

# **POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME: MOSCOW ACTIONISM AS A CAUSE CÉLÈBRE**

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## **Abstract**

Political activism in the authoritarian state is an interesting phenomenon. Despite commonly held beliefs that in Russia the civil society did not develop since the disintegration of the USSR, I argue that given the minimal democracy within an authoritarian state can produce certain forms of political protest. In particular, I discuss the emergence of so-called Moscow Actionism, with its eccentric representatives, who managed to grasp international community's attention. Using the discourse analysis of the material provided by the activist and the process tracing of the modified "boomerang pattern" theory I explain how ideas voiced by the political activists in limited conditions are diffused outside and, as a result, help develop the civil society in the authoritarian regime.

## Contents

<b>Abstracts .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Contents.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 - Theoretical Framework, Literature and Methods .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1. <i>Research topic</i> .....	7
1.2. <i>Literature review</i> .....	8
1.3. <i>Theoretical background</i> .....	14
1.4. <i>Research design and method</i> .....	18
<b>Chapter 2 - “Political Art” in Authoritarian Russia .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1. <i>Moscow Actionism</i> .....	21
2.2. <i>Diffusion and Actionism</i> .....	24
<b>Chapter 3 - Forms of Actionism: Individual and Groups Actionism .....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1. <i>Petr Pavlensky and His “Political Art”</i> .....	27
3.2. <i>Group Activism Case: Pussy Riot</i> .....	33
3.3. <i>Results</i> .....	37
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>41</b>

## Introduction

The existence of political activism in a society can be regarded as one of the features of civil society.<sup>1</sup> The practices employed by the political activist groups alongside the ideas, which serve as the cornerstone of the activities undertaken by political groups, emerge and subsequently operate differently depending on the country. Particularly, the diffusion<sup>2</sup> of ideas of political activist groups or activists largely depends on the importance of the problem that they address. Moreover, it depends on the type of the regime they operate in. Authoritarian regimes tend to suppress any kind of the political initiative that may undermine their system.<sup>3</sup> In the regimes where civil society does not have a say, the mobilization from below becomes one of the few ways towards the democratic path.<sup>4</sup> In this research, diffusion is understood as a process, rather than as an outcome. Since the diffusion is mainly used to explain the contagion effect of the conflict with regard to ethnic minorities, I decided to apply this concept to the diffusion of ideas in the political activism existing in authoritarian regimes, in particular, to the case of Russia. The scope of the diffusion of ideas largely depends on the importance of the problem it is eager to voice.

Russia is an authoritarian state, thus the government has a grip on any individual or group that may challenge its authority. Considering this case, that of a country where citizens do not have

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<sup>1</sup> "Members of groups within civil society must experience themselves as normally free from official repression and from regulation that conscripts their identities, membership, and self-government. Civil society is unintelligible without defined limits both to the means government can legitimately use to regulate groups and to the justifications that count in such regulation." For more detailed explanation see Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post, *Civil Society and Government*, (Princeton University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>2</sup> "Diffusion can take place also within countries, among a wide range of public and private actors, and it can lead to the spread of all kinds of things, from specific instruments, standards, and institutions, both public and private, to broad policy models, ideational frameworks, and institutional settings." For more detailed explanation see Fabrizio Gilardi, "Transnational Diffusion: Norms, Ideas, and Policies," *Handbook of International Relations* 2 (2012): 454-455.

<sup>3</sup> "Authoritarianism is a theory and a system of government customarily linked with dictatorship, in contrast to democracy. It is a principle based on obedience to authority, and opposes autonomy of individuals in thought and action. As a form of government, authoritarianism concentrates power in a leader or in a small elite not constitutionally accountable to the people." For more detailed explanation Robert Bedeski, "Authoritarian System," *Government and Politics*, Vol. 1, (2009): 2.

<sup>4</sup> Karine Clément, "New Social Movements in Russia: A Challenge to the Dominant Model of Power Relationships?" *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 24, no. 1 (March 2008): 68.

the complete freedom of expression, the aim is to investigate the formation, transmission, and diffusion of ideas of political activist groups. Non-democratic regimes do not tolerate the presence of non-state organized activism or of any movements with a political message. These regimes tend to eradicate them by replacing them with state-financed NGOs and associations.<sup>5</sup> There is also a view that with the adoption of a non-democratic regime, the civil society starts to grow hand in hand with the “attempted state control”, which results in “a new consultative authoritarianism model.”<sup>6</sup> The authoritarian regimes, in this case, want to create a civil society that is oriented towards “service delivery” rather than their “policy advocacy.”<sup>7</sup> However, there are still multiple ways, through which political activism can be expressed. There are NGOs, which are in most cases formed by volunteers and usually have a prominent political role. With the consideration of the repressive governments, the forms of political activism manage to spread ideas using the social networks, which in the case of Russia are promoted through Vkontakte.ru and Twitter. Three main actors involved in the process of diffusion are the form of political activism, which includes the political activist group or an individual activist, the government and transnational actors that express their support by granting awards, sending support and publishing letters of support.

In this research, I will focus on the form of protest<sup>8</sup> that first appeared in Russia in 1990s – actionism. Actionism is one of the expressions of art, which is sometimes confused with the performance, which originated in the 1960s in Europe, in particular in Vienna. Even though there are quite a few disagreements regarding the similarities and differences between actionism and performance, I consider these two types of art as different from each other. Actionism differs from the performance because it is oriented towards the audience and has the aim to

<sup>5</sup> Guillermo O’donnell and Philippe C Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule Tentative Conclusions Uncertain Democracies*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Jessica C Teets, *Civil Society under Authoritarianism: The China Model*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 145.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>8</sup> “Protest is defined as joint (i.e. collective) action of individuals aimed at achieving their goal or goals by influencing decision of a target.” For more detailed explanation see Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 38-39.

reach some result, such as attracting attention, challenging the audience's worldview or, in this case, criticizing the authoritarian regime.<sup>9</sup> The actionists mainly want to blur the line between the reality and the art and express their ideas through the actions oriented towards the audience, or creating a rock group, etc.<sup>10</sup> However, the word performance that I am using in this research does not fall under the umbrella of the type art called performance. But the activities done by the actionists are usually mistakenly called by performance in both Russian and Western media.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Russian actionism today took another direction and transformed into street action, to the street protest, which would challenge the authoritarian regime and make the audience or the society "think" about the development. So even though some Russian activists engage in the performance, as it is usually presented in the media, they usually define their protests as the *street action*.<sup>12</sup> Thus, I interpret actionists as the protesters and their actions as the protest by presenting two case studies: one of the individual and another of group activism.

As Rosenblum and Post argue "the boundary between civil society and government is located differently in diverse political regimes."<sup>13</sup> I consider that in the case of the authoritarian regimes we have the state-society dichotomy. The combination of words "state-society dichotomy", used in this research represents society as the unit autonomous from the state apparatus. From this standpoint, a state is always viewed as the coercive power, while society as the fighter for freedom and for the ideas they believe in.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to this view, many scholars believe that any protest or initiative from the civil society's side against the authoritarian regime is part of the discourse that was created by the authority. Thus, any action undertaken by the civil society is the

<sup>9</sup> Maria Mikhantieva, "Chto Takoe Performans I Aktsionizm I kak Ikh Razlichit?" [What is Performance and Actionism and How to Differentiate Them?], *The Question Beta*, August 2015, accessed May 29. <https://thequestion.ru/questions/26363/chto-takoe-performans-i-akcionizm-i-kak-ikh-razlichit>.

<sup>10</sup> Andrej Kovalev, *Rossiiskij Aktsionizm*, [Russian Actionism], (Vord Art Muzej, [Word Art Museum], 2007), 7

<sup>11</sup> Maria Mikhantieva, "Chto Takoe Performans I Aktsionizm I kak Ikh Razlichit?" [What is Performance and Actionism and How to Differentiate Them?], *The Question Beta*, August 2015, accessed May 29. <https://thequestion.ru/questions/26363/chto-takoe-performans-i-akcionizm-i-kak-ikh-razlichit>.

<sup>12</sup> Alek D. Epstein, *Post-Post-Soviet?: Art, Politics & Society in Russia at the Turn of the Decade*, (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2013), 272.

<sup>13</sup> Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post, *Civil Society and Government*, (Princeton University Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Marie Perinova, "Civil Society in Authoritarian Regime: The Analysis of China, Burma and Vietnam," BA th., Lund University, 2005, 7. Retrieved from <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/1330580>.

part of the government's discourse and that makes the state-society dichotomy impossible. For example, Lewis states that "instead of inculcating more democratic values [they] have come to reflect the dynamics, behaviors, and attitudes of the authoritarian state in their own structures and operations."<sup>15</sup>

I oppose the view that the activist groups and activists whose ideas oppose the authoritarian government are a part of the discourse of the ideas that they do not agree on. This would mean that the activists engage in domestic and international politics carried out by the authoritarian government, or they are the constitutive part of the government's discourse. It should be noted that activists in Russia differentiate political and non-political spheres of engagement. When they engage in non-political activism, their priority and primary cause of the engagement is *solidarity*, since they perceive themselves as a collective "us."<sup>16</sup> In the case of the non-political activism, the authoritarian regime is not eager to oppose the ideas or the actions undertaken by them.

However when the activist engages in the political sphere, here comes the state-society dichotomy, since it is inevitable to have autonomy from the power that they oppose. However, the collective "us", or the solidarity is formed in both cases and represents the first step towards the formation of the activism.<sup>17</sup> Finally, I believe that civil society can operate in the authoritarian regime at a certain level.

Following this logic, I argue that the political activism in Russia that aims at creating the civil society is reinforced by the transnational contacts and ideas that are initially formed domestically and subsequently diffused outside to grasp international attention. In order to justify my argument, I will use the theory known as the "boomerang pattern." The term was coined by

<sup>15</sup> David Lewis, "Civil Society and the Authoritarian State: Cooperation, Contestation and Discourse," *Journal of Civil Society* 9, no. 3, (September 2013): 327-328.

<sup>16</sup> Natalia Sedova, "Grazhdanskij Aktivizm V Sovremennoj Rossii: Formaty, Faktory, Social'naja Baza", ["Civil Activism In Contemporary Russia: Formats, Factors, Social Base,"] *Sociologičeskij Žurnal*, [Sociological Journal], no. 2, (2014): 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> S.V. Patrushev, "Grazhdanskaja Aktivnost' Kak Faktor Modernizacii," ["Civil Activity as A Factor of the Modernization,"] *Modernizacija i Politika v XXI Veeke*, *Modernization and Politics in the XXI Century*, 2011: 272.

Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink in order to explain how NGOs attempt to bypass their states and look for international support to reinforce their ideas.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, it was usually applied to understand the spread of information from one state's NGO to another.<sup>19</sup> In this research, I will substitute the NGOs by the activist and activist groups that aim at empowering the civil society by grasping the international attention. Since they cannot challenge the government directly, the transnational support would help develop the civil society and influence the authoritarian government. The diffusion of ideas in the case of Russia mainly operates in the direction of the West rather than towards the East. This will serve as the explanation on how Russian political activist groups engage in the developing of the civil society to challenge the Russian government.

One case of group political activism and one case of individual political activism will be presented. As an individual case, I chose the art-activist, Petr Pavlensky, who tried to influence society in his eccentric manner, and who managed to become internationally known. During one of his protest actions, Petr set fire to one of the security services headquarters on Lubyanka Square.<sup>20</sup> After imprisonment, he sent an open letter from the prison to the University of Tartu, which published his letter on their website and was one of the institutions that supported his actions.<sup>21</sup>

The second case is Pussy Riot, the punk rock group, which is at the same time eager to challenge the Russian government, accused of the violation of women's and LGBT rights and suppressing the civil society.<sup>22</sup> Pussy Riot grasped international attention by its courageous actions, the critic of the Russian Orthodox Church and by bringing the importance of feminist rhetoric to the

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Keck E and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, (Cornell University Press, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Shaun Walker, "Protest Artist Petr Pavlensky in Court after Setting Fire to Lubyanka," *The Guardian*, April 18, 2016, accessed May 30, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/28/petr-pavlensky-appears-court-russia-setting-fire-to-lubyanka-protest>.

<sup>21</sup> Roman Leibov, "A Letter to Tartu Students from a Moscow Prison | UT Blog," *UT Blog*, June 2, 2016, accessed May 31, 2017. <http://blog.ut.ee/a-letter-to-tartu-students-from-a-moscow-prison/>.

<sup>22</sup> "Pussy Riot: The Story so Far," *BBC News*, December 23, 2013, accessed May 23, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25490161>.



society, due to the belief that the women were marginalized and discriminated against by the government side. I would emphasize the state-society dichotomy in order to identify the discourse pursued by the group activist group.

The rationale for choosing both cases is driven by the fact that both of them managed to gain international support and are deemed to be the “Western” in the negative sense. The rationale is further driven by the fact that both cases became internationally popular and caused a wave of support from all over the world. The unit or the level of analysis, in this case, includes individual and the institutional level as well.

I conclude that one of the ways that transnational character of the political activism can be explained is the diffusion of the ideas, created, employed and interpreted by the political activist groups and individuals. The political activism in the authoritarian Russia that emerged as the result of the repressive and limited conditions for the development of the civil society, resulted in the revival of the new form of protest, called Moscow Actionism. The issue of the transnationality becomes inevitable when political activism has to face the grip of the authoritarian regime, eager to suppress the freedom of expression. Given the examples of individual and group activism, the dynamics of the interaction between them and the government with the help of diffusion of ideas influences the conditions, under which the civil society can be reinforced.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework, Literature and Methods

### 1.1. Research topic

I will research how the notion of the protest in the authoritarian regime can be interpreted and explained by the introduction of the rather unexplored form of political expression that the political activists and groups form inside the authoritarian regime. I also emphasize the existence state-society dichotomy, or the political activists and groups being independent of the authoritarian government. The protests that occur in the authoritarian states may have a different form of expressing themselves since the civil society cannot be fully empowered, so the activists and activist groups serve as one of the ways to contribute to the development of the civil society. This is the reason why, in the case of Russia, I bring the example of actionism, which is considered to be the type of the art that is expressed not through creating a painting or a sculpture, but through the extreme erasure of the boundaries between the art and the reality. Since actionists cannot pressure the government directly, they engage in the protests that have the political message, which subsequently grasps the international attention thanks to the ideas diffused outside the country.

The form of activism that developed in Russia in light of the limited condition for the development of the civil society is called Moscow Actionism, which has been practiced in Russia since the 1990s. The actionism in Russia has not always been politically motivated, however, the more the authoritarian regime was becoming evident, the more actionists were in favor of protesting against it. Their political message opposes the unacceptable reality and strives for the reconsideration of the values that discourage the process of building the true civil society. Thus, actionism views the state-society interaction as independent of each other. It opposes the inclusion of the civil society in the discourse proposed by the regime per se. It corresponds to the

state-society dichotomy within the state with the minimal democracy. Thus, if the state has the minimal democracy, that determines the existence of the civil society within the authoritarian regime at a certain level.

The groups and individuals that engage in the actionism, as I already mentioned, are oriented towards the outcome, and as the outcome, they challenge the authority in an eccentric way, which in its turn results in grasping the international attention. Protesting in the states where the freedom of speech and basic liberties are violated takes quite a bit of courage and deserves the support if viewed from the Western discourse.

International attention in its turn is brought by the ideas that were the voice during the protests and further diffused to the West. The West subsequently absorbs these ideas, promotes them through the media and by granting the attention to these activists and giving them the support they contribute to the development of the civil society within the authoritarian regime or the place from where the ideas originated. Thus, the authoritarian regime, which operates within the place of origin of these ideas, in its turn, is challenged by the ideas diffused to the West. The “boomerang pattern” is used in order to explain this process and follow the logical sequence. As the result of the “boomerang pattern,” the civil society in the authoritarian state can be developed and influenced in a good way, even though it cannot directly pressure the government.

## **1.2. Literature review**

The literature review includes the literature on the transnational activism, civil society in light of the authoritarian regime and protests in the case of Russia, in particular, the form of the political activism in Russia called actionism. Before moving to the transnational activism, I want to find out whether political activism that involves more than one person in Russia alongside the

outcomes of the actions could be explained through the framework of social movements. Opp provides with the sophisticated differentiation of the social movement from the protest.<sup>23</sup> The social movement should be distinguished from the protest in order to avoid any misunderstanding of the activities undertaken by the actionists. The social movement according to Opp includes the mass mobilization, which is aimed at pressuring the target in order to change the decision.<sup>24</sup> The protest should not necessarily involve the mass mobilization and can only influence the decisions made by the target. However social movement should not be completely distinguished from the protest because the social movements engage in the protests in order to reach their aims. Thus, the protest is ontologically prior to the social movement.

Moreover, Beissinger gives a historical overview of dynamics of the mobilizations, demonstrations and other forms of political activism before the disintegration of the USSR. In particular, he sheds light on the emergence of the nationalism, its contention and using it as the form of the mobilization of masses, which is applicable to the case of the USSR.<sup>25</sup> Beissinger argues that in light of the unstable situation the USSR in the end of the 1980s the Nineteenth Party Conference of 1988 resulted in the diffusion of the politics. The local parties' control was no longer strong enough and resulted in the emergence of the social movements, called "popular fronts in support of perestroika", which contributed to the consequent waves of demonstrations all over the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> What is important in this book, is the reason for the emergence of the mass mobilization, which Beissinger described as the "domino effect", since one protest was following another, making the collapse of the USSR as the outcome of the transnational mobilization.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 38-39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 80-81.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 68.

In support, Jakulski gives the overview of social movements from the historical standpoint, and argues that usually social movements are accompanied by the “ongoing spontaneous protests.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, in this literature review, I will not be focusing on the social movements and the mass mobilization, since it has greater outcomes and activists cannot be analyzed in the same way as the social movements due to the existence of individual activism. The theories applicable to the social movements and mass mobilization cannot contribute to the understanding of the transnational support of the smaller political activist groups of individuals.

Moving to the topic about the civil society in the authoritarian regime, Levitsky and Way argue that after the end of the Cold-War so-called hybrid regimes<sup>29</sup> emerged in most of the countries.<sup>30</sup> “Competitive Authoritarianism”<sup>31</sup> is only one type of the hybrid regime and it applies to Russia under Vladimir Putin as well. These hybrid regimes create the basis for the “arenas of contestation” between the authoritarian government and the activists, thus authors argue that Russia is not the case of the full-scale authoritarianism. Even though giving the precise level of the authoritarianism in Russia is beyond the scope of the research, I agree with the author regarding the possibility of an existence of activism and some of the democratic features of the authoritarian regimes, or as they call the competitive authoritarian regimes.

As for the transnational activism, Keck and Sikkink talk about the emergence of transnational networks and a means of their existence, the possibility of the deconstruction of transnational

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<sup>28</sup> Jan Pakulski, *Social Movements: The Politics of Moral Protest*, (Longman Cheshire, 1991), xiv.

<sup>29</sup> “Regimes may mix authoritarian and democratic features in a variety of ways, and competitive authoritarianism should not be viewed as encompassing all of these regime forms.” For more detailed explanation see Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 54.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “In competitive authoritarian regimes, formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy.” For more detailed explanation see Ibid: 52.

advocacy networks<sup>32</sup> to understand better the idea of their formation.<sup>33</sup> Their book serves as the cornerstone for the explanation of the theory of the “boomerang pattern.” The authors argue that the idea of transnational political activism has been marginalized among the IR scholars. Thus, my research would contribute to filling this gap by explaining the dynamics of the relations between the protest groups and the government. Kick and Sikkink highlight the role of the third party and emphasize that with the help of the transnational advocacy network the NGOs dealing with three important issues: human rights, environment, and women’s rights, which managed to sustain and achieve their goals.<sup>34</sup>

Clifford sheds light on the so-called transnational marketing.<sup>35</sup> Clifford disagrees with the “rosy view” that the NGOs and TANs alongside the media coverage would help unearthing the problems that domestic movements that want to “counterbalance the power-hungry amorality of states and the grasping self-interest of corporations.”<sup>36</sup> However, he agrees that is applied to the activists, the possibility to get noticed by the third parties is higher, rather than in the case of the social movements in the developing world. After posing a question about why one group managed to grasp the international attention while others fail. He argues that the attention from the NGOs or TANs is determined by the marketing and strategy, promoted by the support-seeking group per se.<sup>37</sup>

However, little literature focuses on the political transnational activism and in turn offers broad literature on the transnational activism focusing on the human and labor rights. Moreover, transnational activism almost always addresses the NGOs and the support of the TNAs, whereas

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<sup>32</sup> “Transnational advocacy networks (TANs), loosely formed groupings of NGOs, activists, foundations, journalists, bureaucracies, and other, all of whom are bound by “shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.” For more detailed explanation see Margaret Keck E and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, (Cornell University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Bob Clifford, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 3.

this research concentrates on a form of the political activism, called actionism, which in the case of Russia emerged in the 1990s and as the result of the diffusion of the ideas manages to grasp international support, which in fact makes it transnational. For example, Rodio and Schmitz discussed the development of the transnational human rights activism since the end of the WWII, which are mainly represented by the NGOs.<sup>38</sup> Mihr and Schmitz argue that the transnational human right activism lacks the power to cooperate with the local human rights activists and sheds lights on the causes of this problem. As for the Hodgson and Brook, they call for the NGO-ization of the contemporary activism that would be easily accommodated easily in the “neoliberal capitalist and state regimes.”<sup>39</sup> Finally, they mention the activist women, who organize “small protest”<sup>40</sup> to fight for their rights and the building of the civil society. Thus, when talking about the transnational activism, the scholars omit any other forms of activism, in particular, the actionism.

While focusing on Russian activism, the Russian academia argues first of all if there is a political activism in the country at all and secondly, it provides the general tendencies, upon which the framework for the analyzing of the political activism in Russia can be built. Sedova considers political activism in Russia as the reality that they should face by presenting quantitative data, identifying that since the dominant form of political participation is elections, the people engaged in political activism constitute only 14 % of the population, while the civic inclusion in the non-political activism represents 45% of the population.<sup>41</sup> Sedova argues that the successful people, with good educational background and high social status, form the contemporary activism in Russia, including political.<sup>42</sup> Since I argue that the political activism in Russia is represented also by the art-activists, I contest the conclusion made by Sedova. The cases of individual and groups

<sup>38</sup>Emily B. Rodio, and Hans Peter Schmitz, “Beyond Norms and Interests: Understanding the Evolution of Transnational Human Rights Activism,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 14, no. 3 (May 2010): 442–59.

<sup>39</sup>Dorothy L. Hodgson and Ethel Brooks, “Introduction: Activisms,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 2007, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Natalia Sedova, “Grazhdanskij Aktivizm V Sovremennoj Rossii: Formaty, Faktory, Social'naja Baza”, [“Civil Activism In Contemporary Russia: Formats, Factors, Social Base,”] *Sociologičeskij Zhurnal*, [Sociological Journal], no. 2, (2014): 50-51.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid: 69.

activism will show that activists do not necessarily have the high social status, their background is diverse. For example, the members of the art group "Voina" Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Petr Verzilov were coming from completely different families and cities. While Nadezhda is from the small city and a poor family, Verzilov is coming from the well-off family with dual, Russian-Canadian citizenship.<sup>43</sup>

Patrushev argues that civic activism, which in this case includes the non-political issues, facilitates the differentiations of the social spheres and of individuals belonging to it. When there is no such differentiation, the civic and political activism are usually confused within the society, but not by the government. The differentiation, as he thinks, leads to the easier path towards the democratization. Moreover, he concludes that activist minority or activist individuals who engage in the protest face the opposition from the government, which is not even eager to make the decisions or responding to it somehow.<sup>44</sup> For Patrushev the cause of this problem lies in the lack of the modernization of the society and the government, which he defines as the transition to the "contemporary condition,"<sup>45</sup> or to the modern. Another article presented by the number of Russian researchers provides with the argument that organized political activism is available only for the small part of the Russian population.<sup>46</sup>

Henry analyzes the condition within which the social activism started to develop in Russia after the disintegration of the USSR.<sup>47</sup> Apparently, three types of organizations were developed in Russia: grassroots, professionalized and government-affiliated organizations. Given the example of the environmental activist group, which in 2005 formed its own party – Union of Green or

<sup>43</sup> Vera Kuchanova, *Pussy Riot. A Real Story*, (Litres, 2012,) 12-13.

<sup>44</sup> S.V. Patrushev, "Grazhdanskaja Aktivnost' Kak Faktor Modernizacii," ["Civic Aktivism as A Factor of the Modernization,"] *Modernizacija i Politika v XXI Veeke, Modernization and Politics in the XXI Century*, (2011): 279.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid: 262

<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Vasil'evich Petuhov, Raisa Jeduardovna Barash, Natal'ja Nikolaevna Sedova, and Roman Vladimirovich Petuhov, "Grazhdanskij Aktivizm V Rossii: Motivacija, Cennosti I Formy Uchastija," ["Civil Aktivism in Russia: Motivation, Values And Forms of Participation,"] *Vlast', Power*, no. 9 (2014): 11.

<sup>47</sup> Laura Henry, "Shaping Social Aktivism in Post-Soviet Russia: Leadership, Organizational Diversity, and Innovation," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 22, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 99–124.



Green Russia, the civic activism that addresses the issues concerning the environment and is eager to include in the political agenda of the country have more opportunities to be politically active, though without considerable results.<sup>48</sup> Thus, civic activism in Russia has more possibility to develop, rather than political activism.

Finally, all of the aforementioned literature about the political activism in Russia does not focus on the forms of political protest in the authoritarian states. As the result of the actionism in Russia, e.g. in 2012, the diffused ideas cause the wave for the support from the international attention. As for me, this issue should be raised, since the actionism is the understudied topic in international relations due to its artistic roots. For example, Kovalev sheds light on the development of actionism in Russia, or as it is usually called the Moscow Actionism and analyzes the every stage according to the years until 2000, but he does not problematize the issue and provides only with the historical background.<sup>49</sup> I consider that actionism is one of the constituent parts of the political activist history since the creation of the independent state of the Russian Federation. Finally, in this paper, I will focus on the role of actionism in grasping international attention through the diffusion of ideas aimed at reinforcing the civil society within the authoritarian regime.

### 1.3. Theoretical background

The “boomerang pattern” was developed by Keck and Sikkink in their book *Activists Beyond Borders*. This pattern is applicable when “the state and its domestic actors are blocked.”<sup>50</sup> I believe that this description perfectly matches the “gap” made between the authoritarian government and the civil society, in particular, the activist groups, who engage mainly in the political sphere. The model originally demonstrates how the Third World NGOs, challenged by their owned

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid: 119.

<sup>49</sup> Andrej Kovalev, *Rossijskiy Aksiionizm*, [Russian Actionism], (Vord Art Muzej, [Word Art Museum], 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Keck E and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, (Cornell University Press, 1998), 12.

governments try to cooperate with international NGOs in order to make a change. The global North, as the authors call it, try to make a pressure on the government of the Third World and to give the NGOs free space to fulfill their agenda (see Fig.1). Clifford includes here the element of the marketing and the strategy, as he argues that the NGOs and TANs decide to support and finance those groups, which meet their expectations about and satisfy the criteria according to their market strategy.<sup>51</sup>

If we apply it directly to the case of Russian and view it from the standpoint of the diffusion of ideas, then the puzzle will be as follow. The first player or the players are the types of group or individual activists, who carry the idea and are eager to voice it. Considering the authoritarian government, which confronts and opposes any initiative that may undermine their ability to influence people, groups and activists seek the support from outside, in particular from the West. The diffused ideas serve as the cornerstone for the protests against the authoritarian regime from the Western society. Thus, if we follow the original “boomerang pattern”, these ideas would not have a static nature. They would be rather modified and reinterpreted in a different discourse from the Western supporters and following the aforementioned “boomerang effect” would be echoed back to the country from where they actually originated, e.g. in Russia. The problem is that ideas cannot be easily echoed back to the authoritarian state since it is too closed for any “Westernized” idea.

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<sup>51</sup> Bob Clifford, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

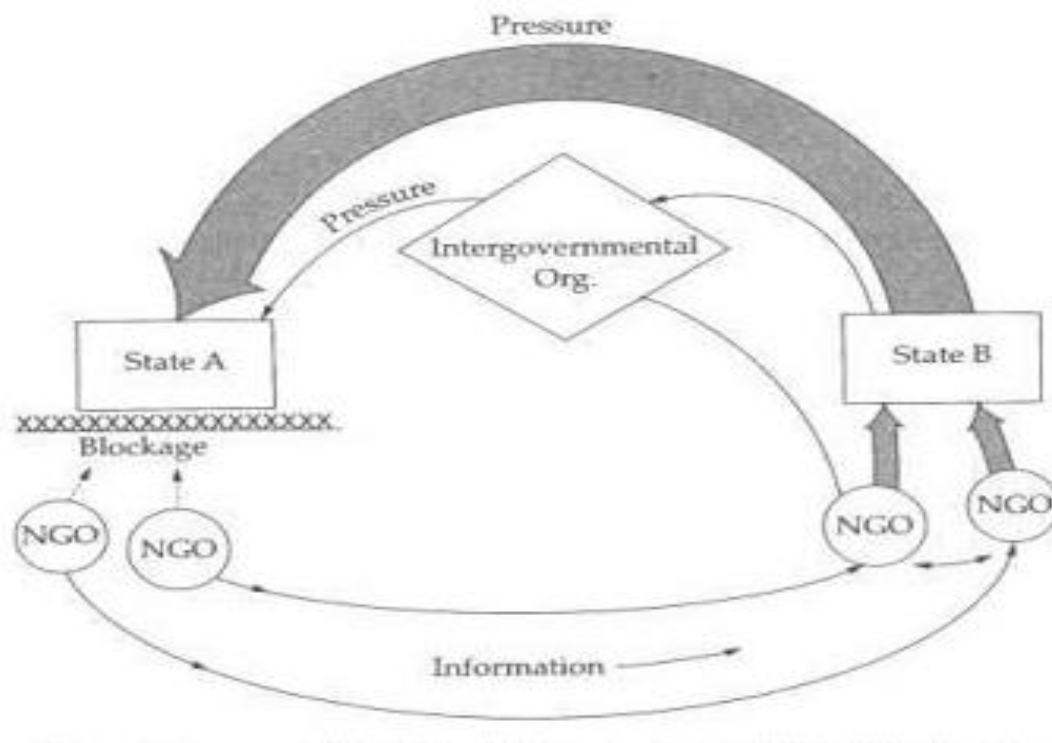


Fig. 1. Source: Margaret Keck E and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, (Cornell University Press, 1998), 13.

Therefore, I call for the modification of the “boomerang pattern” in order to apply it to the real condition in the case of Russia. The modified “boomerang pattern” would serve as the instrument of the diffusion of ideas from Russia and it will not involve the process of echoing back of the ideas to the country or origin. However, as the outcome, the diffused ideas would result in international support, which would eventually contribute to the development of the civil society and challenging the authoritarian government. In particular, when the actionists organize the protests in Russia, or in the authoritarian states, they challenge the government discourse by criticizing the issues that the government considers as important in order to stay in power. Since the authoritarian government does not tolerate any kind of the initiative that may undermine its importance within the society, it tries to eliminate any threat. However, the ideas promoted by the Russian actionists are diffused outside and subsequently supported by the West. The outcome or the support includes sending letters of support, granting awards and demanding the protection of the people, whose rights were violated.

To illustrate this theory, let us assume that Russian activists are A and the outcome that we get as the result of their actions is B, or the international support.<sup>52</sup> Russian activists, who try to pursue their goals, try to look for the support on the international level. In order to grasp the international attention, A in the case of Russia are the activists eager to contribute to the development of the civil society or as it is in the case of individual activist, try to act in an eccentric manner and become widely well-known. I call this process the diffusion of the ideas since I think that the actions generate the ideas that are subsequently diffused transnationally to the communities, the countries or in my case to the West in general, which would find it inevitable to support. Thus as the result of A's actions, we get to the outcome B, which in the cases of the individual and the group activism is the international support from the West and the attempts from the activist's side to contribute their bit to the development of the civil society. For example, the case of the individual activist is more vulnerable and does not have enough outcomes to have visible results for the reinforcement of the civil society. However, in the case of the group activism, the international attention is grasped more easily and thus grants more support to the protesters. For example, after the jail delivery, two members of the activist group Pussy Riot found the organization that offers the help to the prisoners.<sup>53</sup> The causal mechanism here is also evident, since A is largely interconnected with B, and A causes B, and result in the support from outside that empowers and develops the civil society opposed to the measures undertaken by the authoritarian government.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> By support I mean getting international awards, sending the letters of support from the institution, artists expressing their support openly.

<sup>53</sup> "Zona Prava", ["Zone of Right"], 2014, accessed May 31, 2017. <http://zonaprava.com>.

<sup>54</sup> Derek Beach, "Process Tracing Methods – an Introduction," (PhD workshop, University of Konstanz, Germany, March 16, 2012). Retrieved from [https://www.press.umich.edu/resources/Beach\\_Lecture.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-194,595.d](https://www.press.umich.edu/resources/Beach_Lecture.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-194,595.d)

#### 1.4. Research design and method

In order to understand the process of the diffusion of ideas and the character of the actors involved in it, I decided to use the comparative analysis of the cases. Since one of the cases represents the individual activism, while another one the group activism, it will be interesting to compare the outcomes and the level of influence on the authoritarian regime. The comparative analysis is applicable since my research is case-oriented and is aimed at understanding the outcome and the causes leading to the outcome. The cases are different since one of them includes the individual activist and another one represents the group activism.

The process tracing of the changes occurring transnationally will help understand the “boomerang pattern” better. There are three types of process tracing: theory-testing, theory-building, and explaining-outcome.<sup>55</sup> The aforementioned “boomerang pattern” fits mostly into the theory-testing since I know that as the result of running the intervention, or as the result of the Russian activist or an activist group trying to grasp the international attention, the outcome was produced – grasping international attention. Moreover, there is a causal link between these two phenomena. I also understand why the actions undertaken by activist entities in Russia produced such an outcome. Thus, by applying process tracing to the “boomerang pattern” to the diffusion of ideas, I additionally underline the importance of transnational actors and networks that largely contribute to grasping the international attention to the problem raised by the country with an authoritarian government.

Lene Hansen’s *‘A User’s Guide: Analyzing Security As Discourse: Security As Practice: Discourse Analysis And The Bosnian War’* can contribute its bit in the understanding how the discourse analysis can be built considering the songs and interviews from the Russian political activist group or

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

individual. The example of the research design on Western Debate on the Bosnian War should be relevant in this case if it is aimed to observe through the prism of my case studies.<sup>56</sup> The textual material analysis in its turn will help to structure and collect all the textual data needed for the effectiveness of discourse analysis and constituting the key findings.<sup>57</sup> To explore the ideas promoted by the activists that would help to undertake the comparative analysis of two cases, I will use the textual analysis of published letters and interviews of Petr Pavlensky, who has a very interesting way of expressing himself, since he uses complicated combination of words, by citing the Russian philosophers and writers in order to emphasize his belonging to collective “us” and the devotion towards the improvement of the society. As for the case of the Pussy Riot, I would analyze few songs performed by the group during their protests in order to understand what are the basic problems that they are eager to deal with. Analyzing the statements made by the activists will help me to understand their perception of the society and of the state-society interaction.

The second chapter sheds light on the formation of the particular form of political activism in Russia, called actionism. First, I mention what lead to paralyzing of the civil society in Russia and the reasons for the state-society dichotomy. Further, I shed light on the development of the political activism in Russia and its importance. Finally, I explain what role diffusion plays in the case of the political actionists within the authoritarian regime of Russia.

In the third chapter, I will present the cases of individual and group activism in relation to the government. I will present the case studies of both group and individual political activism, in particular of a political activist group that is constantly influenced by the support from the outside and are constantly mentioned in the Russian and Western media. The interviews, lyrics of

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<sup>56</sup>Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 88.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid: 92.

the songs for the will be provided. Finally, I conclude that the type of the political activism or the form of the protest, called actionism is an understudied topic in international relations.

## Chapter 2: “Political Art” in Authoritarian Russia

Post-Soviet states do not have a long history of democratic institutions, thus compared to Western countries, the development of the civil society is an issue to consider. In most of these states in the 1990s the control over the state and economic institutions was fragmented, and then this “generated the political competition even where civil society remained weak.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the democratic pluralism did not oppose the elites that much, since elites were eager to preserve them, rather than avoid them. Tolerating the contestation on the same level as it was during the Soviet Union is one of the reasons why civil society did not manage to develop when Russia was drowned into the authoritarian regime.<sup>59</sup> This led to the empowerment of the elites and facilitated the transition to an authoritarian regime, which was gradually becoming apparent by the 2000s.<sup>60</sup> The case of Russia, compared to other Soviet states is particular since its authoritarian regime contributed to the emergence of a particular form of political activist, or the form of the protest, called actionism. In this chapter, I will shed light on the origins of the actionism in Russia and emphasize the connection of the actionism, diffusion within the authoritarian regime.

### 2.1. Moscow Actionism

After the disintegration of the USSR, Russia, which became the arena for the competition between the members of the elite, did not succeed in building a civil society that would at the same time lead to the emergence of political activism. The lack of engagement by Russian citizens in the political sphere of their country generated the special type of protest against the system. Actionism takes its roots from the 1960s, when in Vienna a group of artists engaged in violent

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<sup>58</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 63.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Alfred B. Evans, “The Failure of Democratization in Russia: A Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 40.



performances to challenge the authority.<sup>61</sup> Actionism in Russia was influenced by the Viennese actionism of the 1960s, but developed in the 1990s. The first wave of actionism in Russia did not have a political discourse and was simply oriented towards blurring the boundary between art and reality.<sup>62</sup> The breaking point in the history of actionism occurred in the 2000s, when one Russian activist, Oleg Mavromatti, crucified himself on the cross in front of the Institute of Culturology and consequently had to flee to Bulgaria.<sup>63</sup>

In today's Russian discourse, actionism is defined as "the tactics of certain, most often extremist-oriented social groups, which are based on unclear political goals, but spontaneous protest against the authorities."<sup>64</sup> The form, in which actionism embraces itself in Russia today, was initially created by the art-activist group called "Voina", which is translated as the "war."<sup>65</sup> The members of this group were Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Petr Verzilov, Oleg Vorotnikov and Natalia Sokol, who were subsequently joined by other activists. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova would subsequently become one the members of the activist group which would become well known worldwide, called Pussy Riot. Every protest that was organized by these groups addressed a political issue.<sup>66</sup> Initially, for example, "Voina" challenged the FSB and any government-affiliated institution that represented a threat to the development of civil society in Russia.<sup>67</sup>

Subsequently, with the emergence of Pussy Riot, the aim of this type of art was achieved as never before. Since the aim of actionism is to blur and eliminate the boundary between art and reality, the protest context addressed the problems that stagnate the development of civil society in Russia. This was the first time when the protest that was performed in such an unconventional

<sup>61</sup> "Viennese Actionism Movement, Artists and Major Works," *The Art Story*, accessed May 30, 2017. <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-viennese-actionism.htm>.

<sup>62</sup> Andrej Kovalev, *Rossiiskij Aksiionizm*, [Russian Actionism], (Vord Art Muzej, [Word Art Museum], 2007), 8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Ja. S. Marinenko, "Rossijskij Akcionizm: 1990-E I Sovremennost'," ["Russian Actionism: 1990-E and the Modernity"], *BBK*, (2015): 374.

<sup>65</sup> Vera Kuchanova, "Pussy Riot. A Real Story", (*Litres*, 2012,) 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 25.

way managed to depict the problems that society faces within the authoritarian regime so truly that it gained so much support worldwide.

The best definition of the actionism is given by Gimelshteyn, who explains it in the form that it exists today is as follows:

it is defined in various ways through the nature of the action by actively seeking the response in the social structure, striving to become not only an event, not for the subject of desire, but for the subject of the action. The political action is addressed to the masses and is designed to deconstruct, and then restore on a new social basis. At the sight of political action - in the logic of public correspondence - not the life of a person, but the life of the community.<sup>68</sup>

If before actionism was perceived only as art, today considering the case of Russia it should be perceived as “the mechanism of political communication.”<sup>69</sup> I would say that it should be perceived as the “mechanisms of political communication” between civil society and the authoritarian state. I mentioned above that the state-society dichotomy results in the autonomy of civil society from the authoritarian state. Thus, the miscommunication between these two and the conditions created by the government to oppose any kind of attempt by civil society to evolve results in finding ways to develop civil society. One of these ways, I believe, is Russian or as it is usually called Moscow actionism, which after almost 30 years’ history reached its apogee in 2012 when members of the punk activist group were imprisoned and subsequently supported by the international community.

I view the Moscow actionism as a particular type of protest, which originated as a result of the

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<sup>68</sup> Ya. G. Gimelshteyn., N. A. Dolotckaya, D. A. Schukin, “Etika Akcionizma: Hudozhestvennaja Praktika I Politicheskij Zhest,” [“Ethics of Actionism: Art Practice and Political Gesture”], *Istoricheskaja Otvetstvennost’: Ot Mifov Proshlogo k Strategijam Budushbego* *Historical Responsibility: From the Myths of the Past to the Strategies of the Future*, (2016): 162.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 156.

protracted state-society dichotomy within authoritarian Russia. Since the sources for the mobilization of Russian civil society is quite limited, other ways of expressing the protest towards the government emerged. Thus, in this research, I view Moscow actionism as an expression of the protest from civil society's side, by omitting its artistic base and taking into consideration only the political discourse that it promotes. The aim of these groups does not necessarily have to result in the outcome that will serve as a contribution towards empowering civil society. I emphasize that the attention grasped by the examples of individual and group activism within authoritarian Russian and the wave of support coming from them corresponds to the process of the "boomerang pattern." "Boomerang pattern" serves as the explanation as to why the activist groups managed to become internationally known and the importance of the diffusion of their ideas.

## **2.2. Diffusion and Actionism**

The diffusion of the ideas here is explained as the process rather than the outcome. Even though I argue that actionism indeed contributes to the development of civil society, given the limited sources and the opposition from the government's side, the process of developing the civil society does not occur easily. The actors that participate in the "boomerang pattern" in this case are the authoritarian state, the activist group or the individual activist and the transnational actor, who is not necessarily the group but also an individual. The ideas that are diffused in the "boomerang pattern" are closely interconnected with the problems that the activists address in their protests. In the case of Russia for example, the activist groups usually problematize the fact that civil society in Russia does not develop, that the Orthodox Church goes hand-in-hand with the government and prevents its development even more, that women's rights are violated etc. These are ideas that Western countries consider as an inevitable constituent part of civil society. Thus the diffused ideas are accepted and then supported by third parties. It should be noted that

after engaging in such protests the individual and group activism representatives usually find political asylum in the West.

The diffusion can be applied to anything, including the “ideational framework.”<sup>70</sup> Compared to the diffusion researched from the standpoint of separatist movements, for example Saideman and Ayres differentiate the reinforcement (the spread of some event Inside the country) and the spatial diffusion (the spread of some event outside the boundaries) have positive and negative results, which depend on the increasing or decreasing “the possibility of similar events occurring subsequently elsewhere.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, the case of Russia, if applied to this theory, should ideally be fitting in the positive reinforcing diffusion, since the protests occurred within the boundaries of the states, and increase the possibility of the similar event, taking place in another country. As I already mentioned in the beginning, I view the diffusion as the process, and the most important outcome is the support and attention from the international community. Diffusion is driving force of the “boomerang pattern.” It operates due to the fact that the problems, addressed within the authoritarian states, diffused outside and were supported by the West.

Another cause for the prevention of the positive reinforcing diffusion is the differentiation of the political activism by the authoritarian government. Authoritarian states perceive the political activism as compliant and non-compliant.<sup>72</sup> Compliant activism may involve the criticism of some policies undertaken by the regime; it does not oppose the basic features of the authoritarian regime. As for the non-compliant activism, it represents the protests against the whole system that may endanger the authority. Even though that compliant activism usually exceeds non-compliant activism, the authoritarian government usually fears that the part of compliant activism

<sup>70</sup> Fabrizio Gilardi, “Transnational Diffusion: Norms, Ideas, and Policies,” *Handbook of International Relations* 2 (2012): 454-455.

<sup>71</sup> William R. Ayres and Stephen Saideman, “Is Separatism as Contagious as the Common Cold or as Cancer? Testing International and Domestic Explanations,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 6, no. 3 (September 2000): 92-93.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander Libman and Vladimir Kozlov, “The Legacy of Compliant Activism in Autocracies: Post-Communist Experience,” *Contemporary Politics*, (July 8, 2016): 209.

would transform into non-compliant and pave the way towards the democratization. In order to prevent this process, the government usually internalizes the ideas and norms provided by the compliant activism to overlap the ideas promoted by the non-compliant activism.

I conclude that in the authoritarian regime of Russia the prospects for the development of civil society are strongly limited and actionism emerged as a particular form of protest, which can be regarded as partly successful. First, it was successful as it managed to gain not only international but also local attention. Second, some of the protests were so unusual and were performed in a way that the government did not know how to respond and failed to prevent the diffusion. In the following chapter the cases of individual and group activism are presented, reviewed, and analyzed through the interviews and the songs that belong to them. In both cases the performances carried out by the activists are perceived as protests, challenging the authoritarian regime and aimed at reinforcing civil society in Russia.

## Chapter 3: Forms of Actionism: Individual and Groups Actionism

In this chapter, I will shed light on two types of actionism: individual and group actionism. Petr Pavlensky as the representative of the individual activism compared to Pussy Riot did not manage to grasp much international attention and had to eventually leave the country. As for the example of the group activism, Pussy Riot members managed to survive after being jailed and create their own organization aimed at helping prisoners. Different outcomes of the cases belonging to the same form of the activism show that the more people rise the voice against the authoritarian regime, the more possible it is to contribute to the building of the civil society and developing political activism within the authoritarian regime.

### 3.1. Petr Pavlensky and His “Political Art”

Pyotr Pavlensky is an art-activist, who tries to oppose the authoritarian regime in an eccentric manner. Pyotr Pavlensky was born and raised in Saint Petersburg, where he considers himself as a member of the art encirclement, which is interested in the art. Pyotr studied art, but eventually he left the university, as he did not want to be integrated into “the general system of commercialization of art.”<sup>73</sup> Later, he started opposing not only the perception of art in the society, but his criticism touched the government as well. According to Pavlensky, art gave him “two important things: firstly, some useful information, and secondly, showed him the mechanics of breaking the personality and destroying the artist's potential as such, turning the artist into a service staff for the decorative superstructure of the regime. That superstructure hides the mechanisms of the power. All these educational institutions produce, in fact, artists-designers. Designers of what, you may ask, - of funds, grants, museums, galleries and other pleasant decorations for pastime. The state, of course, is the most coveted customer, it has a lot of

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<sup>73</sup> “Chem Horoshi Akcii Petra Pavlenskogo,” [“Why Pavlenskys’s Protests Are Good?”], *CABLOOK Onlajn-Zburnak: Chitat’, Smotret’, Slushat’*, [CABlook Online-Journal: Read, Watch, Listen], September 9, 2015, accessed May 22, 2017. <http://www.cablook.com/design-art/chem-horoshi-aktsii-petra-pavlenskogo/>.

money.”<sup>74</sup> Discourse, in which Pavlensky engages, throws down a gauntlet not only to the government, but also to the institutions that operate in the discourse of the authoritarian regime. Recalling Mulholland and Karen, “the social world is achieved by human action rather than existing independently of it.”<sup>75</sup> Pavlensky, thus, tries to distance himself from the consumer society and not to serve as the client in order to satisfy the need of the society, perceived through the discourse of the authoritarian state. To survive, he tries to challenge the reality by coming to notice with his protests. In all of his protests the producer is Pyotr Pavlensky himself and the recipient is the local society, as well as the media and Western institutions (which varies according to the cases).

His very first protest, called “Seam” was organized in July 2012 in support of the imprisoned feminist protest punk rock group “Pussy Riot”, which in this case is the context. Pavlensky expressed his support with his sewn mouth and holding a placard with the title saying “The Performance of the Pussy Riot was the overplaying of the popular process, undertaken by Jesus Christ.”<sup>76</sup> Peter Pavlensky’s protest was nothing more than standing in front of the Kazan Cathedral for an hour and a half. It should be noted that he tries to address the issue or as he considers, the problem or the threat for the preservation of the conscience in the society, in a very peaceful way. Thus, the discourse in which he engages is contradictory to the expectations of the authoritarian government, and it makes it even more difficult to accuse him of something.

Even though the activist was detained by the police, and subsequently checked by the psychiatrist, he still was released in several days. Moreover, the psychiatrist confirmed that Pavlensky was sane. We can see that the Russian government does not want to tolerate any

<sup>74</sup> Pavel Nikulin, “Ot Zashchity Pussy Riot Do Podderzhki Osuzhdennyh Za Terakty,” [“From Pussy Riot Defense To Supporting Convicts For Terrorist Attacks“], *Bol'shoj gorod, [Big City]*, November 11, 2015, accessed May 22, 2017, [http://bg.ru/society/ot\\_zaschity\\_pussy\\_riot\\_do\\_podderzhki\\_osuzhdennyh\\_z-23627/](http://bg.ru/society/ot_zaschity_pussy_riot_do_podderzhki_osuzhdennyh_z-23627/).

<sup>75</sup> Karen Healy and Joan Mulholland, “Discourse Analysis and Activist Social Work: Investigating Practice Processes,” *J. Soc. & Soc. Welfare* 25, (1998): 10.

<sup>76</sup> “Peterburgskij Hudozhnik Zashil Sebe Rot V Podderzhku Pussy Riot,” [“Petersburg Artist Sew His Mouth To Support Pussy Riot“], *RLA Novosti, [RLA News]*, July 23, 2012, accessed May 22, 2017, <https://ria.ru/society/20120723/707321040.html>.

protests that may endanger the support that it gets from people. The discourse of the government clashes with the discourse in which Peter engages. If for Peter this form of expressing his views is normal and serves as the catalyzer of the change, for the government that is feared to be challenged by the outrageous actions from the activist, this is “insane.”<sup>77</sup> He also stated that “this process over Pussy Riot is a gesture of power, which decided to show that it's time to shut up. [He] believe[s] that nowadays in Russia there can be no non-political art. They are under obvious pressure on society by the authorities. The country is plunged into darkness. And if a person is neutral to all this, then, therefore, he supports the regime. Whatever the artist does now, it cannot be apolitical at all. Artists, journalists, musicians, writers - all representatives of society – are responsible.”<sup>78</sup> Pavlensky thus reaffirms the state-society dichotomy and views it as the opposition to the authoritarian government. The “diffusion of the idea” occurred through the social media, as the picture of Petr with the sewn mouth holding the placard broke the record as one of the most powerful pictures of 2012 on Reuters and other websites.<sup>79</sup>

The next protest organized by Pavlensky was organized in May 2013. It was called “Carcass.” Again the protest was organized in peaceful conditions and a completely naked activist was placed in the barbed wire with the help of the volunteers. The protest was held the front of the building of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg. According to Pavlensky, his body represented the body of the society per se, since the government is eager to control every single citizen. The most important part of this process was the release of Pavlensky from the wires with the help of policemen. For Pavlensky it represents as if the government was “releasing the artist

<sup>77</sup> Anna Matveeva, “Chto Nado Znat': Petr Pavlenskij,” [“What You Need to Know: Peter Pavlensky,”], *Artgid*, [Artguide], October 10, 2014, accessed May 20, 2017, <http://artguide.com/posts/678>.

<sup>78</sup> Pavel Nikulin, “Ot Zashchity Pussy Riot Do Podderzhki Osuzhdennyh Za Terakty,” [“From Pussy Riot Defense To Supporting Convicts For Terrorist Attacks”], *Bol'shoj gorod*, [Big City], November 11, 2015, accessed May 22, 2017, [http://bg.ru/society/ot\\_zaschity\\_pussy\\_riot\\_do\\_podderzhki\\_osuzhdennyh\\_z-23627/](http://bg.ru/society/ot_zaschity_pussy_riot_do_podderzhki_osuzhdennyh_z-23627/).

<sup>79</sup> Ewan Palmer, “Best of 2012: Most Powerful Images of the Year,” *International Business Times*, December 28, 2012, accessed May 22, 2017, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/powerful-images-photos-2012-year-best-418916> and “Best Photos of the Year 2012,” *Reuters*, December 21, 2012, accessed May 22, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/news/picture/best-photos-of-the-year?articleId=JPRTR3BTJO>.



from the wire, the state immediately clung to him with “punitive spikes”<sup>80</sup>, because “the human body in the mechanism of power, state, society - is what is accused, jailed, injured.”<sup>81</sup> The aim of the protest was the criticism of the laws that suppressed political activism, increase in the number of political prisoners, restrictive laws on NGOs, laws on the propaganda of homosexuality. Pavlensky continues to engage in his particular discourse, as he states that “human body is naked, like a carcass, there is nothing on it, around it is a wire invented for the protection of livestock. These laws, like wire, keep people in individual shells: all the persecution of political activists, state repression represents the metaphor of this barbed wire fence. All this is done to turn people into a securely protected non-livestock, which can only consume, work and multiply.”<sup>82</sup> After Pyotr was released from the wires, he was immediately taken by the police to the Legislative Assembly. It is interesting that Pavlensky in his every protest tries to address everyone, regardless of the citizenship, religion or the political attribution.<sup>83</sup> Thus, his ideas can find the support from any society that faces the same problems. Gradually, his discourse started to embrace not only local but also the international community, what correspond to the process of the transnational diffusion of the ideas.

Later, on February 23, 2014, when in Russia Defender of the Fatherland Day<sup>84</sup> is celebrated, Pyotr organized another protest in support of Ukraine, called “Freedom.” This was the first protest, which was joined by other activists. This protest serves as a breaking point, as it transformed into something non-peaceful. If before Pavlensky had been in a static condition while protesting, this protest fell into a completely new discourse. Alongside the other activists,

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<sup>80</sup> “V Strastnuju Pjaticu,” [“On Good Friday”], *Radio Svoboda*, [Radio Freedom], May 8, 2013, accessed May 23, 2017. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/24978110.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> “Chem Horoshi Akcii Petra Pavlenskogo,” [“Why Pavlenskys’s Protests Are Good?”] *CABLOOK Onlajn-Zhurnal: Chitat’, Smotret’, Slushat’*, [“CABlook Online-Journal: Read, Watch, Listen”], September 9, 2015, accessed May 22, 2017. <http://www.cablook.com/design-art/chem-horoshi-aktsii-petra-pavlenskogo/>.

<sup>84</sup> “Defender of the Fatherland Day (or Men’s Day) is a truly Russian creation, first observed to mark the date of the creation of the Red (Soviet) Army in 1918.” For more detailed explanation see Varia Magakonova, “The History Behind Men’s Day in Russia,” *TripSavvy*, accessed May 30, 2017. <https://www.tripsavvy.com/mens-day-in-russia-february-23-1622488>.

he burned tires, sticks, metal sheets, anarchist flags and Ukrainian flags. They beat in metal sheets in order to create the effect of the ongoing fights in Ukraine. “Burning tires, flags of Ukraine, black flags and thunder of blows on iron is a song of liberation and revolution. The Maidan is irreversibly spreading and penetrating into the heart of the Empire. The fight against imperial chauvinism continues. The day when the state calls to celebrate the day of the Defender of the Fatherland, we urge everyone to stand on the Maidan holiday and protect their freedom.”<sup>85</sup> What makes this protest even more fascinating is the shift of the discourse and the recipient. The context here does not apply to the internal problems per se. Activists address the issue of international importance and the object of the criticism is the authoritarian or as they call it “imperial” government. The protest grasped the attention of Ukrainian media.<sup>86</sup>

The last and the most important protest, organized by Pavlensky is called “Threat.” It represents the best example of the protest that managed to grasp international attention. In November 2015 Pyotr set fire to the door of FSB (The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation).<sup>87</sup> This is the second protest in which the setting of fire has its symbolism, or as Pyotr thinks, “the arson of the tires is the result of which the fire became, and the fire is a symbol definite, in this case, a symbol of liberation.”<sup>88</sup> Liberation, in this case, does not correspond to the personal liberation, but to the liberation from the system, which exploits and controls the members of it. In all of the protests, organized by Pyotr Pavlensky, the state-society dichotomy is the inseparable part of the discourse. “This protest also got the official feedback from the FSB: the burning door of the Lubyanka is a glove thrown by society in the face of a terrorist threat, the Federal Security Service acts as a method of continuous terror and holds power over 146,000,000 people. Fear turns free

<sup>85</sup> “Gorjashhie Pokryshki I Stuk Palok Po Zhelezu - Majdan V Sankt-Peterburge,” [“Burning Tires And Knocking Sticks On Iron - Maydan In St. Petersburg,”] *Cenzor.NET*, February 23, 2014, accessed May 23, 2017. [http://censor.net.ua/photo\\_news/272418/goryaschie\\_pokryshki\\_i\\_stuk\\_palok\\_po\\_jelezu\\_mayidan\\_v\\_sanktpeterburge\\_fotoreportaj](http://censor.net.ua/photo_news/272418/goryaschie_pokryshki_i_stuk_palok_po_jelezu_mayidan_v_sanktpeterburge_fotoreportaj).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> “Akcii Petra Pavlenskogo: Put' K Vratam Ada,” [“The Protests by Petr Pavlensky. The Path to the Gates of Hell,”] *Krym. Realii, [Crimea. Realities]*, November 10, 2015, accessed May 23, 2017. <https://ru.krymr.com/a/27355670.html>.

<sup>88</sup> “Dopros Petra Pavlenskogo. P'esa V Treh Dejstvijah Snob,” [“Interrogation of Petr Pavlensky. A Play In Three Acts,”] *Snob, [Snob]*, July 29, 2014, accessed May 23, 2017, <https://snob.ru/selected/entry/77648>

people into a mass of disjointed bodies.” Thus, Pavlensky protests against the government by trying to challenge of-of its “wicked” institutions. This protest played an important role for one of the best universities in Estonia – the University of Tartu. The diffused ideas found the recognition in one of the courses taught at the University, in particular, “Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Culture.”<sup>89</sup> The lecturer contacted Pavlensky, even though he was imprisoned, Pavlensky sent the Letter as well, in which he traces back to the pre-revolution times, mentioned well-known Russian writers and tries to adapt their ideas to the Russian reality.

Moreover, this protest was awarded the Vaclav Havel Prize for Creative Dissident 2016. It is an international award created by the New York City-based Human Rights Foundation and is usually given to the dissidents who are courageous enough to challenge the injustices of the authority.<sup>90</sup> Eventually, Petr did not get the price, as he decided to contribute the received money to the teen-guerilla group Primorsky Partisans operating in the Far East against “the police terror.”<sup>91</sup> This protest represents the outcome of the diffusion of the ideas. However, even though the activist became internationally known and despite the support, the Western institutions are not ready enough to support any action that would undermine the institution secured by the authoritarian state (as it occurred in the case of Primorsky Partisans). Eventually, Petr Pavlensky had to migrate to France with his family due to the false accusation of the rape.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, Petr Pavlensky managed to grasp international attention by his eccentric protests. The discourse analysis of the ideas and opinions voiced by Pavlensky perfectly shows the discourse in which he actively engaged and perceives the state-society relations as dichotomized.

<sup>89</sup> Roman Leibov, “A Letter to Tartu Students from a Moscow Prison | UT Blog,” *UT Blog*, June 2, 2016, accessed May 31, 2017. <http://blog.ut.ee/a-letter-to-tartu-students-from-a-moscow-prison/>.

<sup>90</sup> “Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent,” *Wikipedia*, March 15, 2017, accessed May 25, 2017. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=V%C3%A1clav\\_Havel\\_Prize\\_for\\_Creative\\_Dissent&oldid=770501886](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=V%C3%A1clav_Havel_Prize_for_Creative_Dissent&oldid=770501886).

<sup>91</sup> Tom Balmforth, “Russian Protest Artist Pavlensky Loses Award,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, accessed May 23, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/pavlensky-havel-prize/27847886.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Agence France-Presse, “Radical Protest Artist Petr Pavlensky Flees from Russia to France,” *The Guardian*, January 17, 2017, sec, accessed May 25, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/17/radical-protest-artist-pyotr-pavlensky-flees-from-russia-to-france>.

### 3.2. Group Activism Case: Pussy Riot

Pussy Riot as the example of group activism represents a very interesting case. It consisted of approximately 30 members. Before some of the members belonged to the activist art group called “Voina”.<sup>93</sup> After gaining much experience in organizing and holding street protests, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, one of the founders of the Pussy Riot, decided to create her own group based on her view on what problems Russia faces.<sup>94</sup>

As it was in the case of Pavlensky, the choice of the place for the organizing of the protest was crucial. From another side, since the group was a fan of punk music, their protest always involved the performance of the songs, which serve as the best source for analyzing their discourse. The beginning of protests carried out by this group coincided with the period when the government, represented by the president Vladimir Putin, tried to preserve its control over society through framing new discourse, which can be understood as the “morality politics.”<sup>95</sup> The new discourse was the result of the 2011-2012 protests and the apogee of the rising of activism was the appearance of Pussy Riot. Russia’s completely new discourse was nothing new rather than the attempt to reaffirm and promote “traditional values” that should not be endangered by the “net-hamsters, sponsored by the West.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church<sup>97</sup> became the constituent part of the discourse and the cornerstone of Russian populations religious identity.

Finally, according to the aforementioned problems Pussy Riot’s discourse comprises three ideas that, that at the same time represent the problem within the authoritarian regime. First of all, Pussy Riot concentrates on the problem of the sexism in the society, which is supported and

<sup>93</sup> Vera Kuchanova, “Pussy Riot. A Real Story”, (*Litres*, 2012), 4.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, “The Pussy Riot Affair and Putin’s Démarche from Sovereign Democracy to Sovereign Morality,” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 4 (July 4, 2014): 615.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid: 617.

<sup>97</sup> According to the roommates of one of activists Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, she never criticized religion, but was very critical of the Russian Orthodox Church. See Vera Kuchanova, “Pussy Riot. A Real Story”, (*Litres*, 2012), 10.

promoted by the regime and the Russian Orthodox Church. The second idea is deeply interconnected with the first one, as they fight against the violation of the gay rights. The third idea is the problem of the suppressed civil society, which is not participatory and engaged mainly in the non-political activism, rather than in political. All of these problems were voiced through the political discourse, what additionally makes them as the example of the political activism.

Pussy Riot got more international attention rather than Petr Pavlesnky, the wave of support was coming from all over the world, including the well-known artists alongside various organizations. Discourse, which Pussy Riot engaged in, addresses the problems in a more participatory way. The first performance, which can also be deemed as a protest and made the activist group so popular, was held in the subway station in 2011. The activists covered their heads with hats and were dressed in bright colors and wearing balaclavas to attract the attention. Pussy Riot's songs represent the best way in order to understand the ideas that are used in their messages towards the audience. During this protest, the group performed the song, called "Release the Cobblestones."<sup>98</sup> It was mainly addressing the violation of women's rights in Russia and challenging the man-dominated society, or at it sometimes called macho society. In their second performance, which I perceive as the form of the protest, "Kropotkin-Vodka" they criticized the criticized the class differences, the problem of the poor and rich, alongside the Russian government and again mentioned the problem of the violation of women's rights. It is interesting that these two protests took part before the elections that were held in 2011. Thus, by performing these songs they once more distance the society from the corrupt government, which is full of the Putinists in Kremlin, which once more point son the state-society dichotomy.<sup>99</sup> The third song performed by the activists "Death to the Prison – Freedom to the Protest" was held in the post-election period in Russian Duma. The lyrics "Direct action – the future of mankind!

<sup>98</sup> See full lyrics here: "Release the Cobblestones," accessed May 30, 2017. <http://www.cheryledithbeckwith.com/items/show/1>.

<sup>99</sup> See full lyrics here: "Pussy Riot - Kropotkin-Vodka", Accessed May 30, 2017. <http://songmeanings.com/songs/view/3530822107859443960/>.

LGBT, feminists, defend the nation!”<sup>100</sup> reinforce the problem of the marginalized groups in the society, such as LGBT people and women. At the same time, this song once again calls for the opposition to the authoritarian regime in order to liberate the nation.

One of the most remarkable performances held by this punk group was in January 2012, when they performed near the Red Square. Like in the case of Petr Pavlensky, the Red Square is considered to be the closest place to the authoritarian regime, where the activists are ready to meet their enemy face to face. The song performed during this protest once again contained the political message criticizing the Russian Orthodox Church, sexist society alongside and the regime: Revolt in Russia - the charisma of protest! Revolt in Russia – Putin got scared! Revolt in Russia - We Exist! Revolt in Russia – Riot! Riot!”<sup>101</sup> The number of the activist during this protest was more, in sum there were eight people protesting. However, the most well known protest organized by the activist occurred in the main church of Moscow, in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior on February 21, 2012. Three members of the group dressed in colorful clothes and balaclavas (but the performance was organized by 5 members), performed the songs for not more than 90 seconds.<sup>102</sup> The song links the government with the Russian Orthodox Church and criticizes their close interaction, since they believe that this connection contributes to the paralyzing of the civil society even more.<sup>103</sup> Two of the girls, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Yekaterina Samutsevich, were arrested on March 5 after the performing of the song and were accused of “hooliganism” and imprisoned.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>100</sup> See full lyrics here “Pussy Riot: Smert’ Tjurme – Svobodu Protestu!” Accessed May 30, 2017. [http://www.mclub.com.ua/s\\_txt.phtml?sn=2396610&sid=56392](http://www.mclub.com.ua/s_txt.phtml?sn=2396610&sid=56392).

<sup>101</sup> See full lyrics here “Pussy Riot: Putin Zassal,” Accessed May 30, 2017. [http://www.mclub.com.ua/s\\_txt.phtml?sn=2396609&sid=56392](http://www.mclub.com.ua/s_txt.phtml?sn=2396609&sid=56392).

<sup>102</sup> Vera Kuchanova, *Pussy Riot. A Real Story*, Litres, 2012, 56.

<sup>103</sup> See full lyrics here Pussy, Riot. “Bogoroditsa, Putina Progoni / Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Banish Putin,” accessed May 30, 2017. <http://russmus.net/song/11998>.

<sup>104</sup> Vera Kuchanova, *Pussy Riot. A Real Story*, (Litres, 2012), 63.

During the trials the girls explained why they organized the performance and what they meant by “Putin”: “What our group does is a kind of civil activity in conditions of suppression of human rights, its political freedoms... Speaking of Putin, we mean the system created by him, the vertical of power.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, they criticize Putin not as the individual, but as the representation of the power. If we view from the prism of the state-society dichotomy, here it is more complicated since it encompasses not only the criticism of the government as of the paralyzer of the society, but it also includes the discrimination of women and criticism of the corrupt Russian Orthodox Church. The feminist rhetoric here is inherently symbolic and justified, since Putin’s hyper-masculinity is reflected in his way of using the power, or as Wood explains it: “(1) appearing to concentrate all power in his hands as the dominant male; (2) making it appear that he rules above the fray of ordinary politics and so is untouchable; yet also (3) establishing the connection of the ruler with the “masses” because of his rough and hence apparently “natural, unscripted masculinity.”<sup>106</sup>

The last performance serves as the example of the diffusion of ideas using the aforementioned “boomerang pattern”, since the imprisonment of the members of the groups caused the wave of criticism from all over the world. More than 100 well-known singers, such as Madonna, Sting and others signed the open letter by the Amnesty International, in which they expressed their disagreement with the imprisonment of Nadezha and Marija.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, the concerts in support of the group were held in various cities of Europe.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, during their imprisonment in one of the colonies of Mordovia and Perm regions activists were supported by the donations made to Pussy Riot Support Fund, which was initiated by the Voice Project.<sup>109</sup> One

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 113-115.

<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth A. Wood, “Hypermasculinity as a Scenario of Power: Vladimir Putin’s Iconic Rule,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 342.

<sup>107</sup> “Open Letter of Support to Pussy Riot,” *Amnesty International Canada*, July 22, 2013. <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/open-letter-of-support-to-pussy-riot>.

<sup>108</sup> Red Hot Chili Peppers and Madonna personally expressed their support while performing in Russia.

<sup>109</sup> “Pussy Riot Support Fund,” *Voice Project*. Accessed May 30, 2017. <http://voiceproject.org/campaign/pussy-riot-support-fund/>.

and a half year after the girls were released. Eventually, the girls decided to create the human right organization, in order to defend the rights of the imprisoned people. Two members of Pussy Riot created the organization called “Zone of Right” in 2014 and nowadays it serves as the platform to spread the information about the rights of the prisoners, providing with the legal help and any kind of possible support.<sup>110</sup>

### 3.3. Results

The cases of Petr Pavlensky and Pussy Riot represent a very particular form of protests, which addresses the problems of the life in authoritarian regimes, tries to send the political message in a very particular form, which at the same time contributes to that fact that their audience may misunderstand it. The political discourse, in which both cases of activism had a different context, different ways of the expression as well as different aims to be achieved. If Petr Pavlensky almost always preferred to protest without saying a word but proving his opposition by being e.g. naked, Pussy Riot engaged in a very loud performance that grasped even more attention. From this standpoint, it is clear that group political activism has more possibility to be noticed, rather than the individual political activism. Furthermore, the ideas upon which the members of Pussy Riot built their discourse corresponded to the Western society, as they addressed the problem of the paralyzed civil society, the right of women and the corrupt government-Church union.

Pussy Riot grasped more international attention rather than Petr did if we compare the number of supporters and of support letters alongside the organizations. Moreover, if Pussy Riot managed to have the local support even more rather than in the case of the individual activism, that mean that its discourse addressed the problems, which were important to the West more, rather than Petr did. Even though, diffusion of ideas and the “boomerang pattern” occurred in

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<sup>110</sup> “Zona Prava”, [“Zone of Right”], 2014, accessed May 31, 2017. <http://zonaprava.com>.



the both cases, since Petr was granted an award and Pussy Riot was popularized even among the singers. Moreover, despite the activist group does not exist anymore, the girls still engage in leveraging the civil society though defending the rights of the imprisoned people. Today the outcome of the protests organized by both representatives of the actionism does have enough effect, but their actions will be remembered and the ideas may serve for the subsequent generations that would engage in the actionism to challenge the authoritarian regime.

## Conclusion

It is interesting how so many unexpected and unpredicted processes can be ongoing in the authoritarian regime. Russia, where the basic liberties of the citizens are violated, the civil society does not have enough basis and opportunities to develop and become a constitutive part of the state. Therefore political activism alongside the people willing to contribute to it has to propose their ideas in limited conditions. Considering these conditions, the particular part of the civil society is still eager to protest, but in a particular way. When actionism developed in the 1990s it would not be expected that its representatives would cause a wave of support from all over the world.

The motivation to challenge the authoritarian regime includes a number of reasons, depending on the type of political activism mentioned in this paper. If Petr was addressing the problems more broadly, Pussy Riot was more specific by mentioning the violation of women's rights in almost every song. However, the main aim of these representatives of the Moscow Actionism is the developing the civil society. Civil society and government relations are dichotomized due to the different discourses that two sides engage in. The state-society dichotomy also points to the existence of the civil society within the authoritarian state and disagreement over the discourse promoted by the government. Thus, as a result of the eccentric protests, the state distances itself from the actionists more, by exacerbating the dichotomy. In reality, it can be interpreted as e.g., jailing the protesters due to the unrelated accusation "hooliganism".

However, the ideas for which the accused were imprisoned appeared to be very important for the Western society. Letters of support, international awards, support, expressed by well-known people all over the world helped at a certain level to release the members of Pussy Riot, who

consequently decided to contribute to the building up a civil society by founding the organization in support of jailed people.

Finally, the "boomerang pattern" which is explained here as the process, rather than as the outcome-oriented theory, helps to explain how the ideas originate, diffuse and then happen to be helpful in achieving some aims at a certain level. The political activism is not the first thing that the Russian civil society want to engage in, however, the part of it understands the necessity of raising the voice. Thus, I believe that the Moscow actionism with its eccentric representatives managed to influence the next generation somehow in order to challenge something that they do not want to be part of. Actionism, despite being usually perceived as a phenomena connected to art, is in fact political and engages in the protests.

Considering the existence of such practices of protest in Russia since the 1990s, it will be interesting to explore if in other countries with an authoritarian regime the actionists are engaged in such kind of protests and whether the outcomes differ from the ones presented in this research.

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