their personal interests to non-normative sexuality, their public action as the heads of the “church” follow the same logics of cooperation between marginal positions with possible emergence of a shared solidarity as a result of the cooperation. In the letter of the church, a project of an official document about the church’s relation to the same-sex sexual relations is mentioned. Considering their future punishment, these people tried to reframe interpretation of their own sexual intentions.

³⁶ The take-over of the state power committed by Boris El’tsin at 3-4 of October.

³⁷ Interview with Olga Krauze. Galina Starovoitova was one of the main Russian urban ethnologists. In the late Perestroika, she had become famous in the country as an expert in human rights and in nationalists movements. She was murdered in 1998.

³⁸ Vechernya Moskva, 21. 11. 1995; Sex i politika’ (Sex and politics) –in: *PLUS Center*, #50, 1990. Both article without authorship. In the last one two photos are printed, of Debryanskaya and Limonov respectively.

At the same time, the movement found helpers among radical nationalists. At the same articles mentioned above the Triangle proclaimed about negotiations with the National-Bolsheviks Party (NBP), recently found by Edward Limonov. Limonov himself was known as a reluctant “popularizer” of homosexuality in Russia due to his fascinating description of his same-sex adventures in New York in “It’s me, Eddie” novel³⁹. Another political leader who promised support was Vladimir Zhirinovsky, whose personal relation to homosexuality was ambiguous for the public (Tuller, 1998, pp.192-195). At the same time, the well-known gay journalist and poet Yaroslav Mogutin published openly nationalistic articles⁴⁰, and Zhirinovsky negotiated with him about cooperation.

Until the mid-1990s, the Russian sexual minorities’ movement failed to find any support or cooperation from political parties and movements. This may be explained, primarily, by common homophobia of the policy makers and the movements’ inability to present itself as a perspective partner who would help with mass mobilizations. Thus, several leaders decided to find cooperation on the side of marginal political groups (parties), who had just emerged and were less constrained by common “rules of the political game” in their search for cooperation⁴¹. Laurie Essig in detail describes this “nationalistic” trend in political self-positioning of several leaders of the Russian “queer community” (Essig, 1999, ch. 7). However, she does not clarify to that extent the community has been, in fact, touched by these initiatives of its leaders; I think she overestimates the influence of both Mogutin and Debryanskaya in the community. The overwhelming majority in the community was and still is liberal in their political preferences. However, one of the characteristic features of the period is that the parties and movements who by their claims should support this “oppressed” social group openly ignored them.

At the same time, the ‘traditions’ of human rights support was continued by the Krylia, led almost in solitude by Aleksandr Kukharsky. It specialized in the problems of law and rights defense from its very establishment. Since its appearance, this organization has monitored the laws. Possibly, the main

³⁹ It was extremely popular in the country in that time. Then “Glagol” publishing house had been established to publish gay literature, this novel was its first and the most successful product (Kirsanov, 2006, p. 448-50)

⁴⁰ Mogutin, 1995.

case in which the Krylia's legal experience and social capital was to be used to influence on the law-makers, happened in 2002, when anti-pornography legislation was made more strict (and leaving place for misinterpretation) and the age of consent (for both sexes) was raised up from 14 to 16 years. The efforts to influence the mass opinion and rise up a protest in elites were unsuccessful⁴².

A comparison of the forms of the sexual minorities' presence in politics with other countries' examples shows that some possible methods were not used. For example, "outing" (proclaiming that politicians who are against homosexuality are intended to or actually are secretly engaged in same-sex relations) was not appropriated as political method. In countries like the USA, "outing" of prominent figures, hostile to sexual minorities, is a problematic but widely used mean of political position improvement (Johansson, Percy, 1994). In Russia, this procedure was not used by the community for any political aims. The "outing" entirely was left entirely to the pulp press, which surely could only reinforce homophobia and "homosexual panic" in the society.

In the USA and other English-speaking countries, the early 1990s were a period of the "queer-nation" movement. In Russia, there were no traces of this movement. Only Dmitry Lychev's articles show his commitment towards contemporary discussions in the international community. The news and translations in the gay press of that period told exclusively about "mainstream" LGBT community life with a prevailing interest to the everyday life of the gay and lesbian communities abroad. The actual interests of the community were aimed towards 'normalization' (in the sense of Foucault), and the texts published in editions showed "normal" life of sexual minorities' abroad. Their political practices were not discussed as possible patterns of activists, even if not neglected at all.

With the disintegration of Triangle's core activists group, the period of (unsuccessful) politization of the movement was finished. It meant that Russian "sexual minorities" did not acquire any political representation and their claims were not introduced in the political agenda. The activities developed

⁴¹ The latter cannot be said, surely, about Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who was and would be an absolute unique figure in Russian political landscape - mainstream and marginal simultaneously.

after 1996 followed other strategies; they did not try to enter the political field as a responsible and active actor. For the next ten years, their activity was de-politicized. Leaders of the previous period were busy with their private lives⁴³. The economic difficulties of survival in “Yeltsin Russia” were mentioned by all the respondents of the “elder generation”; they were not able to sustain the previous level of activity because of the necessity to survive⁴⁴. This period also became a time of generation change. Experience of the previous leaders was not inherited by new activists, who established their own new groups and organizations.

To conclude this chapter, I will briefly characterize the new period, which continues till today. This new period had three main features:

1) The gay and lesbian community was deprived of political participation and alienated itself from the public scene; there were no bright events or scandalous cases around the community. The sexual minorities’ activities began to concentrate in special places, that just had appeared (clubs, internet-chats, seminars).

2) The transformation of relations in the community caused by fast development of the Internet with its variety of option for communications and search for “similar people”: information needs of the community as well as of the previously existed gay and lesbian media now could be satisfied by it perfectly well. Nartova, telling me about the life of the lesbian community, all the time mentioned internet-sites as the main and sufficient source of knowledge about the news, educational information and announcements. She personally do not need to visit any lesbian-oriented meetings or actions because if it.

3) The gay and lesbian infrastructure began to develop itself according to the new logic of professionalized NGO organizations and (latterly) social movements. Although the first experimental

⁴² Among other actions, Kukharsky send a letter to the office of President V. Putin. The documents of the polemics are in: Apollo: Information Bulletin. (2002) #2.

⁴³ Masha Gessen worked intensively as journalist (Gessen, 1997), Debryanskaya had her own small business several St. Petersburg activists moved abroad.

⁴⁴ As one example, I can refer to Olga Krauze’s obituary for Sergei Scherbakov, where she describes as he had tried to remove his name from his university Diploma in order to sell the paper out and buy some food. (Krauze, 2007).

discos and club parties came back to the very beginning of 1990s⁴⁵, in the second part of the 1990s this business became more serious and influential: clubs made in that time existed till the recent time or still operate today. In fact, it was true time of genuine emergence of club culture in Russian cities.

Speaking about St. Petersburg lesbian community after 1995, Nadezhda Nartova describes that period as the time of concentration on “education”, and then seminars and group discussions after movie screening became main typical and demanded form of activity.

I think the struggle was not often discussed at all. In 1990s, there was a feeling that people were afraid and homophobic because they did not know. Neither did the heterosexual elites know. So, we should educate people and thereby normalize ourselves with that. But about political initiatives... nobody knew how to organize it, these companies, participation. They still do not know it well...

During that period, lesbianism was “normalized” and integrated into the culture of urban middle class young women as an option. Nartova harshly criticizes this mode of socialization of lesbianism for its lack of critical and subversive potential. As she exclaimed ironically, “...and we all live in couples! A family is the most important thing for a lesbian! No feminism!” Lesbianism was successfully, to the extent that she spoke about middle-class young urban city lesbians, socialized according to the models offered by consumer society. It implied rejection of any feminist social critics, and total depoliticisation.

In the early 2000s, the absence of a “real” community with internal group solidarity, common interests and a representation of these interests, legitimized in the community, was notoriously acknowledged by various “thematic” writers and journalists.

In this section, I characterized various attempts of entering into national politics exercised by the sexual minorities’ activists. They tried to advocate their political interests and establish a political subject. The coordination of different “trends” of the movement development was not achieved; neither was cooperation with other political actors established. The Center Triangle was the last

⁴⁵ The first experimental transvestite party was managed in Leningrad as soon as in 1989 by Timur Novikov after his visiting Queen Drag shows in the USA. It was aimed at Leningrad artistic circles (Kirsanov, 2005, pp. 381-83). Clubs and discos if the beginning of 1990s were described by Essig, hardly with a sympathy.

organization of that period which had a chance to politicize the movement effectively. After its disintegration, the movement lost its political subjectivity.

National Tradition and International LGBT Community in the Group Identity of Early Russian Sexual Minorities' Movement

Sexual minorities did not appear in the country “out of the blue” (as Kevin Moss had entitled his anthology of Russian gay prose), even for mass consciousness. However, the image of sexual minorities' groups, their place in the cultural system, more or less acceptable for the public eye, only had to be designed. It was a process of invention of social identity of an emerging social group. This identity could be presented differently to the social environment and to the community itself. There were different aspects in constructing of the identity. The usage of different group names, which is one of the ways to construct the group identity, was studied in the section 2.2. In this section I am going to speak about the community's relation to traditions of gay life in Russia and abroad.

From the one side, the community was to imagine its place in the global LGBT (or “sexual minorities”, since the abbreviation was not in use in the Russian community). From the other side, they could explicitly acknowledge the history of homosexuality in Russia, and try to present themselves as an actual continuation of the gay and lesbian life. The references to the traditions of the Silver Age with its habits of non-normative sexual behavior among art celebrities could be mobilized as a kind of the community's cultural capital.

My respondents often could not remember any special interest in the international life neither by themselves nor by their friends. For many participants of the movement, their involvement in non-normative sexuality based activities abroad provided an ultimate possibility to come there. Foreign LGBT organizations invite them. “There were Lesbian games [in Berlin]... so nice. We figured out: what kind of sport could we play better? Handball. So, we formed a women team. We were the last in

the line after the competition, but, well, we were in Berlin” (Nat. Ivanova). At the same time, the whole community was autonomous in the ideas about itself and its future life. They were interested in the West, but its most important contribution was in creation of the first organizations’ infrastructure. People became acquainted with life and practices of other communities. However, they did not take the organizational rationality and identity so easily as they, perhaps, were expected to do it by their “Western” partners.

In the section 2.2., I described how the word “gay” was appropriated by the community with its connotations to a “virtual”, imaginary lesbian community *in making*. This was, possibly, the most discernible “western” innovation in the group identity in the period. If the Western missionaries, described by Essig (1991, p. 121-139), had tried to import a “western” (mainly, “American”) way of conceiving the non-normative sexuality to this cultural area, they were not successful⁴⁶. It may be explained, however, by the availability of sufficiently other ways to practice the non-normative sexuality in the society (exactly which Essig decided to name “queer”). Russian sexual already had developed a “native” tradition of managing the non-normative sexual preferences and forming the individual and group identities based on it. This community had developed before the openness to the West and could depend on its own experience.

After the beginning of Glasnost’ and opening of the country for foreigners, a considerable interest among foreign activists to the state of things in the USSR arose. They traveled to study the situation (as Daniel Shluter did [1993]), to help the community organize and to share their experience. When Russian sexual minorities came out and began to organize themselves, they had a strong support from the West. This support was organizational one: the West provided money and necessary equipment, whereas the local activists were considerably free in their ways to use these contributions.

American influence was especially recognizable in the shape of “radical” trend activities. An organization called the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), aimed

⁴⁶ Here and below, by the “West” I mean Western Europe and the USA. It does not make sense to try to discern between the USA, Germany and France as the countries to which these activists were primarily oriented. It depended on their own circumstances. I only should mention that the Leningrad/St. Petersburg lesbian community was in closer contact with

at supporting Russian LGBT activists, was established in California in 1990 by US citizens who used to visit Russia and wanted to advocate for the sexual minorities' struggle there. They promoted new leaders of Russian community Roman Kalinin and Eugenia Debryanskaya to travel across the USA in 1990, and organized a serial event in Moscow and St. Petersburg in August 1991, such as "thematic" movies screenings, press-conferences and discussions. The key figure was American lesbian activist and co-founder of IGLHRC Julie Dorf.

Laurie Essig mentioned that the idea of a festival was imagined as "Russian Stonewall" (1999, p. 133-134), however she had to admit that "Russian Stonewall" never occurred (p.66). She criticizes the approach Americans exercised to Russian activities, calling it "colonialism". The Americans felt that they had to introduce the experience of the US community into this community. In this vein, Essig made a disappointing description⁴⁷ of a seminar which took place as late as in 1994, then foreigners tried "to teach" Russians how to be a gay, a lesbian etc. There really were attempts to "export identities" there. However, who would receive them?

In my interviews I did not find any strong evidence of influence by "western movement experience" in construction of activists' individual and group identities. The foreign organizations and "allies" were an indispensable source of material support, but "Russians" did not follow their patterns of self-description. Possibly due to the rich experience of living in a society where the private/public sphere was constructed in another way as it as in the (imagined) West, these people had their own patterns of making their everyday life (Moss, 2002; Nartova, 2004). This is what Essig tried to conceptualize as a Russian "queerness". Straight "propaganda-styled" actions like "soviet Stonewall" of 1991 could not be accepted by local lesbians and gays because of the culture distance and because of non-existence of the "identity-politics" in this society. They knew that usual interpretation of these actions would be as a "propaganda" with a negative response to follow, but on a "self-assertion".

Germany, whereas several persons from Moscow find a way to the USA first. But all these territories may be gathered under one category of "West" – that is, capitalistic North European and American countries.

At the same time, a slow introduction of images of the Western community took place - at least, in the realm of language (semiotics). As I have mentioned, the name “gay” was thoroughly appropriated, and “LGBT” is also in the process of being adopted. During my research I saw rainbow flags at the homes of at least two “old guard” activists. In 1993 at an anti-AIDS conference, symbols of ACT UP (the pink triangle with signature “*Silence=death!*”) were used, even if the participants did not know the origin of the sign. Originally, it was used by New York anti-AIDS gay activists in 1986 and become popular due to actions of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) movement in 1988 (Crimp, 1990).

To summarize it, I would suggest that in the 1990s, Russian sexual minorities successfully integrate themselves into the economic (financial) infrastructure of the world LGBT community, and gradually appropriated its language. However, they did not present themselves as an organic participant of the global movement. This global collective identity was only in the process of introduction with consummation of Western texts and acquiring knowledge about sexual minorities’ life all over the world. In the described period, one can hardly find this attitude to the movement in the global context. The separation between “we” and “they” was kept. Neither my respondents would think about the national movement and community of that time as local parts of the global ones. At the same time there was no resistance for such ideas, I suppose they were not appropriated yet, because the collective identity was already produced “indigenously”.

One of the striking features of the movement was its uncertain relation to the tradition. It is known how important traditions are for defining a social sense of belonging to a group. If a practice or identity may be proved to exist for a long period of time, this long history effectively legitimizes them. References to “tradition” rooted in the past also explain the emergence of a given practice or behavioral norm and proves their necessity. As far as legitimacy and justification are necessary for any society and group (identity), they try to attach themselves to a tradition. This managing with social and cultural capital Eric Hobsbawm has named “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm, 1983).

⁴⁷ Essig, 1999, ch. 7. The same seminar is described by David Tuller (1998, pp. 118-122). He was skeptical about the

The Russian gay and lesbian community had to perform this “invention” as well. Obviously, it had three options in its search for cultural roots and frameworks: (1) to enframe itself into the global history of homosexuality in the manner as such ‘attachment’ had been done by American and European gay and lesbian communities two decades before, presenting themselves a “natural” continuation of it; (2) to reconstruct the national history of non-normative sexuality, (3) to convert its own subculture developed under the Soviet regime from “underground” into more or less normalized “subculture of sexual minorities” and legalize it. These three perspectives were developed simultaneously. But the approaches to the ways of reshaping of the group identity varied. In the following, I will look at the ways of their transformation.

An interesting difference between Moscow and St. Petersburg communities’ strategies consisted in their relation to “tradition”. For Moscow groups, the history of same-sex sexual relations in Russia was not a sufficient source of cultural and social capital. The newspapers and journals published by its representatives included items about the history, but neither their content nor other texts contained references to the past as tradition. They were much more interested in news from the international gay community and images for a new (imagined) community in the country. In St. Petersburg, it seems to me that from the very beginning the “inheritance” was more openly articulated. The very procedure of naming of the organizations tells a lot. The gay literature journal *Argo*, published in Moscow by Dmitry Kuzmin, was intended to explore homoerotic themes and motives in contemporary Russian literature, but without accentuation of that homoerotics. As Dmitry Kuzmin explained in his introductory note to the first volume of *RISK*, “[o]ur main task is to present, classify and revise ways in which homosexuality functions in contemporary culture.... This is not a journal for gays, less gay journal nor journal about gays.... Our subject in the whole cultural situation in its totality” (Kuzmin, 1995). “Gay, slaviane!” invented by Olga Zhuk and her staff, offered a “continualist” view of the history of homosexual culture in Russia. It included, among others, an article about the history of lesbianism in Russia and consequences of the Soviet period of gay and lesbian movements in the

possibilities to “teach” Russians how to be lesbians, gays men etc., too.

country. Unfortunately, the journal was not demanded by the community and the editors gave up the whole idea with termination activities of the Fond in about 1996 (when Zhuk emigrated to Germany).

The title of the journal combined the “traditional” Russian exclamation “Gey” (which meant “Hurrah!”, “Go!”) with an address to ”Slavs” (“Slaviane”). It sounded rather traditionalistic (supposing that the readers were “Slavs”, true Russians in their identity), if it was not written partly in Latin letters with this new-invented word ‘Gay’ (Gay, славяне!). Thus, by the title of the journal, its inventors’ national identity and their orientation to Western (American) experience and culture were simultaneously expressed in an ironical manner. As Olga Krauze explained, it was a title of an article about homosexuals, but the journal’s staff loved it and decided to use it.

The editor informed his readers in the editor’s message: “the journal’s aim is not propaganda of homosexuality... but support of self-consciousness and self-expression of every personality” (Gay, Slaviane, p.1). The journal was presented there as “for literature, art and culturology.” For example, the first issue contained inside: a collection of articles about Tchaikovsky’s death (all of them are translated from English); an article and poems by Gennady Trifonov, who still is one of the most acknowledged “gay poets” of the elder generation (in the late 1970s he was been sentenced by the article 121.1), his participation in the journal meant a symbolic connection of its contemporary (post-soviet) readers with the “old guard” and their heroic suffering; articles about gay prisoners (this theme was popular in these years, culminating by the report published by Masha Gessen’s group (1994)), various verses of Russian (“native”) authors and translations of foreign homoerotic stories (Heinz Heger along with Cortasar). The journal was concluded with an unknown text by Marina Tsvetaeva. Foreign materials and ”national tradition-grounded” materials were equally represented here, creating a homoerotic aesthetics. But this journal, highly valued by critics and scholars, was the only sample of such attitude in that period.

After the first period of intensive interest to the Western examples and experience followed a period of inner development. Russian groups did not politicize their actions nor did they appropriate symbols and methods of self-presentation. Russian sexual minorities’ attitude to the European and

American group identities in that period may be best described as a rather distanced. It must be mentioned that in the late 1990s, the money flow decreased also because of self-withdrawal of main leaders of the community who had personal relationships to Western organizations and who used these contacts as a channel to obtain financial support (Debryanskaya, Ortanov, Zhuk).

The gay press that appeared in the country by efforts of several enthusiasts was not consistent in its presentation of the community's group identity. Some editions were made as "fanzines" for a company of acquaintances (such as analyzed "Omskaya Tema"), others were mainly informational, and some of them, in addition to news, acquaintance invitations and advertisements, contained articles about the history of the world LGBT movement, biographies, and visual homoerotic content. All of them contained also information about safe sex, hygiene, and counter-AIDS campaigns.

It is important to note that this was a time of tremendous development of pornographic literature and media (Gessen, 1995; Goscilo, 1995). In the time of Perestroika, this market was increasing tremendously. The first publications about same-sex sexuality which appeared in the first pornography newspapers certainly were consumed by a broader audience than the first specialized "thematic" editions. This "consistent front" of new sex media created a new situation where sexual minorities' press was one of the available options. Elena Certlich found her first piece of information about MOLLI in a "pornographic newspaper," how she defined it by herself. "But", said she, "it was time then everyone used to read pornography. Everyone, there was such strong interest to it." Thus, I can suggest that there were two important social factors of development of the gay and lesbian press:

1) legalization of hidden interest to these matters in the community, 2) common liberalization of the media and emergence of sexuality-related editions. Emerging gay and lesbian press contributed to the "sexual revolution", or social construction of sexuality as matter of public consent and interest, which in turn was caused by Perestroika and Post-perestroika openness. A similar process took place in other countries of Eastern Europe, there censorship of the Soviet period was changed by extreme openness, unusual in comparison with presumed Western countries of sexual freedom (True, 2003).

Soon after the normalization of the social environment, this “public sexuality” was again normalized following exclusively heterosexual patterns (Nartova, 2004a; Vorontsov, 2004).

Briefly speaking, the Russian sexual minorities’ movement did not develop a group identity of a participant of global LGBT community. Foreign organizations-partners were used mainly to obtain financial and technical support, and these relations were heavily based on personal relations of the movement’s leaders with their allies abroad. The coming out of the community was not a result of Western influence but rather a natural effect of transformations in the public sphere.

The group identity mainly was formed on the basis of pre-existing community subculture rather than following “imported” examples and patterns. I suppose that the de-politization and the loss of community integrity in the second period was (at least, partially) predestined by such features of the first one, as lack of common political position, weak integration between different projects, and inability to appropriate the experience of the international community. The organizations that could become a real working NGOs were closed (again, the Krylia was an exception here), and the contemporary generation of NGOs did not use experience of the previous generation.

Ethos of the movement’s activist. The case of Olga Krauze

In an anthropological research, it is necessary to look at how an individual acts in the framework of the bigger movement, and consequently how that individual participates in the realization of the movement’s aims. Individuals engage themselves in this process in order to achieve their own aims and targets. They understand and conceptualize their situation, and develop their own strategies in order to achieve their imaginary objectives.

In this section I make an analysis of Olga Krauze’s history of participation in Leningrad/St. Petersburg lesbian and gay movement and in several projects of that period. I try to discern (1) the genesis of her personal approach to the problems and interests of the movement, (2) her estimation of her own place and status in the community (as well as of the whole community as such), and the

practical she usually chose to realize her ideas about the development and improvement of local sexual minorities' community in Leningrad/St. Petersburg and Russia in general. I look also at how she has combined different cultural traditions and influences in making her own view at the sexual minorities' life. She has been one of the key figures of the Leningrad/St. Petersburg' community and her way of thinking about these things influenced the activities that shaped the community, therefore, this closer look helps me to understand how one individual could figure out her own way of participating in becoming of the movement. I ground my analysis primarily on the text of my interview with her 27 April, 2007 in Moscow⁴⁸. There are also different texts of interviews with her, as well as texts about her (especially: Kirsanov, 2005, p. 419-423), and her personal website⁴⁹.

I use the notion of “ethos” as the common category to describe how Olga’s “coming out” as a lesbian and participation in this community as well as her simultaneous involvement into processes on independent musical and poetical scene both influenced her strategies. Mark Blasius (1992) tries to find proper conception for lesbian and gay existence that would not neglect the uniqueness of their position in the heterosexist society, and displays the importance of their experience for production of truth in the given society. He argues for a concept that shows how the specificity of lesbian and gay existence is reflected in their political and social positions. Blasius introduces the concept of “ethos” as “shared way of life through which lesbians and gay men invent themselves, recognize each other, and establish a relationship to the culture in which they live” (*ibid.*, p.645). It is “a type of existence that is the consequence of coming out – understood as the process of entering into and creating oneself through the field of relationships that constitutes the lesbian and gay community” (*ibid.*, p. 658).

“Ethos” is a way of being in and for the community, invented through their personal voluntary ethical efforts. Coming out produces the possibility for the community, however the community is being constantly created in these individual and voluntary efforts to exist in this certain way. It is not

⁴⁸ Olga resided in the apartment of the keeper of ALG, Elena Gousyatinskaya, who was abroad at that time. Thus, I had a chance to have several talks with her and to observe relation in the “community” of the archive, discussions about other

possible to “come out” once and for all the time (*ibid.*, p. 655). Coming out is necessarily crafting “a way of life through one’s homoeroticism” (*ibid.*, p. 656). This way of life, then in the community (i.e. in relation to homoeroticism of others) is conceptualized as “ethos”. “Ethos” is a deeply social category, and as far as this community consists of individuals who are dominated and marginalized ones outside of it, its development has deeply subversive political meaning. It problematizes the domineering regime of f and the social truths that support it, “*publicly* introducing a change in the order of compulsory heterosexuality” (*ibid.*, p. 660; emphasis in the original). Thus, the concept of “ethos” explains development of personal responsibilities and practical norms.

In the following, I reconstruct Olga Krauze’s history of an active participant of Leningrad/St. Petersburg sexual minorities’ community (leaving aside her private life and musical carrier) as the story of becoming a lesbian activist in the sense that she did not have a predestined way of activities as such a person, but had to invent it constantly. Thus, I try to look at her history as a case of making the “lesbian ethos” in the particular circumstances of post-Soviet transformational city society.

Olga Krauze defines herself primarily as musician and poet. She is also a professional painter. She was deeply involved into the underground culture of Leningrad⁵⁰ and even nowadays, I think, she thoroughly associates herself with these underground circles but not with more “mainstream” musical and art circles. Her image is also organized according to these patterns of underground, even counterculture community. I should admit that as a person who has been socialized in a similar subculture⁵¹, I can recognize these features and ways of self-presentation to the surrounding at once. She has the *habitus* of an underground singer and writer of the St. Petersburg artist subculture (a

lesbian group, etc. I am rally grateful to Olga for her hospitality and honesty. All the quotations in the text are from this interview and also from shorter talks in the next several days when I was working in the ALG.

⁴⁹ www.olgakrauze.ru

⁵⁰ It must be mentioned that Leningrad/St.Petersburg always was considered the cultural capital of the country. In the Soviet time, its specific cultural environment produced, among others, several underground subcultures and several

⁵¹ I grew up in a peripheral region in a younger generation. Thus “our” subculture style was influenced and modified by the patterns produced and distributed exactly by Olga Krauze’s “native” circle and by persons of hers and the next generation. It does not mean, of course that I can share her experience, it only means that I can recognize that she performs the *habitus* fairly well. For me, it has been particularly interesting to observe at her behavior as such a perfect performer of this subcultural style and manner.

“classic” Russian subculture). She often performs at small parties in private flats or small clubs, following to the subcultural tradition of “flat concert” (*kvartirnik*, квартирник)⁵².

At the same time, she rejected being categorized as a “lesbian poet.” As she stated, if it was a “culture”, it was interesting to all not only for “lesbians” (as (her comparison) “Giovanni’s room,” by James Baldwin has been read not only by gays). Thus, she did not pretend to emphasize her creative works as an expression of a “specific” lesbian culture. At the same time she openly spoke and wrote about homoerotic matters (same-sex love) (Krauze, 2007a).

She came from a family of intellectuals who had been exiled from Leningrad. Although her parents managed to come back to the city, the childhood experience of being one of the oppressed and growing up in semi-marginal surrounding always was crucially important for her. In my interview, she repeatedly referred to her origins explaining different circumstances of her life in the Soviet period.

Living in Leningrad, she had an intermediary social status: she had higher education and even was a member of the Communist Party. At the same time, she lived among working class people, and was employed in non-prestigious works. Although she never was seriously imprisoned, the prisoners’ subculture influenced her since her childhood (since the prison was and still stays a universal source of cultural patterns, behavioral traits and language for Russian unprivileged social classes, and a person living among people of that class cannot ignore the influence of prison experience). At the same time she was constantly educating herself in various humanities. Thus, I would define her social status as a highly marginalized one. Her national origin (she was an ethnic German) made her vulnerable to Soviet bureaucracy, too. She was between different social groups and classes. At the same time, she was socially active (she described her activities in the *Komsomol* and in various artistic organizations). This social activity may be interpreted as tactics of compensation of her social marginality (=vulnerability).

⁵² It is much easier to organize them, but it is worth mentioning that this manner of performing is “natural” for her habitus. It is a “classical” form of non-commercial musical performance in this cultural area, and she prefers to perform in this way.

Since her childhood, as she would reconstruct it nowadays, Olga Krauze was a lesbian. “My history was amazing, I lived with my beloved girlfriend and till 25 years old thought I was the only one of this kind, an exception”. Working as a yard-keeper, she could be relatively at ease in her choice of her way of life. At the same time she surely felt the burden of social control. In her autobiographical book (2006), she described how once she had managed to forge a passport she had found in her yard, and made a “registration of marriage” with her girlfriend. At that time she had a long period of living a “closeted life” in early 1970s, when she gradually moved to understanding of herself as a lesbian but had no possibility to study get know more about this type of existence yet. It was a period when she developed her techniques of hiding her life. She described the period of understanding her own homoerotic intention as traumatic one. She dreamt about being a boy in her childhood, because it was the only virtual way “to marry” a girl.

Olga became acquainted with the life of the community of people with non-normative sexuality when she was 25 years old (about 1977), already having the experience of living with same-sex lover and of making her life as marginal person. A lesbian woman tried to make Olga’s acquaintance and that person happened to know different lesbian groups in the city. These were relatively small communities (sometimes their members could manage to co-habitate). In the late 1970s, Olga entered to the “virtual” community of sexual minorities (as I characterized it in the section 1.3). She continued to participate in unofficial artistic life and the social network of underground culture, but now she combined it with another social network of “these people” (obviously, there was no contradiction in being included in both these networks). Being a lesbian, she shared the common experience with other homosexual men and women. They all had to explore possible methods of relations with the state power. The lesbian girls saved their friends – gays from the danger of imprisonment, even dared to interrupt into militia arrest. Olga spoke about this as a common practice:

Me: Did you have this partnership, or cooperation, in the time of the struggle for decriminalization?

Krauze: Even before that struggle. Well, how did I get the stamp⁵³ into my passport? We used to save the guys. Once, they called me... [and said that] Grishka

⁵³ The “stamp” means the state registration of marriage. She means she had been officially married.

Andreev had been captured and he was in such-and-such office. I could run into the office, fall onto that Grichka and shout leave my man alone! If they'd begin to say "he is a faggot", I cried that they all were faggots, nobody fucked better than him and so on. I did not care for anything I knew I had to help my friend and sometimes I had the success!

In time then Perestroika had began and the mass coming out of the community became possible, Olga already was experienced in the community life. Here I may conclude that up to that time, she had formed her "*ethos*". This implied attention to the vulnerable position of sexual minorities'; necessity to help "people of that kind"⁵⁴; interest in the specificity of homoerotic art. As an experienced participant of various informal communicative networks, she counted on informal, personal relations in different social strata in managing her activities and projects. All these features of her ethos were traceable in her further public activity.

For Olga, the life of the community was highly personalized; by that, I mean that she thought about the community (imagined it) as certain set of personalities, familiar and unfamiliar to her personally. They had difficulties in their socialization. She was not interested in big programs of development of the whole community (as several leaders, obviously, were); thus, she never produced an ideological project. Her projects were oriented toward individual help and promotion to suffering individuals. The concepts of vulnerability and danger designed her thinking about the community.

Her explanation of how the sexual minorities thought about she displays her attitude to the sex reassignment surgery (SRS) shown this latent depiction of them as victims. She told me she knew a plenty of cases then women desperately tried to make female-to-male reassignment operation. However, having the experience of long "adjustment" to her homoerotic "orientation" and living as lesbian, Olga thought the operation often was not a proper solution, because after it the person would have more problems than before. Not being against the SRS in principle, she thought people (mainly women) often decided to do it only not being able to understand themselves properly⁵⁵. Thus, they desperately needed help.

⁵⁴ Or, rather, to "her people" in the meaning described in section 1.3.

⁵⁵ Krauze repeatedly mentioned the SRS operations as a notorious thing. According to Igor Kon, during the Soviet period these operations were rare due to very complicated procedure of the permit obtaining (the person needed to get positive decision of two State Ministries, leaving aside all other bureaucratic procedures) (Kon, 2003). I cannot explain her attitude to SRS as an option "many" people chose. A close friend of Krauze, whom she often mentioned by various occasions, was

[T]hey were extremists, especially those of elder generations. [Imagine] she makes artificial fertilization, gives a birth, sooner she suddenly understands she is a man, so she has the operation. There were so many of them. I won't say they were fools, but exactly because they were driven crazy by their sexual orientation, they could not understand that was going with them... And that was the work that nobody did to them [psychological consulting].

On the contrary, Olga developed her own concept of homosexuality that helped her to harmonize her inner life and to find better ways of making life in the heterosexist society. She was one of co-founders of the Association Krylia invited there as a socially active lesbian to represent lesbians' interests. In the very beginning of its activity, the Krylia published a letter about its intention to help homosexuals in a leading newspaper. Soon after, thousands of letters were received⁵⁶. Olga participated in their gathering and preliminary analysis. She discerned the problem of “*solitude*” as the main common problem which should be paid great attention. She was impressed by the number of desperate requests to help to find somebody, and decided to organize a nation-wide “acquaintances service” (as she names it) or, more precisely, an information and communicative system for sexual minorities. She spoke about this decision as unexpected for herself; nevertheless, I think it should be rather “natural” realization of her ethos. Information exchange always was basis of the community, and she just systematized the information channels, turning herself into a kind of national medium, or coordinator of it:

“It was clear the service of acquaintances was necessary, thus I had begun to do it... I was without of any help. Somehow I was loaded by all this work... from the very beginning, because there was no Internet, nothing at all. I made catalogues”.

Olga developed her own communicative system. She completed a nation-wide database, through which people from different regions could find their mates. Later, about 1992, she even used to distribute a special newsletter, *Probuzhdenie* (“Awakening”), which consisted of the database (“catalogue”), with a adding of actual information about international LGBT community.

a transgender person, therefore that “overestimation” possibly was grounded in the specificity of her mutual environment. Or, rather, SRS operations become a part of her personal mythology about the community.

⁵⁶ A short note about this action on “Krylia”'s English website: <http://www.kriliya.sp.ru/2eng.htm>. See also: Essig, 1999, p.76.

At the same time, she distanced herself from the Krylia and established the *Klub Nesavisymykh Zhenschin* (“Klub of Independent Women”) about 1992. As she explained, the Krylia’s projects expressed primarily needs of gay community, and she could not accept their “commercial” implications. Kukharsky, who had another concept of gay activism and was incomparably better socialized, tried to develop more “western-like” projects.

The activity of the “Klub” was based on charity. They organized help for women prisons in St. Petersburg. This organization was not exclusively made up of lesbians’. Olga tried to provide an opportunity to meet and became closer via co-operation with different women trapped by difficult situation. Besides lesbians, there were women - participants of the War in Afghanistan and single mothers⁵⁷. Simultaneously, she worked as a volunteer on a “hotline telephone” for sexual minorities, founded by the Krylia in cooperation with a medical institution.

Thus, her first activities were aimed at facilitating information exchange and helping individuals with their socialization problems. The next perspective of her interests, promotion of lesbian homoerotic art, was designed later. Olga did not give up performing her concerts with openly homoerotic songs, she also published her poems in the “Gay, Slaviane” journal. She also invented her own “hand-made” fanzine *Arabesques*.

She tried to facilitate the life of the community by helping its participants, and played a role of an artist-member of the community who develops it also through her artworks. However, the cooperation between different groups in the community was so weak that she could not acquire sufficient help from any active organization of the city operating in the field. As an activist, she was demanded by the movement; nonetheless, the movement could not (or was not ready yet?) provide not only infrastructure, but personal support for these activities. Following her ethos, she worked voluntarily as long as she could. But, at the same time, this manner of organizing her activities was regular for a participant of underground artistic life there so many activities were absolutely individual projects

guaranteed only by these persons' intentions. She, naturally, transmitted this style of work in this new emerging field. The other side of this style was that she did not enhance that infrastructure of the movement. Then she left the movement she had not create an institution working without her constant personal investments.

For a relatively long period of time, Olga used to receive help from people and from foreign organizations. Clearly, her personal image helped her to find funding for concrete action.

Me: where did you get the money for your publisher's actions?

Krauze: It the beginning I had some money. Secondly, I used to find donors. They gave me the money hand-to-hand. Not only foreigners, Americans and Germans, did it, but our people, too. I thought I could not spend the money on myself so I did the deal.

The sequence is important: the activists expected the financial help primarily from abroad not from inside the country. (However, it is not clear whether Olga's "our" referred here to the sexual minorities or to Russian citizens in general). Thus, she counted on the informal relations and the "communal" style of projects (based on voluntary work of close friends and funded by individual help of interested personalities). This style of work made her projects vulnerable to her personal circumstances as well as to her personal relations with other people.

At the same time Olga lived in extremely poor conditions. She had several trips abroad and still actively participated in the life of the (already international) community, but simultaneously had to work hard to survive. Essig quoted Krauze's words that her girlfriend and she would "smoke rather than eat because it's cheaper" (Essig, 1999, p. 205, n.117). She could develop multiple activities to support the community, but her living conditions prevented her from the continuation of it. Up to 1997, she could not keep working because she "had no money at all". Neither her unique database, nor the *Klub* were accepted by any organization in spite of her asks— thus, results of one leader's

⁵⁷ Taking into account into account the variety of activities, developed by the "Klub", Laurie Essig's estimation of it as "one-woman crusade to make her voice heard" (1999, p. 78) seems shallow and imprecise.

activities were not effectively demanded by other leaders. Being unable to guarantee security of the database, Olga burnt it down. In 1997, she broke off any social activities for several years.

This infamous ending of her projects followed the common line of the finishing of the first period. She never tried to establish an NGO-style organization. (Surely, she was not the only one in the movement who did not accept this organizational rationality). She followed her ethos and depended on the methods and strategies coming back to the period of underground life of the Soviet period. Her last action in that period was proposing of the women's organization *Labris* in 1996. As a more or less stable group, *Labris* existed for a very short time, but was a kind of "mediator" between the first and the next periods and, correspondingly, between "old guard" and "new guard" generations in the life of the city's lesbian movement. Young women who participated in *Labris* later joined other groups.

Today, Olga Krauze is an individual independent musician who does not engage herself in such complicated social initiatives. She is an open lesbian that may be easily read even from her appearance: short haircut with shaved temples, three earrings in her right ear and none-in her left ear... But she realizes the limits of such openness: it gives an additional power to the surroundings and especially to the people who can exercise a power over her: the state officials and employers. In my judgement, in managing her comings out, she follows the trinary model of personal life (private/semi-private/public) as it has been described by Nartova (2004). Nowadays, she is a member of the older generation looking at "the youth" with irony (especially at the young girls who try to date her). Since the hard period in the end of 1990s, she has accepted a more "individualized" strategy of participation in the community life concentrating herself almost exclusively on her own creative work. Her personal contribution into the development of the community consisted not only in that she led several groups in the 1990s and influenced contemporary leaders of the lesbian community, but also in the production of cultural patterns of an independent lesbian singer. In this image she is most known nowadays in the community⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ Interviews with Irina B., Julia Smirnova, Sasha.

In this section, I tried to follow a personal story of one of key leaders of the sexual minorities' movement of 1990s. I tried to show how her personal ethos and self-determination as a lesbian activist and an artist simultaneously influenced her public activities and how these activities were shaped by the conditions of the period. In a sense, Krauze's experience is unique; there is no other lesbian artist so widely acknowledged not only in the community. However, her experience shows typical moments and thus helps to see how the movement has developed itself and disadvantages of that movement.

Conclusion

In my work I tried to define the way how Russian sexual minorities came into public being and formed a kind of social movement. It happened in the period then the USSR was dismantled, the Soviet regime with its specific sexual and information politics was terminated and the society was in the state of transformation to a new, "better" social regime. In the period of the Perestroika and soon after, the social activism dramatically increased. The sexual minorities' movement was considered in this context.

I began with an outline of the specific features of the "regime of sexuality" in the Soviet Union. Since the middle of the century it had been extremely constrained, and the public discourse was normalized in a way that precluded mentioning of any sexuality-related matters. At the same time, the population of the country came through a gradual transformation of sexual life comparable in its features and chronology with transformation in Western societies. In the Soviet period, I think the discrepancy between public "silence" and factual demand for public access for information and discussion of sexuality (which was a part of soviet regime of "double thought" (Remington, 1989)) was one of the reasons for fast transformation of media sphere, emergence of "sex in media" and temporary establishment of tolerance for overt manifestations of sexuality.

During the Soviet period, sexuality was strictly normalized along with heteronormative models. When the public movement of sexual minorities emerged, its first tasks were decriminalization and establishment of publicly legitimized culture of non-normative sexuality.

I argue that an underground sexual minorities' community with its discernible subculture existed already in the late 1970s. Speaking about the emergence of the movement, I ground myself on the differentiation between "community" and "movement". To frame the development of the set of activities that I generalize as "the movement", I offered a chronology which helped me to divide it into two periods. I also discuss in the second chapter the names which were used by the community and for the community from outside.

The choice of names for definition of a group is an important aspect of its identity constructing and transformation. I show the difference between such terms as "sexual minority"; "blues/gays/lesbians" and other Western terms used to name and describe the community by itself, or the outsiders. I suggest that introduction of the term "gay" has been a mean of re-constructing of the community's group identity and is a sign of a process of the identities' development.

In the next section I made a general overview of the movement. I show its dependence on the broader social transformation with its rise in tolerance, availability of foreign contacts, possibility of independent citizen's organization making and general rise in activism in society. By analysis of organizational history of several organizations in Moscow, Leningrad/St.Petersburg and regional cities I show that the process of group coming out and organization building took place not only in capitals but all over the country. I discern three main trends of the organizations and groups' public activities: "radical political", "developmental" and "cultural" ones. I show how they correlate each other, and discuss how the personal impact of their leaders have shaped their development and chosen forms of activity. The Center 'Triangle' potentially could become a nation-wide organization for Russian sexual minorities, had it overcome its organizational hardships, thus I discussed its agenda and development. I argue that the organizations emerged in the first period could not effectively represent the community in which they emerged.

In the third chapter I discuss, firstly, the attempts to politicize the sexual minorities movement and engage into national politics made mainly by representatives of the "radical political" trend. For this purpose I discuss their political actions, and unsuccessful search for allies among other political

groups in the early 1990s. As far as the aim was not achieved and the sexual minorities movement did not become a political subject, it did not have articulated political interests in the second period (late 1990s and early 2000s). I consider the second period the time of deep “normalization” of sexual minorities.

Secondly, I discuss relations the movement’s attitudes to “the West” The financial and resource help from abroad was a crucially important factor in the very shape of the community. I would suggest that in 1990s, Russian sexual minorities successfully integrate themselves into economic (financial) infrastructure of the world LGBT community. However, the group identities of participants of global LGBT community were not appropriated simultaneously, and the movement developed its group identity without strong influence of Western patterns. I discuss reinvention of the “national tradition of homoeroticism” by several activists mainly belonging to the “cultural” trend. In the last section, I illustrate individual options and reasons to participate in the movement’s development by example of Leningrad/St. Petersburg lesbian activist Olga Krauze. I analyse her interview along with other available materials and show how she had construct her approach to the community’s needs and interests and how that approach later defined her activism. I also show by this example relations and connections that existed among activists in that period.

APPENDIX. The list of the interviewees

- 1) Igor Kon (1936), - the most prominent Russian researcher in sexology and sociology of sexuality, acknowledged also for his efforts in advocating sexual minorities' struggle. (Moscow)
- 2) Vladislav Ortanov (nickname, 1953) –gay activist, participant of the first organizations editor and publisher of first gay newspapers (the *Tema*) and journals (*RISK*, *Argo*). (Moscow)
- 3) Elena Gysyatinskaya (1946), director and current keeper of the Moscow Archive of Lesbians and Gays (ALG), participates in the movement since early 1990s, teacher of French language. (Moscow)
- 4) Julia Smirnova (1969), vice-director of ALG, lesbian writer, professional manager. (Moscow)
- 5) Elena G., (1967), journalist, Smirnova's partner, recently has moved to Moscow from Barnaul, professional journalist. (Moscow)
- 6) Irina B., (1959), singer and writer, recently has moved to Moscow from Barnaul. (this interview was not recorded) (Moscow)
- 7) Svetlana, (1975), computer specialist, in the late 1990s edited lesbian funzine "Organic Lady" (this interview was not recorded). (Moscow)
- 8) Julia Tsertlich (pseudonym; 1952), lesbian poet and writer, actively participated in the work of ALG, teacher of social sciences. (Moscow)
- 9) Sasha (1978), gay man, participated in the community's life since 2000 (this interview was not recorded). (Moscow)
- 10) Nadezhda Nartova (1978), lesbian, anthropologist who studied lesbian community of St. Petersburg.
- 11) Aleksandr Kukharsky (1949), open gay, leader of the first officially registered sexual minorities' organization the Krylia (1991 –present), professor, businessman. (St. Petersburg)
- 12) Natalia Ivanova (1961), lesbian, participated in different women groups and organizations since 1993, car driver. (St. Petersburg)
- 13) Olga Krauze (1953), lesbian, musician, poet and artist, one of the main leaders of St. Petersburg sexual minorities' scene; her story was especially analyzed in section 3.3.

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