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Politics and Society in Federation Era Russia: Power Elites, Music and the Shaping and Manipulation of Culture and Identity

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Musical Innovation is full of danger to the whole state, and ought to be prohibited. When modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change with them."

Plato

"It is through music that the powerful myth of Russia's national character can best be understood. Russian art and music, like Russia itself, has always been tinged or tainted with an air of alterity – sensed, exploited, bemoaned, reveled in, traded on, and defended against both from within; and from without."

Richard Taruskin

This thesis will provide unique analysis and evaluation that will seek to demonstrate that contemporary Russian music viewed in a political context is important not only for what it is and what it can do, but also for what it can be used to do. Music is powerful, because it is embedded into societies in a way that enables it to influence the perspective, knowledge and behavior of the people who make up a society. As a concept, it is both a means of expression and of shaping. As much as it is an expression of emotion, thought or ideas, it has the ability to significantly shape them as well. As a key expression and shaper of culture and identity, music has been, and continues to be used to convey information, political messages and folk customs as well as other social and economic cues. The close connection between music and culture and identity, particularly politics as a key aspect of culture and identity, is arguably universal. Music both expresses and shapes – and in many cases defines – social, economic and political ideas, values, principles and behaviors. In the context of

government structures and the power elites whose interests are closely connected or aligned with them, music can be either favorable or unfavorable – either pro or anti. In this context, governments and power elites might provide aids or impose barriers to both the expression and impact of music as a shaper of culture and identity. This thesis examines the relationship between government and society in shaping and manipulating perceptions or even illusions of contemporary Russian culture and identity. Specifically, it explores the use of music to persuade, appease, or create support for, or marginalize or eliminate opposition to competing agendas of power elites within governing structures. The connection between music and politics is widely recognized through the work of scholars such as Jacques Attali, Ray Pratt, John Street and Thierry Cote, which were specifically examined in the literature review for this thesis. In contrast, detailed studies effectively addressing Russian music's role and significance in contemporary Russia are less common, especially from the Western perspective. This is important, because it raises a question. That is, "How well do we understand the nature of contemporary Russian music itself, or how contemporary Russian governments and power elites might use it to shape and manipulate illusions or perceptions of national culture and identity, and in addition, the barriers of musical content they have formed?"

a. Music: What is It?

Thought of in social and political contexts, music is both an expression and action. From the context of folk customs, it can be an expression of heritage or memory of the group. That memory and how it is interpreted can be an inspiration for some type of action. The interpretation of memory impacts the actions the past, present and the

future. Music's role in interpreting the past, present and future is played out through the combination of knowledge and action.¹ As an important part of culture and identity, music can be viewed to convey interpretations or perceptions – or illusions – of “truth.” Viewed in this way, music as a concept becomes larger. It becomes a window through which the view is much more expansive than the physical dimensions of the window frame. In essence, music as a concept encompasses much more than what can be seen. It is both expression and action, involving people as expressive actors and speech – or talk. Musicians become important as actors in creating and expressing – or performing – their music. This type of expression cannot exist without words and speech. Among other things, this means that music is an essential part of public life.

b. Music: What Can it Do?

Typically, day to day focus and concerns are on immediate needs and considerations of family, leisure and work. People might think that their relationship to politics is more indirect than direct.² Due to this perception, the average person may be unaware of the degree to which music is used to shape and manipulate perception and interpretation of culture and identity. One of the main purposes of music is to communicate, which raises the question, “To what effect?” Existing research indicates that music communicates – and reveals – beliefs, assumptions, values, ideals and principles that define and shape the character of communities.³ Music's capacity to communicate, shape and manipulate social, economic and political aspects of a society,

¹ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21-24.

² Geraint Parry et al, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 8.

³ Mark Mattern, *Acting in Concert: Music, Community and Political Action* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 15.

can be abused by power elites. The expression and action of musical power behind power elites (incorporating words, speech and a musical beat), generates opinions and attitudes on virtually any aspect of public life. In Western terms of representative democracy, these opinions and attitudes serve as a link between the people and their government, which serves to inform “legitimate authority in a functioning democracy.”⁴ In Western terms, these opinions and attitudes can agree with or challenge the goals and agendas of governing and power elites. This is important, because in a social-political context, the goal of a democratic government is to create checks and balances against the power of the government, the majority, or societal elites, especially in a Russian context.

c. Music and its Larger Relationship to Society: Public Actions and Messages

Music is a shaper and influencer of culture, identity and public opinion, which raises the question, “Do governments have an inherent interest in shaping and manipulating the public space to limit – or even eliminate – messages that challenge the status-quo or the goals and agendas of power elites?” In other words, do governments and power elites have an interest in creating and using propaganda (both informationally and through systems and processes) to shape and manipulate what the cultural theorist, Jurgen Habermas, refers to as the “public sphere?”⁵ Some believe that the use of propaganda is viewed by power elites to be necessary, whether in democratic or authoritarian governing structures. The political theorist Jacques Ellul

⁴ Paul Rutherford, *Endless Propaganda: The Advertising of Public Goods* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 18.

⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 6th ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 176. Jurgen Habermas is a cultural theorist who defined the public sphere as a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in an identifiable space. He wrote that in its ideal form, the public sphere is “made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state.”

supports this belief stating, “Propaganda is needed in the exercise of power for the simple reason that the masses have come to participate in political affairs.”⁶ The social theorist, Herbert Marcuse, added another perspective on propaganda as a shaper and manipulator of social behavior. He argued that in social, economic and political contexts, elites adopted the practice of direct and emphatic messaging. Marcuse argued that this type of messaging had both the purpose and effect of creating “one dimensional” citizens, incapable of opposition or resistance and who exists in a state of “unfreedom.”⁷

Jacques Ellul’s and Herbert Marcuse’s research and conclusions reflect the contradictions in societal culture and identity. Given that the world is not ideal, it is not realistic to believe that Habermas’ ideal of the public sphere could ever be fully achieved. In fact, Habermas arguably understood the limitations of his ideal. He identified a weakness in his ideal based on the emergence of elite interests driven by profit. For example, Habermas argues that profit motives have transformed the media into an agent of manipulation – “It became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere.”⁸ He arguably acknowledged the existence and the role of the impact - if not the role – in his ideal of the “public sphere.” Habermas placed this in the context of the common occurrence of what he termed “manipulative publicity.”⁹ Additionally, he wrote, “Even arguments are translated into symbols to

⁶ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 105.

⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), 1-5,

⁸ Habermas, 185.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 178. For Habermas, the misuse of publicity in a way that undermines the public sphere constitutes “manipulative publicity.” In this context, “manipulative publicity” rises to the level of propaganda used for the purpose of asserting the authority, dominance or entitlement of those in authority.

which again one cannot respond by arguing, but only be identifying with them.”¹⁰ In this context, Habermas’ suggests that propaganda is a tool that serves the interests of power elites by playing both an active and passive role in shaping, manipulating and managing perceptions and views in a way that conveys “authorized opinions.”¹¹ This suggests that elites pay attention to the power of messages delivered by or on behalf of individuals or groups. Public expressions by cultural actors – in this context, musicians – are essential to the ability to create, interpret and apply an individual and group sense of culture and identity. It is the “public sphere” described and idealized by Habermas, that lies at the center of culture and identity. It is there that the identification, discussion and expression of societal “truths” takes place, both individually and in groups and associations. In the absence of such a “public sphere” Habermas argues that culture and identity can be shaped and manipulated into an illusory “staged display” created and sustained by power elites and in which the illusions of a “public sphere” are maintained for purposes of legitimizing the status and power of ruling elites, as well as delegitimizing any opposition.¹²

d. Thesis Outline

This thesis is focused on examining the following question: *“What is the relationship between power elites and the contemporary Russian culture and identity?”*

This thesis will also raise questions about how music acts as a “tool” in shaping and manipulating societal perceptions, or even illusions, of culture and identity for social, political purposes. This study is presented through an interpretative ethnographic

¹⁰ Ibid., 206.

¹¹ Ibid., 245.

¹² Ibid., 206.

approach comprised of a literature review, a comparative historical background and context, individual actor analysis, case studies, field research interviews in Russia and findings and conclusions.

The literature review research discusses and examines scholarly studies to provide the reader with a clear understanding of how this research will add to the existing body of knowledge relating to this topic, regarding the body of research and knowledge that exists on music and politics in general and more specifically, the existing body of research and knowledge on music and politics in Russia. Comparative historical research on the dynamic and use of music by power elites in Russia to shape and manipulate perceptions, illusions and interpretations of Russian culture and identity is presented in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I compare two distinct eras of Russian history, the Soviet era (1918-1991) and the current Federation era (1991 – present). This chapter will provide essential historical and contemporary background and context on the role of music as an influencer in the Russian public sphere during the Soviet and Federation eras. This information is conveyed through scholarly historical journals, Slavic Studies journals and investigative research. The purpose of the case study in the contextual chapter is to provide the reader with a larger contextual understanding of power elites' manipulative relationship with Russian culture and identity by examining the relationship between power elites and the artistic expression and action of actors who engaged in both music and other cultural realms, including film, within the larger public sphere. Chapter 4 will discuss the thesis research methodology. The methodology chapter explains the importance of the literature review's content and how it informed my research methods. This chapter also explains how I arrived at the song

selection for my survey, the details of my song survey, and how I planned to retrieve and provide new information on my thesis topic through these means. This thesis will conclude with a summary of findings and a discussion of new contributions to the existing body of knowledge on the role of contemporary music in power elites' efforts to shape and manipulate perceptions and illusions of Russian culture and identity. It will also include a discussion of insights gained, areas for further research, and will add depth to present questions regarding future perceptions and interpretations of Russian culture and identity in a post-Putin Russia.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: The “Real” and the “Assumed” in Contemporary Russian Music and Politics

a. Introduction

This literature review chapter seeks to accomplish two main goals. First, it will seek to validate why and how music is significant and present in contemporary Russian politics. The scholarship of Jacques Attali, Ray Pratt, John Street, and Thierry Cote will be discussed to establish the nature of the relationship of music and politics that exists, and also to identify key concepts from each scholar to develop unique insight within the relationship of music and politics.

This literature review will also seek to provide an example of a case study done in Russia on Russian music and politics. This will be accomplished through incorporation of a case-study of the Soviet Rock Scene done by Sabrina Petra Ramet, Sergei Zamascikov, and Robert Bird. The Soviet music case-study discussed in this chapter will serve as a guideline for my thesis research. This source is a solid Russian music case-study partially conducted on the research countries' soil that projects a real Russian perspective. It utilizes Russian individuals and a variety of Eastern European perspectives within the study. The methodology of this work includes interviews and used songs and lyrics. I have modeled my own methodology on this approach. In addition to the sound research methods and real Russian perspective provided by Ramet et. al.'s study, this research group revealed valuable information about Soviet music and politics that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Prior to diving into the research on the relationship between contemporary Russian music and politics, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the scholars in the following section primarily focus on the intersection of music and politics broadly. In their scholarship, they utilize examples from a plethora of nations. While they reference countries that are both democratic and autocratic, they are Western oriented in their thinking and naturally empathize more with Western society as they examine music and politics. This is not to say that their theories and findings are not useful or biased and valid in the context of contemporary Russian music and politics. Rather, one must consciously consider the theorist's broad concepts and how they apply to Russia in its context as a censored and autocratic nation.

The broader concepts regarding the relationship between music and politics that will be discussed in this chapter will be considered and mentioned in the following chapter with the intent to indicate how these theories are visible (or not visible) based on the interviews and research that I conducted in Russia. Discussions with Russians about the scholarly research on music and politics examined in this literature review will yield invaluable information and insights. Whether they agree or disagree with this content, they will provide explanations and key insights into to why they view what they view. For example, perhaps a Russian participant does agree with my research supporting popular music's ability to influence political views (this is one broad example). I would then ask them to share their reasoning. This would allow for a meaningful discussion from a *real*, not *assumed*, Russian musical and political point of view and understanding, yielding information and stories that may not otherwise have been accessible from my American and other Western sources. Russians' stories can

allow for a better understanding of not only the relationship between contemporary Russian music and politics, but also the understanding that exists broadly about the relationship between contemporary music and politics provided in this thesis.

Aside from gaining better understanding of these topics directly from average Russians, their insight uncovers a point I noted above. That is, differentiating “the real” Russian perspective from the “assumed” perspective by the Western media. For example, when I began researching and viewing different news sources on Russian music and politics, I was reading from an American and Western media sources. Additionally, I was informed of a very limited and select number of songs that managed to make Western news headlines or gain notoriety in other print media. As it turned out, my understanding of contemporary Russian music and politics was very skewed by this limited information.

The songs I initially found, were unfortunately assigned inaccurate messages and little understanding from the points of view of foreigners (Americans and Western thought in this case). The sources include CNN, Vice, The Moscow Times, Radio Free Europe, and World-Crunch. I came to the realization that these sources were inaccurately representing Russian music and politics after running the news articles and songs by a Russian friend, Julia Danyushevskaya.¹³ Julia characterized the songs from these news sources as “spoof” songs that are not taken seriously by Russians, which

¹³ Julia Danyushevskaya has been a very important person in my thesis research. She was my host for the first nine days of my research trip to Russia and accompanied me in my field work.

completely contradicts the seriousness with which Western news authors articulate the articles.

Julia's reaction to the news articles and songs was a mixture of genuine shock and laughter. She was surprised by how convoluted these mainstream American and Western media sources were when portraying contemporary Russian music and politics. She was not familiar with these supposed fourteen "popular" songs, despite being a teenager or older when they were released. She also noted how Russians actually feel towards these songs which were misrepresented by the American and Western media.

The best example of this misrepresentation came from CNN, one of America's most well-known and well-respected news outlets. CNN published a headline in March 2018 entitled, "Russia had a hit song about Putin" and with it posted a video of the song "A Man Like Putin."¹⁴ Within the video, there was a clip of Russian women singing the song with complete seriousness, saying how they support and love Putin. This angle taken on the song was not an accurate portrayal of Russian public opinion. Russians in fact think of "A Man Like Putin" as a silly song.

I found that this song was also featured by another well-known Western source, John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight: Putin*.¹⁵ In his segment, Oliver also misrepresented

¹⁴ Fareed Zakaria - GPS, Special Report on Vladimir Putin, 3 March 2017, (accessed 3 March 2018); available from <https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2017/03/12/putin-special-report-bush-hollywood-zakaria-gps.cnn>; internet.

¹⁵ John Oliver, Last Week Tonight, Report on Vladimir Putin, 19 February 2017 (accessed 22 February 2018); available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OutzB6oDan0>; internet.

the real Russian reception of the song and failed to point out that it was satire. Instead, he played on the narrative of a subservient Russian society and their autocratic dictator.

Thanks to Julia's insight and an article from Public Radio International (PRI), the reality that this song was actually not taken seriously and was a joke became clear. PRI's article "Writing the Best Known Pro-Putin and Anti-Putin Songs," covers an interview with the writer of "A Man Like Putin", Alexander Yellin, who disclosed that his song was made on a whim and cast in the light of satire.¹⁶ He is not a supporter of Putin, and actually writes anti-Putin songs. In contrast to Yellin's song, there was one Russian music group being reported correctly by American and Western news sources. This group was Pussy Riot, a contemporary Russian band with a very politically controversial background.

Pussy Riot is arguably the only accurately represented Russian music source I found, because their story made many international headlines and was supported by a variety of Western celebrities and music performers. The global awareness of Pussy Riot, elevated especially by such significant figures, left no room for false perceptions to emerge (intentionally or unintentionally) within international audiences. On a final note, this situation is coincidentally an example of popular musicians playing a significant role in societal perceptions of politics, a point that will be revisited in this thesis.

It was interesting to learn that seemingly credible sources available were simply wrong; and that subsequent misperceptions were not only created, but also

¹⁶ Julia Barton "Writing the Best Known Pro-Putin and Anti-Putin Songs." Public Radio International, 3 February, 2012, (accessed 10 February 2018); available from <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-02-03/writing-best-known-pro-putin-and-anti-putin-songs>; internet.

perpetuated. This “hiccup” in my preliminary research shows that there is a need for more comprehensive and objective understanding of the intersection of contemporary Russian music and politics available to those with a limited Western perspective like me. My thesis research will seek to accurately address this intersection and be conscious of the distinction between “real” information and “assumed” information.

Fortunately, I managed to find authentic Russian songs with legitimate messages addressing their politics. Julia pointed me to a number of sources that I would have never known about had she not shown me. Based on the perspective of Russian music she revealed to me, I have chosen four well-known contemporary Russian songs with meaningful societal and political content that will later be discussed. They will serve a key purpose in my interviews with Russians on my thesis topic. Overall, in this information gathering process, I have learned that it is challenging, yet exciting and possible, to find factual information about contemporary Russian music and politics as an American.

Having described the need for updated and substantive information on the relationship between Russian music and politics, my literature review will turn to addressing the four conceptual works on the intersection of music and politics by Jacques Attali, Ray Pratt, John Street, and Thierry Cote. This section’s purpose is to establish why and how music is significant and present in politics for each respective society, as well as the nature of the relationship between these two entities. Since it is understood that there is a challenge in bridging the gap between Western thought and Russian thought, I will incorporate responses to these theories in a frame of reference that applies to Russia as needed.

b. The Intersection of Music and Politics

Much can be said about a nation's culture based on their music. However, can it also be said that much can be said about a nation's politics based on their music? In the following discussion, the perspective of four different scholars on the exact nature of the relationship between music and politics and its significance will be explored and considered.

When we consider national anthems played during battles in history to encourage soldiers to continue fighting, the disorderly rock and roll music played during the global revolutionary period of the 1960's reflecting political dissent; the tranquil music of Lennon's "Let it Be" played uninterrupted at the John Lennon Wall in Prague to promote peace and reconciliation; or, the orchestral marches played at German Nazi parades for government support; we cannot deny the crucial role of music in politics.

Music and politics share a particular common characteristic that makes them so relatable, especially in the examples discussed above. They are both present at all times in life. Whether one is consciously aware of how music and politics shapes their actions and perceptions, these forces are undoubtedly and unconsciously relevant in the life of each member of society. The properties of political processes to enact, reform, restrict, and regulate society through laws, and the capacity music has to express, promote, and make sense of societal perceptions, forms a crucially important dynamic that provides insight into how society is feeling about the nation's politics and the directions in which they want to see their politics move. Having established that there is a connection between music and politics, I will now turn to discussing the

functions of music in a political context described by political and musical expert, Jacques Attali.

As a key principle of Attali's contributions to the dynamic between music and politics, it is important to understand how he frames music like prayers to the gods in his piece "Noise." Music, in this scholar's view, has sacred moving properties that exert influence on humans comparable to that of religion. Attali makes this clear by indicating that musicians in ancient times were among the most highly regarded individuals in the society alongside the priests, and that they were only to play holy music for the gods. Otherwise, the music was considered taboo. For example, they believed it encouraged prostitution.¹⁷ In addition to these examples of connecting ancient religious authority with music, Attali uses spiritual and theological diction in his piece to further perpetuate this connection as he describes music as a "prophetic" and "heralding" entity that "forecasts a change in social relations."¹⁸ All of this establishes Attali's foundational points that: just as a god has uncontested power and influence over those who are followers, music and musicians have the capacity to have uncontested power and influence over its followers. Songs are synonymous to prayers and embody human hope and prophecy.

In addition to establishing the agency of music in exercising a type of power and influence like that of a deity, Attali also casts music as a "mirror," exemplifying its power

¹⁷ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis-St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 12

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4

to communicate and resonate with its audience.¹⁹ Furthermore, the mirrored expression of music gives individuals, and groups, a sense of what their identity is and establishes how they see their interests.²⁰ While Attali makes this point, he quotes the political theorist, Karl Marx, who called music “the mirror of reality.”²¹ Attali then referenced the music of Mozart and Bach, “reflecting the bourgeoisie's dream of harmony better than and prior to the work of 19th century political theory,” to exemplify how classical music worked as a societal mirror.²² In a more recent context, he noted how classic rock musicians from the revolutionary era of the 1960s in the United States including Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, and Jimi Hendrix used their music platform to project and “say more about the liberating dream of the 1960’s than any theory of crisis.”²³ These examples serve to reiterate Attali’s point that music and musicians can address society’s circumstances, in the moment, more efficiently than political theory. Not only can music address these circumstances, but by contending with the music artists’ views they can receive a sense of identity, which is a very powerful attribute. In other words, music is the symbolic expression that gives one meaning. This transaction of accepting a musician’s view speaks to music’s power as a form of communication and ability to reflect society coherently when other threads within society cannot.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6

²⁰ Ibid., 9

²¹ Ibid., 6

²² Ibid., 6

²³ Ibid., 6

Although Attali establishes how music is sacredly powerful, he incorporates its quality as a weapon of power. Eavesdropping, audible censorship (microphone devices), recording, and surveillance are all mechanisms of obtaining information to assert and secure authority.²⁴ Naturally, in authoritarian political systems in particular, these mechanisms are utilized extensively. This is important, especially when considering Russian music and politics.

Coincidental to this thesis and on this point of music as power, Attali quotes a speech in 1947 by Andrei Zhdanov, a Soviet Politician, who stated, “Music, as an instrument of political pressure, must be tranquil, reassuring, and calm.”²⁵ Attali uses this quote to illustrate how a significant political figure not only recognized music as a political pressure, but how this political figure distinctly critiqued and encouraged Russian music to be soft and peaceful. Noise and or music that is abstract, loud, erratic, or foreign are considered to threaten cultural and political autonomy. Additionally, according to Attali, it supports differences and marginality.²⁶ Therefore, when Zhdanov publicly stressed the need for music to be less contentious and exude calmness, his intent was to repress the public. This is just one example of a political figure’s acknowledgement that music can threaten and usurp the power that the government wishes to maintain over their respective public.

²⁴ Ibid., 7

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 7-8

Attali continues this point by explaining how in this timeframe, the trends of Soviet music were concentrated in two different perspectives. Attali includes an excerpt of Zhdanov's speech on the two Soviet music trends.²⁷

And, indeed, we are faced with a very acute, although outwardly concealed struggle between two trends in Soviet music. One trend represents the healthy, progressive principle in Soviet music, based upon recognition of the tremendous role of the classical heritage, and, in particular, the traditions of the Russian musical school, upon the combination of lofty idea content in music, its truthfulness and realism, with profound, organic ties with the people and their music and songs—all this combined with a high degree of professional mastery. The other trend is that of a formalism alien to Soviet art; it is marked by rejection of the classical heritage under the cover of apparent novelty, by rejection of popular music, by rejection of service to the people, all for the sake of catering to the highly individualistic emotions of a small group of aesthetes. . . . Two extremely important tasks now face Soviet composers. The chief task is to *develop* and per-

fect Soviet music. The second is to *protect* Soviet music from the infiltration of elements of bourgeois decadence. Let us not forget that the U.S.S.R. is now the guardian of universal musical culture, just as in all other respects it is the *mainstay of human civilization and culture against bourgeois decadence and decomposition of culture*. . . . Therefore, not only the musical, but also the political, ear of Soviet composers must be very keen. . . . Your task is to prove the superiority of Soviet music, to *create great Soviet music*.⁶

Zhdanov acknowledges that Soviet music and its style holds political power as it could either threaten the authority of the Soviet Communist Party, or bolster it. This piece of evidence that a Soviet leader publicly asserted that music can support or threaten a political system is important to understand, because as my thesis research will later address the songs I will use in my study, one will be able to see how the Russian political system has consciously played a part in using popular musicians and songs with unthreatening music styles to increase support of their views and position

²⁷ Ibid.

within the power structure. Likewise, I have incorporated songs in my study that incorporate unusual and foreign styles, such as punk, in which one song seeks to threaten and challenge the political system, and the other uses an unusual style of music and lyrics to express the repression they face, indirectly crediting their circumstances to the Russian government.

Returning to Zhdanov's thoughts brought out by Attali, this excerpt shows that those who have political power are very weary of music's power. That is why they monitor it, acknowledge it, and pay attention to it. This point brings me to a central thread of thought mentioned in three of the four of the scholarly pieces to be discussed in this literature review.

After Attali explained the story of Zhdanov recognizing music's power and thus monitoring it, Attali references Plato's timeless iteration of this exact concept in *Republic* through Socrates' perspective that reads:

The idea that noise, or even music, can destroy a social order and replace it with another is not new. It is present in Plato:

This is the kind of lawlessness that easily insinuates itself unobserved [through music] . . . because it is supposed to be only a form of play and to work no harm. Nor does it work any, except that by gradual

infiltration it softly overflows upon the characters and pursuits of men and from these issues forth grown greater to attack their business dealings, and from these relations it proceeds against the laws and the constitution with wanton license till it finally overthrows all things public and private. . . . For the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions. . . . It is here, then, that our guardians must build their guard-house and post of watch.³⁷

This is a warning to political figures and systems; and in particular, to their leader(s). Socrates articulates that unregulated and unconventional music has the capability to disguise as “play” or mere entertainment without any threat. Gradually, he believes that this music poses a threat to authority as unconventional music deconstructs the character of humans and makes them to disassociate from and resist the conventions of society (i.e. the authorities).²⁸

Ray Pratt and Thierry Cote also reference this thread of thought in *Republic* in addition to Attali. However, it is the first source of music being named a repressor, which each of these authors in some way note that political systems attempt to do in their interaction with music. In particular, it is the final line in the excerpt that is written “our guardians must build their guardhouse and post of watch” that they emphasize.²⁹ “Guardians” refers to political leaders and their need to build a body of people to monitor and control music in order to prevent losing authority over those who they rule. This is a view that establishes a central truth for all of the scholars in this literature review. That is, music has destabilizing and regime threatening capabilities. Given that this is recognized, music is controlled to in varying ways and to varying extents by political systems worldwide.

I would like to add before moving forward, that this view of needing a “guard” is obviously at work and in practice in contemporary Russia. Pussy Riot, a politically controversial Russian female punk collective, are “victims” of this Socratic warning of

²⁸ Ibid., 33

²⁹ Ray Pratt, *Rhythm and Resistance: The Political Uses of American Popular Music* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 2.

music restriction in the postmodern era. In 2012, the group faced arrest for a cathedral performance that lasted less than a minute. They were sentenced to jail time in Siberia.³⁰ They were reportedly released, but one of the members, Maria Alyokhina, said that her amnesty order was “a joke” and that she “would have rather stayed in prison.” *As she was still being monitored by the Russian authorities, she had felt like a prisoner to the Russian government even prior to her sentence.*³¹ This story about Pussy Riot does not only shows credibility to the Socratic reference, but blends with other key concepts that will be discussed as I turn to my next scholarly source on music and politics.

Ray Pratt’s “Rhythm and Resistance,” focuses on three main points. First, he believes that the messages found in music rely more on the reception of the audience than on the artistic intention.³² When applying this thought to Pussy Riot, Pratt’s theory makes sense. Pussy Riot received public support from a plethora of global celebrities, musicians, and organizations; Madonna, Sting, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Paul McCartney, Amnesty International, and many others during their trial and sentencing.³³ Naturally, through gaining public displays of support from across the globe from well-known groups and individuals. This has the positive effect of creating a positive worldwide popular reception of their music. In terms of Pussy Riot’s artistic intention,

³⁰ BBC interview with Maria Alyokhina, 23 December 2013, (accessed 28 February 2018), available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-25490466/pussy-riot-member-maria-alyokhina-freed-in-russia>; internet.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 4

³³ Michael Idov, “Putin v. the Punk Rockers,” *New York Times*, OP-ED, 7 August 2012, editorial.

their music content is contentious. It openly criticizes Putin's character and his alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church. However, however their expression is not the only contentious music with this type of "artistic intention" that has been produced in Russia. In this light, the positive audience reception is what made Pussy Riot's music so powerful and moving in comparison to other music products with related or similar artistic intentions.

Pratt's second major point is how music serves two masters: the conservatives and the liberals. For the conservative or "hegemonic" master, music is intended to "maintain the status quo."³⁴ Referring Plato's thoughts on the guardians monitoring music, Pratt elaborates on how in this use of music, the goal is to disallow for the distribution of power and values in a society and to produce and preserve content only within the established traditions of the institution.³⁵ His conservative use of music should be kept close in mind when I turn to talking about the pro-Putin music in my thesis methodology.

In contrast to the conservative use of music, the other use of music Pratt discusses is the liberal or emancipatory use. This use is primarily meant to challenge a dominant institution. Pratt's description of this concept is extremely valuable to my thesis as it coherently explains the exact attitude I have found in the songs chosen for my interview questions. Therefore, I will include the excerpt:³⁶

³⁴ Pratt,10

³⁵ Ibid., 9

³⁶ Pratt, 14

EMANCIPATORY USES

By “emancipatory” uses of popular culture is meant those that challenge dominant institutions. “‘Emancipatory’ signifies emancipation *from* something that is restrictive or repressive, and *for* something that is conducive to an increase of freedom and well-being.”⁷⁸ Such a conception, as Kellner describes it, “subverts ideological codes and stereotypes. . . . It rejects idealizations and rationalizations that apologize for the suffering in the present social system, and, at its best, suggests that another way of life is possible.”⁷⁹

Through history, music has often been fundamental to such an emancipatory process, reinforcing exercise of such human abilities to subvert and transform existing systems. Through affectively empowering emotional changes, music promotes establishment of sustaining relations of community and subculture that are fundamental to creation of an alternative public realm, a kind of cultural free space made of materials taken from thousands of composers and musicians who contribute the essential elements of what is propagated by the culture industries.⁸⁰ In the chapters that follow, some of the ways in which people have used and continue to use music to “squeeze out” free space in the existing class and power relations of society are explored.

Pratt’s inclusion of the concept that the liberal use of music serves to suggest that another way of life is possible. This excerpt expresses a powerful sentiment when considering Russia. Russia has significantly liberty and mobility to not only act on their repressive government, but they are also restricted from having a secure voice against their government. They live in a culture of fear and “us versus them.” There is no freedom of speech as an individual civil liberty acknowledged in Russia. There are however, unjust and corrupt cases like Aleksei Navalny’s detainment. He was detained for posing opposition to Putin’s regime.³⁷ Additionally, there is active government censorship that deletes content from podcasts and even social media posts that pose opposition.³⁸ This concept Pratt articulates of using music to emancipate and

³⁷ Ivan Nechepurenko, “Aleksei Navalny, Kremlin Critic, Gets 30 Days in Jail for Protest,” *New York Times*, 15 May 2018, (accessed 28 May 2018), available from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/15/world/europe/russia-aleksei-navalny-jail-protest.html>; internet.

³⁸ Information received from Julia Danyushevskaya

disconnect from the traditions of the establishment is something I find fascinating. I focused on this during my research in Russia. Finally, this concept of Pratt's where specific kinds of music work to serve particular group's agendas, relates to his last major point in his piece in which he articulates that music is a product that influences and identifies individuals – and furthermore, groups.

Previously, I discussed one of Attali's main concepts about how music is a symbol of identity through its ability to express and communicate. Similar to this thought, Pratt notes the communicative and mobilizing ability of music to quickly facilitate a collective identity, to encourage an individual or group to take action on matters, and to create contagiously strong emotions.³⁹ Pratt further emphasizes his point by referencing the song "La Marseillaise" as a cultivating force of the French to build and sustain resistance to the German occupation during World War II.⁴⁰ Beyond this point, Pratt asserts that music can be a cultivating force for a collective or personal identity. He shows how popular music has the ability to function as political behavior.⁴¹ In considering this third concept of Pratt's, I will observe what identities and influences of action are attached with the four songs I have chosen to utilize in my methodology.

Continuing the thread of Pratt's third concept on identity and influence being formed from music and thus exhibiting political behavior, John Street's scholarly piece "Playing to the Crowd: The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation," addresses that music *can* function as political behavior as long as it meets three specific

³⁹ Pratt, 4-5

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4

⁴¹ Pratt, 4

conditions: organization, legitimation, and performance.⁴² Street's concepts are important to my research as they provide systematic explanations of how music activates political participation and influence among listeners, rather than by "coincidence or cultural climate."⁴³ Using his concept, I will search for these conditions in regards to contemporary Russian music and politics and build more comprehensive conclusions. I will now discuss Street's three conditions that validate music as form of political behavior.

The first condition Street explains in his piece is organization. Organization refers to the infrastructural dynamic of a group that is participating in politics.⁴⁴ In this sense, Street believes that the financial, cultural, and social contexts surrounding a movement must be understood in order to establish the validity of claiming music as a cause for participation in a political movement. As an example of infrastructural details he notes that "Live 8 cost 11 million pounds to stage."⁴⁵ This reference draws on Street's point that events of this caliber do not just sporadically happen, but that there are identifiable means to be consulted in order to understand how an event contributes to political movements. Overall, Street disregards the idea that cultivation happens at random in a "spirit of the times" moment and articulates that the infrastructural aspect of

⁴² Street, pg. 275

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

music's part in a movement must be understood beyond the social and cultural aspect.⁴⁶

Legitimation highlights how a musician must base their presence and music on an authoritative cause.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Street notes that music and musicians who are popular, but lack this authoritative quality, are not viable actors in political participation because they do not hold political views that are "taken seriously or sought after."⁴⁸ I agree with Street's point. Western rock music of the 1960's, which addressed calls action and opinions to the political climate and movements of the time, embodies the authoritative quality Street articulates in his research. Arguably, an even more relevant example is Pussy Riot. In the lyrics to one of their most famous songs, they command action and call for the listener "to become a feminist" in the chorus as they energetically move about the stage, kicking, punching the air, and jumping.⁴⁹ The distinction of music's message inciting authority rather than just providing a commentary will be considered in my research.

The last of Street's conditions that qualify music as a cause for political participation is performance. This refers to music being not only able to convey a movement's message, but it must also motivate it.⁵⁰ Street expands this thought with

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 276

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Michael Idov, "Putin v. the Punk Rockers," *New York Times*, OP-ED, 7 August 2012, editorial.

⁵⁰ John Street, "Playing to the Crowd: The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (May 2008), 275.

noting how certain rhythmic patterns can energize a listener.⁵¹ He notes that it is not so much the literal communication (i.e. lyrics of songs) of a performance that determines if it is political, but rather it is the ability to physically engage a crowd with energy that makes music a political influencer.⁵² Music must deliver a call for action and motivate it with a sound, style, and speed that represents movement, as opposed to something that is calm or slow and that otherwise translates a feeling of contentment. This concept will be kept in mind as I consider the songs I've chosen to incorporate in my interviews, as well as whatever other songs I will encounter during the research process.

The final scholarship on music and politics to be discussed in this section, is that of Thierry Cote, his "Popular Musicians and Their Songs as Threats to National Security: A World Perspective." Cote illustrates the capacity of popular musicians to exercise power and influence in a social context. He explains how their social power translates to political power depending on how they gage their platform or voice through their uncontested communicative abilities. By being capable of asserting social and political power and having state authorities react to their power, popular musicians can be considered national security threats to state authorities.⁵³ Ultimately, this logic establishes Cote's main point, which is that popular musicians are potentially powerful political actors.

⁵¹ Ibid., 276

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Thierry Cote, "Popular Musicians and Their Songs as Threats to National Security: A world Perspective," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 44, (November 2010): 733

Within the first part of Cote's article are many important points regarding how popular musicians have social power. Cote's reasoning includes how music creates physical and sentimental emotions; how it provides a sense of identity through common interests with the artists; and how music can also encourage repression. For example, the music used in the People's Republic of China to control ideology in the aftermath of the 1949 Revolution.⁵⁴ With these points, Cote establishes popular musicians' power in a social context. This sets up his argument that popular musicians also have power in a political context. According to Cote, popular musicians' social power is transferred to political power through utilizing their exceptional communication capabilities. Popular music creates discussion, opposition, debate, and can inform or convince their audiences like politicians.⁵⁵ Their performing stage and voice are their political platform in this sense.

Following the thought that musicians have a platform and create a range of communication among its listeners, Cote points out how modern technology allows media content, including popular music, to upload, spread, and stream content faster than what an individual or set of authorities can control.⁵⁶ This means that state authorities are unable to control on command the potential mass consumption of political and social messages shared by popular musicians, which can make popular musicians a national security threat to state authorities. Like Attali and Pratt, Cote cites Plato as a source to provide context regarding how state authorities have been long

⁵⁴ Ibid. 740

⁵⁵ Ibid., 735-737

⁵⁶ Ibid., 735

warned to monitor and control music to maintain social and political order.⁵⁷ Prior to modern technology, other means were taken to restrict music's audience reception through methods such as monitoring and stopping distribution of musical products and revoking musicians' passports to confine their presence and power.⁵⁸ In the context of modern technological capabilities, where old methods of restriction no longer apply, Cote's research raises the question, "What then will state authorities do to control the messages and influence of popular musicians?" This particular question significantly informed my research and observations in Russia as I engaged with average Russians to learn more about the popular musicians I chose for incorporation into my research methodology. Based on my research in Russia, I found the impact of modern technology to be an advantage to popular musicians. Its impact on the reception of popular musicians and the size of their audiences has been incredibly valuable. I gained considerable insight into how this factor plays a part in contemporary Russia during my research there. These will be discussed further in chapter 4, Methods and Analysis. Having completed discussing a variety of concepts on the relationship between music and politics relative to the scholarship of Attali, Pratt, Street, and Cote, the next section will provide an example of a case study done in Russia during the time of the Soviet Union on Soviet rock and its relationship to the Soviet authorities.

Ultimately, the goal of this section of my literature review is to provide evidence of a case study similar to mine that contributes to the body of knowledge on Russian

⁵⁷ Ibid., 732

⁵⁸ Ibid., 742

music and politics and informs methods using lyrics and Russian voices (Ramet uses musicians and music critics in Russia) to gather new information.

c. Soviet Music Case Study

In this section, I will examine the case study “The Soviet Rock Scene” by Petra Ramet, and contributing authors, Sergei Zamascikov and Robert Bird. In addition to completing a case study on Soviet Russia’s rock scene during the time of the Soviet Union, Ramet has a background that includes performing research on rock music and politics during the Soviet era in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. This variety of research and fieldwork experience in Eastern Europe and Russia makes Ramet a substantive source of the musical and political context of Soviet Russia and its satellite states, which allows for knowledge to build upon my research on the Russian perspective on music and politics. Also, her work contributes to my research as it provides a guide for my methodology when discussing Russian music lyrics and their connection to themes and events in Russian politics.

Ramet et al’s case study focuses on the growth and evolution of Russian rock music during the Soviet era. In this context, it examines “the evolution of official responses, discussion of the internal heterogeneity of the Soviet Rock Scene, and the probing of the diversity of views to be found in the official press.”⁵⁹ Ramet et al’s study begins with a contextual subsection discussing the early years of rock in the Soviet Union. She starts this section through discussing how rock music performed in 1957 at

⁵⁹ Sabrina P. Ramet, ed., *Rocking the State: Music and Politics in eastern Europe and Russia* (San Francisco: Oxford University Press, 1994), 181-182.

the Sixth World Youth Festival held in Moscow initially shocked some Russians.⁶⁰ A few years later in 1963, she indicates Soviet rock was taking on a shape of its own. Ramet et al then referenced these early Soviet rock musicians like Alexander Gradsky, a veteran of the Moscow rock scene who formed the group Tarakany (Cockroaches) in 1963, and Kolya Vasin, the founder and curator of the Beatles museum in St. Petersburg. Ramet quotes Gradsky as he recounts his first reaction to the Beatles' music, "I went into a state of shock, total hysteria. They put everything into focus. All the music I'd heard up to that time was just a prelude."⁶¹ Building on this point of rock music's meaningful beginning in Soviet Russia, Ramet et al quotes Vasin upon his initial reaction to the Beatles when he states, "All the depression and fear ingrained over the years disappeared. I understood everything other than the Beatles had been oppression."⁶² These Russian rock figure's quotes are important to bear in mind as Ramet moves to a discussion of Soviet authorities' response as closing out the influence of freedom and rejection of the system that Western rock presented to their Russian listeners.

According to Ramet et al, by the end of the 1960's when rock music began to be seriously discussed as a form of counterculture response to establishment politics, Soviet officialdom sponsored what were essentially "safe" ideological rock music groups such as "Happy Guys." This was a response designed to "satisfice" the societal appetite

⁶⁰ Ibid., 182

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

for rock music.⁶³ I found this very interesting. I will discuss a contemporary Russian music artist, who is an example of Kremlin sponsored music, later in my methodology. Along with sponsoring “safe” music, Ramet et al explain how the Soviet authorities (during the 1970’s) made every musician in the Soviet Union go through certain processes to perform and be recognized for their music. First, they had to register through the state concert agency (Goskontsert) or the Bureau of Concert Bands to be authorized to perform in the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ Once they managed to become authorized, or official, musicians they then had to have any content they wanted to publicly perform, be performed in front of the local City Council where they were playing in order to ensure their music and lyrics were “safe.” Otherwise, their music was forbidden to be played.⁶⁵ If a group was deemed unofficial, they could still perform, but only in venues like hotels or restaurants. These venues were still difficult to arrange, because of their unofficial status. The 1980’s brought forth more restrictive policies and procedures from the Soviet authorities, particularly those of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of Komsomol. One of these policies was the implementation of raids of places where forbidden music marketing and recording were thought to be occurring.⁶⁶ In one raid, 536 records were confiscated.⁶⁷ In addition to this, the Komosol established “music patrols” to conduct “music raids” to ensure consistent monitoring of “low-grade” music, as well as to employ music patrollers with foreign language skills to translate any

⁶³ Ibid., 183

⁶⁴ Ibid., 184

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 185

⁶⁷ Ibid.

potentially “dangerous” foreign music.⁶⁸ These measures pointed out by Ramet work, when establishing the Soviet authority’s relationship to music, prior to the time when they performed their research, serves as useful context for their study.

After establishing the relationship of the Soviet authorities and music, Ramet et al discussed the two contrasting viewpoints amongst Soviet authorities regarding music. One viewpoint believes rock music, or untraditional music, is a form of “Satanism,” while the other attempts to provide some openness to the expression of the artists.⁶⁹ This section is useful and will be something I consider when I provide my own context on contemporary Russian authorities and politics, as I can search for opinions of political figures and their thoughts on untraditional music.

Ramet et al then turns to a discussion of lyrics and politics. She provides excerpts of songs and their lyrics in her piece and notes what the lyrics are commenting on in terms of Soviet politics, society, repression, or ideology. Ramet includes, where possible, the encounters between the Russian authorities and the musicians that performed these songs, as well as the songs’ reception (negative, positive, seriously, etcetera). This section serves as a useful guide that I followed when I discussed the songs I chose to examine and incorporate into my own research and methodology during my research in Russia.

Ramet concludes that the content of the musicians in Soviet Russia was not politically contentious by nature for the most part. However, it was the conservative

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,188

viewpoint from those within the Soviet government that made the music politically contentious as they were weary and controlling of not just music's lyrics, but also the attire of musicians, the music's style, and the language of the performers.⁷⁰ Ramet further concludes that rock music was more of a player in the face-off between the Soviet government's liberalizers and conservatives, than a public enemy to the entire Soviet government.⁷¹ I found this conclusion very fascinating. It informed my thoughts throughout my research into Russian political figures' stances to gauge music's role in contemporary Russian politics. Overall, Ramet provides a useful example for structuring a case study that incorporates retrieving information from Russians and Russian music artists; framing the social and political contexts of a case study; interpreting lyrics and their political meanings in the context of Russian politics; and tracking information on Russian music and politics' evolution over time to provide new and substantive insight into both topics of Russian music and politics and the nature of their relationship.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 208

⁷¹ Ibid., 209

Chapter 3

History and Context: Culture, Authorship and National Identity in the Soviet Union and Contemporary Federation Russia

*"I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. **That key is Russian national interest.**"*

Winston Churchill,
BBC Broadcast,
London, October 1, 1939

a. Introduction

Historically, in all eras of Russian government, those in power have sought to shape and manipulate Russian culture and identity to meet their needs. Over the past century, this has been particularly true during the Soviet era and more recently in the contemporary Federation era. In each era, the Russian people have experienced interference by those in positions of social, economic, and political power. During the Soviet era, this power was exercised by the government, in particular, the Communist Party. Although the social, economic and political power structures appear different in each era, Russian culture and identity are still intentionally manipulated through identical methods for the purpose of serving the needs and goals of those in power in Russia. Research on the correlation of methods of cultural and identity manipulation between these two eras suggests that societal restriction and control has only grown with the help of technological advancements. Among these advancements, the internet and the expansion of access to it, has actually created a paradox. There is a facade - the perception - which the masses have been empowered as the creators of culture and identity, but rather, that power remains with the power elites. This paradox applies to multiple aspects of Russian culture and identity. However, this thesis focuses on the manipulation of music, as a key aspect of culture and identity, during the Soviet and the Federation eras. My research shows the Soviet

era power elites' relationship to Russian culture and identity, in terms of creation, manipulation, and control are consistent with the current relationship of Russian power elites to culture and identity in the Federation era. In order to gain insight and understanding into this relationship, this thesis examines past and present Russian music scenes as they relate to Russian politics and culture and identity.

In order to better understand how this dynamic operates in terms of Soviet era and contemporary Federation era music and politics, it is important to acknowledge and discuss similarities between the strategies of Soviet and Federation power elites' manipulation of Russian culture and identity through the restriction of musical creation and authorship overtime. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historical background and context of the relationship between Russian culture and identity and the political elites during the Soviet era and the current Federation era. It serves to provide context in support of my thesis that specifically addresses the relationship between Russian music and power elites who seek to shape and manipulate it for their own purpose. It is supported by historical accounts and trends in culture, and politics from the early Soviet Union to contemporary Russia, comparative research on both varying and consistent aspects of national identity in Russia, empirical data on Soviet and Russian national identity and political culture; and defense-strategic research connecting Soviet policies, political methods, and tactics that exist in post-Soviet and contemporary Russia.

b. The Early Soviet Union

The early decades of the Soviet Union are particularly important to note when considering how contemporary Russia has responded to changes in the influencers and relationships within the creation of national culture and identity, as well as perceived restrictions and perceived freedoms within Russian society. Two different ideologies for Soviet culture and identity existed in this time. The Communist Party and those who followed its new ideals,

adopted a culture of self-sacrifice inspired by Lenin's "vanguard" Bolshevik party.⁷² The other ideology, a more artistic form of progressive socialist view was derived from the artistic Russian *avant-garde*, the offspring of the Russian intelligentsia.⁷³ In addition to these new ideologies, there remained the enduring folk traditions and culture of Russia and the cultures of neighboring countries of Eastern Europe.

The perceptions of two branches of Soviet culture and identity coexisted with the traditional folk culture and identity of Russia throughout the 1920s. However, the approach of allowing these contrasting ideas of culture and identity to coexist and blend into Soviet identity failed. The revolutionary social-political vanguard and artistic *avant-garde* concepts and ideas, inspired by Lenin and the Russian intelligentsia, were significantly western-influenced. As such, the Communist Party elite's attempt to combine these two ideologies to create a new singular Soviet identity and culture ultimately failed, because this combination proved infeasible in influencing all corners of the expansive geographic and demographic space that was the Soviet Union. Not only was it difficult to exert influence over such a large and diverse region, but the ideas were too foreign and too radical to influence the deeply-held traditional folk culture and identity of feudal societies with centuries old multi-ethnic cultures.⁷⁴ In particular, the enduring aspects of Russian traditional culture and identity in the early Soviet era proved to be incompatible with the policies and effort needed to sustain the New Economic Policy, which was implemented in 1921. High achieving "heroes", self-sacrificing saints or revolutionaries, and a fusion of the cult of the individual with the cult of the collective mentality (i.e. merging the concept of "I" with thinking in terms of "we") were necessary to be both recognizable and

⁷² Vanguard is defined as "a group of people leading the way in new developments or ideas."
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vanguard>

⁷³ Robert C. Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigres in Germany, 1881-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 157.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

relevant to everyone in the Soviet Union. This was necessary in order to achieve the economic goals of the Communist Party. This fusion proved beyond the ability of the Communist Party to create. In response to this reality, the Communist Party transformed and manipulated the coexistent cultures and identities in the Soviet Union into a single culture “defined by the party orthodoxy of Socialist Realism and the revived legacy of 19th century Russian socialism and scientism.”⁷⁵ In doing this, the Communist Party became the single author, creator, and supervisor of Soviet culture and identity from 1928 onward. This single culture and identity came to be defined in two separate, yet distinct, terms.

In Marxist terms, culture ceased merely to reflect changes in the substructure or base of society, and became a powerful means for transforming the forces of production. In scientific terms, culture was no longer the product of work, but a source of energy. As such, culture ceased to be autonomous, and became subject to party direction and designed for mass support.⁷⁶

c. Stalin’s Russia to Post-WWII Soviet Russia

During the 1930s, the onset of WWII combined with the economic crisis and resource shortage (namely food, i.e. Soviet Famine of 1932-33), and Joseph Stalin’s uncontested role as dictator intensified the already bleak momentum towards state manipulation and control of Soviet culture and identity. Fear and paranoia were driving factors both within the Communist Party and amongst the masses. The people of the Soviet Union lacked security in their lives down to the most basic levels. An estimated 11 to 14 million people died from hunger in the Soviet Union from 1932-33.⁷⁷ Of these, 4 to 7 million were Ukrainians.⁷⁸ State enemies were

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2018 ed., v.v. “Ukraine - The famine of 1932-33”, (accessed 26 February 2018), available from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-famine-of-1932-33>; internet.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

created by the Communist Party in a number of arenas including kulaks and academic and religious intellectuals as well as other figures.⁷⁹ The creation of state enemies only worsened in the years to come as they were used as scapegoats for any and all shortcomings and hardships faced in the Soviet Union.

In contrast, state heroes were made. However, the heroes made had no value unless their characteristics contributed to Stalin's mystique. Initially, the characteristics of a state hero were emphasized, relatable to platforms of characteristics attached to Stalin. But later, individuals in line with Party goals were bolstered. Whether the individual was alive or dead, all individuals portrayed as heroes, cast in the same positive light and intentionally created to be relatable to Joseph Stalin. This was done through film, radio, news and print media, particularly *Pravda* - the Soviet Union's official newspaper as early as 1922.. In film, examples of this were Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin*, Vasiliev's *Chapaev*, Kozintsev's *Youth of Maksim Gor'kii*, Petrov's *Peter the First*, Eisenstein's *Aleksandr Nevskii*, Pudovkin's *Minin and Pozharskii* and *Survivor*.⁸⁰ The practice of fusing ideal Russian cultural heroes with Stalin and his image also occurred via the radio, literature, news, and print media, particularly *Pravda*. Officially, in February 1934, "*Glavlit*," also known as the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets, an entity under the Council of Ministries in the USSR, obtained total power of censorship over all literature, plays, films, ballets, broadcasts, and even circus acts produced in the USSR.⁸¹ False, but believable narratives in these sources painted Stalin as the "good son" of Lenin; and also, emphasized Leon Trotsky, Stalin's opponent, as well as any other opposition to Stalin, as enemies to the state. This process was used to curry favor with the masses and

⁷⁹ Kulaks are affluent peasants. They are important to consider, because they are analogous to the middle class, who similarly faced oppression in the Soviet Union. This parallel will later be returned to in this chapter.

⁸⁰ Williams, 168.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

justify the removal of Trotsky from his numerous leadership positions throughout the 1920s until his exile from the Soviet Union in 1929. Trotskyites were also removed in addition to Trotsky himself. Lenin's death in January 1924 eliminated the opportunity for a prominent voice against Stalin to defend Trotsky and to speak out about the true relationship he shared with Stalin. Unpleasant responses from Lenin to Stalin show the true nature of their relationship. Stalin unrealistically portrayed his connection to Lenin as early as the late 19th century as he wrote to Lenin when he was in exile to tell him what he was doing to support the revolution, and then later showed these letters they exchanged as a way to integrate himself into more prominent roles within the party in the 1920s.⁸² Unsurprisingly, Lenin commented he had no memory of Stalin's early letters, and only allowed him into the Party, because he was ruthless and passionate for the revolution; this did not necessarily mean that they had a relationship, or that Lenin believed Stalin was fit to be his successor.⁸³ Collectively these actions, manipulating national culture and identity as a means to accomplish the Communist Party's ends show the extent of awareness the Party had of the importance of maintaining the authorship and control of these national aspects of culture and identity to achieve its own ends.

At the same time however, the Party itself lacked security at a crucial time.

In 1925, in "Mein Kampf," Adolph Hitler stated the necessity of war with the Soviet Union to ensure the survival of Nazi Germany. When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933, his ideas in "Mein Kampf" came closer to reality. Stalin's response to this reality was not only refusal to believe it was coming, but his approach to the matter was to seemingly appeal to Hitler in a variety of ways, such as providing Germany military and food resources that the Soviet Union needed themselves. The paranoia within the Communist Party and the

⁸² Hayley E. Ream, "The Personality of Joseph Stalin," (Schenectady, NY: Union College, 2018), Research Paper completed in PSC, Strategic Lessons of World War II.

⁸³ Ibid.

international coalition of countries, particularly the West, and also opponents within the Soviet Union provided public justification for Stalin to cultivate absolute power and incite what is known as “The Great Purge” or “The Great Terror” of 1936-38. This event included a “large-scale purge of the Communist Party and government officials, repression of wealthy peasants and the Red Army leadership, widespread police surveillance, suspicion and imprisonment of “saboteurs” and “counter-revolutionaries,” and arbitrary executions.”⁸⁴ Contemporary Russian elites and the people of Russia also live in an environment of paranoia where the middle class (in the Soviet era - the wealthy peasants) are repressed, businesses not related to elites are difficult to establish and grow; and the West remains a major enemy – a character demonized by the official media. Historically, these events are important to note in considering the Federation era, because they relate to current tactics used in marginalizing or eliminating government opposition. Despite the resentment of the West, however, “western collectivism gave way to Russian authority.”⁸⁵ Initially culminating a fuse between the appealing artistic and progressive western- avant-garde culture with western democratic ‘appearing’ policies (without an economically decadent elite or “bourgeoisie”), of the new Soviet political structure; “[Soviet] culture was not an expression of creativity, but a means of mobilizing the nation.”⁸⁶ Furthermore, the intentionally utilized ‘culture actors’ (i.e. musicians, writers, artists and others), by the Soviet era elites, “were expected to demonstrate the proper party spirit (*partiinnost*), ideological direction (*ideinnost*), and popular appeal (*narodnost*), a trinity that bore a resemblance to the orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality of Tsar Nicolas I a century earlier.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), xxx

⁸⁵ Williams, 167

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 169

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 169

d. Post-Stalin to Gorbachev

The intense elite control of culture and identity in the Soviet Union remained until Stalin's death. At that point, elites began to rework the identity of the Communist Party in the tension-filled atmosphere of the Cold-War. They placed blame on past Soviet policies unrelated to the current elites to maintain their power and authoritative legitimacy. In particular, in the final years of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev's leadership, two very important policies were adopted, perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness). *Perestroika* is defined as:

“the policy or practice of restructuring or reforming the economic and political system. First proposed by Leonid Brezhnev in 1979 and actively promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev, perestroika originally referred to increased automation and labor efficiency, but came to entail greater awareness of economic markets and the ending of central planning”⁸⁸

Glasnost is defined as:

“the policy or practice of more open consultative government and wider dissemination of information, initiated by leader Mikhail Gorbachev from 1985.”⁸⁹

Aside from the technical definition, perestroika was implemented so that people could buy and sell goods at a profit without interference from the state. In addition, the policy of glasnost, often paired with perestroika, came about to reintegrate openness of speech and press from the general public, or in other words “give back power to the people,” in order to prepare for a more “honest” and “open” government. Both policies have been criticized despite their appearance of creating positive reform. In regards to perestroika, ten other economic reforms were introduced by Gorbachev in his six years

⁸⁸ Oxford Living Dictionary, (accessed 16 August 2018), available from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/perestroika>; internet.

⁸⁹ Oxford Living Dictionary, (accessed 16 August 2018), available from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/glasnost>; internet.

as General Secretary of the Communist Party.⁹⁰ All of these economic reforms introduced, including perestroika, have been described as “inconsistent and incoherent measures” by economic experts.⁹¹ Interestingly, these policies met with opposition within the ruling elites’ circle, which reveals that only certain elites would benefit from them. This raises the question, “Were these “liberalizing” and “capitalist” policies observable means by which to strengthen particular oligarchs in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union?”

When considering glasnost, it arguably divulges another exclusive beneficial strategy taken by the Communist Party, and particularly the emerging inner elite circle of the post-Soviet power structure. Information collected by the KGB (the Committee for State Security) only included content selected by their agency. In order to understand the public better, the policy of glasnost encouraged the masses to speak their minds. This new wave of information that included thought and ideas left out by the KGB officers, who presented only what they thought the Party wanted to hear, was yet another form of surveillance of the masses disguised within a democratic appearance.

As the Soviet saying goes, “we are still on the leash and the dog dish is still too far away, but now we can bark as loud as we want.”⁹² The “leash” refers to the fact that social-political demonstrations, journalism, music, and all other cultural outlets of society were still under the control and final approval of the government. These were precisely the measures exercised in the Federation era. All social and political aspects of the society that are addressed by the public must be registered and approved by the

⁹⁰ Peter J. Boettke, “Why Perestroika Failed, *Journal of the Foundation for Economic Education*, 1 March 1992, (accessed 15 August 2018), available from <https://fee.org/articles/why-perestroika-failed/>; internet.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

government through certain ministries, otherwise it must go “underground.”⁹³ The “dog dish” refers to the resources that were short in the Soviet Union. Though promised through perestroika that new goods and economic prosperity would be coming to the Soviet Union, the policy did not deliver this promise to the people, but only to a selection of the ruling elites.⁹⁴ A more economically focused explanation of the failure of perestroika relative to its benefit to power elites states that, “the structural economic reform promised short-term and easily identifiable costs to be borne mainly by the party bureaucracy, and long-term and largely hidden benefits in terms of increased economic efficiency and consumer well-being.”⁹⁵

Overall, the policies of perestroika and glasnost were not only implemented by Gorbachev to improve the lives of those in the Soviet Union, but also to alleviate the corruption and structural weakness permeating the political and economic sectors of the larger Soviet structure. However, when considering how the nature of the Federation era in Russia has existed as a system bolstered by multiple scandals to include embezzlement of millions of dollars, stolen budgets and numerable other instances of public and private corruption. Russia has historically lived under the curse of “bad rules that failed to restrain the political whims of the ruling elite;” first during the Imperial era, then the Soviet era, and now in the Federation era. The passage of time has revealed that these policies did not then, nor now, improve the lives of Soviets or Russians. Rather, these policies almost exclusively benefitted the highest social, economic, and

⁹³ This detail will be important later especially in considering the underground music scene of the Soviet Union and in contemporary Russia

⁹⁴ Boettke.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

political elites, or in other words, the unofficial oligarchs.⁹⁶ This commonality between the Soviet era and Federation era indicates that despite new “democratic” social or economic policies, or transitions between government eras and leaders, the Russian social and political power dynamic is consistent between both eras due to elitist manipulation that culminates in the creation of illusory perceptions of Russian culture and identity.

Beyond this common link of power dynamics, lies the link specifically important to my thesis. That is, how culture, and particularly music, was used in the manipulation and culmination of an illusion of systemic perceptions of democratic changes orchestrated by power elites, in order to set the conditions for *an even more powerful regime*.

e. Glasnost to the Collapse of the Soviet Union

The creation and authorship of Soviet culture and identity belonged to the Communist Party during the Soviet Union. The Party still created, sponsored, advertised and produced the cultural material available to the public. However, there was a slight variation. In some cases, beginning in the mid-1960s onward, specialized ministries with oversight of a variety of cultural aspects could allow the option of undergoing strict registration procedures in order to receive approval to produce goods or services on behalf of non-government related individuals or entities. The addition of this optional registration and approval process was seemingly a step towards more liberty for the Soviet people to cultivate their own view of culture and identity. But, these processes

⁹⁶ Ibid.

were significantly manipulated, first by the Party and later by power elites of the emerging Post-Soviet power structure. These ministries included:⁹⁷

- The Ministry of Communications (1946-91)
- The Ministry of Culture (1953-91)
- The Ministry of Cinematography (1946-53; then under Ministry of Culture 1953-91)
- The Ministry of Information and Press (1990-91; previously section of Ministry of Internal Affairs 1946-1990)
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs (1946-60; 1968-91)
- The Ministry of Radio Industry (1965-91)

As interesting as each of these ministries' history and details are pertaining to how they operated and the role they played in cultural manipulation and control for the Party, the role played by the Ministry of Radio Industry and Melodiya, the Soviet state record company, was particularly remarkable. What I learned about the roles of these specialized ministries, combined with my in-country research findings done in Russia, led to original and compelling insights.

Upon interviewing a St. Petersburg record store sales-associate in July 2018, I learned that this individual once liked Kino, the most successful rock group in Russia of the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, he disclosed that he does not like them now. In particular, he dislikes the band's vocalist and star, Victor Tsoi. I asked why his feelings for Kino changed, and my interviewee "shut down." He said, "I will tell you another time," as we stood in the shop. Despite spending more time with this person, learning more about the contemporary underground music scene in St. Petersburg and attending shows together, I still do not fully understand the reason for his change of heart towards Kino and Tsoi. After doing additional research and inspired by my emerging realization

⁹⁷ List of Ministries of the Soviet Union, (accessed 17 August 2018), available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Ministries_of_the_Soviet_Union; internet.

of the illusory perception culminating in cultural manipulation by the emerging elites of the Post-Soviet power structure – and connected to the policies of perestroika and glasnost – I researched Victor Tsoi’s background and some of those with whom he associated. My research revealed that he was among the cultural actors, used by the emerging power elites of the Post-Soviet structure, to shape and manipulate perceptions and interpretations of post-Soviet Russian culture and identity. While my research has not yet explicitly – or implicitly – indicated a coalition of these illusory cultural actors, there are arguably, noticeable commonalities amongst their communities, sponsors, and relationships. These commonalities reveal that a type of “collusion” was in play amongst elites for the purpose of creating illusory perceptions of the Russian public sphere.

In the 1960s, rock genres of music in Russia were trying to exist outside of and above the unsupported and limited world of the underground. The influences of Western rock bands, like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, made its way to the Soviet Union, where they inspired underground artists.⁹⁸ In 1965, with the establishment of the Ministry of Radio Industry and the lifting of the ban on rock music, bands from the underground could enter a strict process of registration in the hopes of having their music played publicly, albeit at state-sanctioned venues and under state supervision. Additionally, official registration enabled bands to take advantage of national production and distribution of their records and participate in state-sanctioned music festivals.⁹⁹ Being approved through the registration process was the only way to survive as a music artist and have your content available for listening. Otherwise, music artists could exist underground. Music artists knew that the Party elite were aware of the distribution

⁹⁸ http://www.krugosvet.ru/enc/kultura_i_obrazovanie/muzyka/ROK-MUZIKA_V_ROSSII.html;

⁹⁹ Sabrina Petra. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: religion, Politics and Social Change in east-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 129.

system of the underground, known as samizdat (self-publishing). State informers, or “spies,” posing as fellow underground supporters were filtered into their scene.¹⁰⁰ Even after approval, if a music group’s or artist’s actions proved unacceptable to the party, they could face negative legal and personal repercussions. Boris Grebenshchikov, or “BG”, the lead singer of Aquarium, a popular Russian rock band in the 1980s, faced this disapproval early in his music career. In 1980, met by the first public Russian rock critic and key figure in a Russian rock musician’s music career, Artemy Troitsky, BG was invited by Troitsky to play with his band Aquarium at the state sanctioned Tbilisi Rock Festival.¹⁰¹ Only government-approved bands could play at this festival, and Aquarium had not yet received approval. Because BG had not yet received the required approval, he and his band were removed from the stage. BG lost his day job and he was removed from membership in the “Komsomol,” the Young Communist League. This is “the kiss of death for a Soviet citizen in 1980.”¹⁰² The importance of this event in BG’s music career, particularly how he was removed from the Komsomol, is crucial to the events unfolding in his participation as an illusory cultural actor in the 1980s and early 90s. Furthermore, BG is the man who introduced Victor Tsoi to the world of the elitist endorsed illusory culture.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 132.

¹⁰¹ Aleksandr Gorbachev, “Meet Boris Grebenshchikov, the Soviet Bob Dylan, *Newsweek*, 25 May 2015 (accessed 21 August 2018) available from <https://www.newsweek.com/2015/06/26/meet-boris-grebenshchikov-soviet-bob-dylan-335200.html>; internet.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Not all power elites were on board with these policies, but a questionable push for internal changes, combined with Gorbachev's desperation to keep the Union together, made the policies go forward. Two years after the policies were implemented, the state-supported "cult film," *Assa*, was directed and produced by Sergei Solovyov.¹⁰³

Solovyov, a former student at the all-Soviet State Institute of Cinematography, intentionally chose his characters and plot for *Assa* to be relevant to the Soviet counter-culture, as each character embodied certain Soviet roles, and the plot motivated certain feelings about each character's role. The main female protagonist portrayed the common Soviet person. The female protagonist's lover portrayed a wealthy elite man identified as a criminal by the KGB and under watch for his activities on behalf of fraudulent international business. Put another way, he was an individual who represented a person of power who was corrupt. The third main character was played by a real-life Soviet artist, Afrika, who is portrayed as the hero in the film. Afrika was the protagonist's new lover, an eccentric rock musician in the underground music scene.¹⁰⁴ Additional leading roles in *Assa* included a plethora of other underground artists entering the mainstream Soviet music scene and culture at that time due to glasnost, including BG, Viktor Tsoi, and others. Interestingly, BG selected all of the music for *Assa*. His role in the film cultivated a strong ethos and pathos appeal to him, likewise with the other real-life rock artists who were featured.¹⁰⁵ With this dynamic of roles and a plot that moves the common Soviet citizen to choose "truth" over "corruption" in the end of the film, it created an acceptable and favorable identity for the Soviet counterculture, and

¹⁰³ "'Assa': The story behind the 'film that brought down the Soviet Union,'" *Russia Beyond*, (accessed 15 August 2018), available from https://www.rbth.com/arts/movies/2016/04/11/assa-the-story-behind-the-film-that-brought-down-the-soviet-union_583733; internet.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

emerging rock artists filtering into the mainstream music scene, which was once restrictive towards rock music. In broader terms, a cult of personality was being built upon people like BG and Tsoi within the counterculture community to motivate a particular political agenda of the elites of the emerging Post-Soviet structure; this was a method used in the early Soviet days by another set of elites. This transformation of social and political acceptance of the rock music artists and scene were well-received by the Soviet audience. At the same time, however, it raises several questions about these actors. Why were they *then acceptable* and featured in state-owned film productions? Why were they *then* regarded as state heroes, instead of their former status as state enemies? How were they *then* supported by the state, when they were once oppressed by the state? What *now* are these illusory cultural actors' in the present Federation era of Russia?

My research revealed that Solovyov was a product of the state-owned Institution of Cinematography in the 1980s. However, after his work in the late 1980s on *Assa* and similarly created films, he became the chairman of Cinematographer's Union of Russia from 1994-97. He has continued producing films to this day in Moscow. Additionally, he has served as a professor of Cinematography at the state university, Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography. This institute has been affiliated with making films sponsored by the state, to advance its social-political agenda through creation of illusory disguises, since 1919.¹⁰⁶ Solovyov's career with the state during the Soviet era, and his success in the Federation era, arguably show he was useful in the effort to manipulate societal perceptions of the Soviet elites, which mobilized the Soviet masses to demand political

¹⁰⁶ "Sergei Soloyvov," Russia IC, (accessed 20 August 2018), available from <http://www.russia-ic.com/people/general/s/198/>; internet.

change and expel the corruptors of the system in order to pave the way for the new system.

Based on my research, one can conclude that Solovyov cast his counterculture characters used in *Assa* from the system of samizdat. Russian elites and intelligentsia were known viewers of their content. These same elites wanted to create an illusory perception of societal democratization and openness. In doing this, power elites used former social-political dissenters who they believed could most convincingly deliver a facade of cultural creation. Ultimately, their goal was to delegitimize the current power structure, break it and then attain social, economic and political power from the vacuum created by the Soviet Union's dissolution.

On the set of *Assa*, Solovyov's assistant director, Natalya Razgolova, met Victor Tsoi and the two fell in love. Tsoi left his wife and young son for Razgolova. The information yielded by my research on Razgolova and her family background was astonishing in light of her connection to Tsoi's sudden super-stardom that followed with his new relationship with her. Razgolova's brother, Kirill Razlogov, was the director of the Russian Institute for Cultural Research from 1989-2013. A Russian film critic his whole career, he has served as President of the Russian Guild of Film Critics from 2015-present. He is also the author and host of *Cult Cinema*, a program on the TV-channel "Russia-K," also known as "Russia Culture," which is owned by the Russian government "state-controlled" network, VGTRK, existent since 1997, formerly named RTR-2.¹⁰⁷ Kirill Razgolov's background and relationships with state elites in the Soviet era, and his continued success in the Federation era – similar to Solovyov's story – suggest questions regarding how closely he may have been aligned with the emerging elites of

¹⁰⁷ "Kirill Razlogov: Film Expert, Cultural Specialist," *Register of the British Council*, (accessed 18 August 2018), available from <https://www.britishcouncil.ru/en/hitchcock9/guests/kirill-razlogov>; internet.

the Post-Soviet power structure; the elites who pushed for internal social, economic and political change.

The success of the film *Assa* gave Tsoi and his band Kino immense popularity and recognition. This popularity continued to grow, especially as Tsoi developed close ties to Razgolova and her prominent brother. In *Assa*, Tsoi plays himself. His character is a band-member and the leading male role in the film. His character is also a singer working in a restaurant. In a famous scene from the film, the manager of his restaurant reads Tsoi the “strict rules” to which all restaurant singers must adhere. But instead, Tsoi heads to the stage and sings, *I Want Changes!* – an actual song by his real-life band, Kino.¹⁰⁸ Both the movie and the song became closely identified with the policies of perestroika and glasnost, both of which were still fairly new in the Soviet Union. In the same year that *Assa* was released (1987), Kino released their sixth album, *Gruppa Krovi* (*Blood Type*). This was their most political album yet.¹⁰⁹ This album’s release in addition to Tsoi’s role in *Assa*, led to what was then called “Kinomania.”¹¹⁰

People adored Kino, and particularly Tsoi, for their Western-rock sound, which was not widely popular in mainstream music prior to the release of *Blood Type*. Kino and Tsoi were also highly popular because Tsoi was the “picture” of the average Soviet citizen, who lived modestly in his small apartment working in the apartment building’s boiler room.¹¹¹ The average citizen could easily relate to Tsoi. The mania over Tsoi grew stronger in the years after 1987 as he starred as the main character in the film, *The*

¹⁰⁸ “‘Assa’: The story behind the ‘film that brought down the Soviet Union,’” *Russia Beyond*, (accessed 15 August 2018), available from https://www.rbth.com/arts/movies/2016/04/11/assa-the-story-behind-the-film-that-brought-down-the-soviet-union_583733; internet.

¹⁰⁹ Viktor Tsoi, (accessed 18 August 2018), available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Tsoi; internet.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Needle (1988), traveled to the United States to promote his films at film festivals and continued making another political album with Kino. Then, the mania is tempered by a devastating event – Tsoi's untimely death in a car accident August 15, 1990.¹¹² In December 1990, Kino released their final album, with Tsoi's part on the album, which had been recorded in the summer just before his fatal accident.¹¹³ This album, with eight tracks, became the band's most popular release. After researching Tsoi's death, the eighth album released by Kino (Black Album), and, Tsoi's role in the film, *The Needle*, another important connection to the emerging elites of the Post-Soviet structure was revealed.

The Needle was released in 1988 – roughly two years prior to Tsoi's death. At first, having come to understand Tsoi's illusory cultural role in *Assa*, when discovering he played a similar role in *The Needle* – as well as its message and plot's similarity to that of *Assa* – it appeared that this film was another product of the emerging power elite's efforts to identify state heroes and authoritative figures involved in corruption. Arguably, the film was also part of the elite's efforts to bolster the rock music scene aligned with their agenda. However, information found on the director and the remaining band members after Kino's death show that although this film product was a part of the illusory cultural content endorsed by the emerging power elite, their illusory culture actors (the director and Kino) were no longer interested in being their “puppets.” This became evident following Tsoi's death.

The director of *The Needle*, Rashid Nugmanov, a Kazakh man, moved to Moscow in 1984 to study cinematography at the Moscow State Film Institute (VGIK) -

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

also known as the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography. This was also where Solovyov, the director of *Assa*, studied and was later a professor.¹¹⁴ Four years later and after arriving in Moscow, Nugmanov directed and released *The Needle*. This was done under a joint-stock company called, Kazakhfilm. An open joint-stock company is defined as:

“a business entity in which shares of the company's stock can be bought and sold by shareholders. Each shareholder owns company stock in proportion, evidenced by their shares (certificates of ownership). Shareholders are able to transfer their shares to others without any effects to the continued existence of the company.”¹¹⁵

Several well-known examples of other open joint-stock companies in Russia include the OSJC Russian Railways, OSJC Gazprom, OSJC Lukoil, OSJC Rusnano, and OSJC Channel One Russia.¹¹⁶ These open joint-stock companies will be mentioned in more detail later in this chapter relative to their connection to corruption and Federation era power elites. However, in the context of Kazakhfilm and Nugmanov's relationship with the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, among successful Federation era film-makers such as Solovyov, a distinct detail becomes clear: *The Needle* was a product of the illusory culture and manipulation of the emerging elites in the Post-Soviet power structure. Another distinct detail in this relationship is made clear in light of Nugmanov's life and career after *The Needle*, that is the foreshadowing style and content used in this controversial film and Tsoi's untimely death. *The Needle* was

¹¹⁴ Andrew Horton, “Nomad from Kazakhstan: An Interview with Rashid Nugmanov,” *Journal of Film Criticism*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (Winter 1990), 35.

¹¹⁵ Thomas B. Courtney and Brian G. Hutchinson, *The Law of Private Companies*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Tottel Publishing, 2008), 26.

¹¹⁶ “List of Open Joint Stock Companies in Russia,” on Wikipedia, (accessed 22 August 2018), available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_joint-stock_company; internet.

also “a model for the Russian version of postmodernism - uninhibited and uninformed, compensating for the lack of culture, skill, and resources with mischief and wit.”¹¹⁷

The character roles, setting, and plot in *The Needle* support the illusory culture and identities of this separate elite circle quite clearly. However, these same elements of characters, setting, and plot also support an artistic objection to all elites of the Soviet era, and the direction of the emerging Post-Soviet power structure. Tsoi is the main character who returns from Russia to his home city in Kazakhstan as a “drifter” to collect a debt from a low-level criminal named, Spartak, at a cafe named “Parliament.”¹¹⁸ This return of the Russian (Tsoi) to Kazakhstan at a cafe with the name “Parliament,” for the purpose of collecting the debt of a low-level criminal, plays on prevailing stereotypes of the Russian Communist Party. In addition, the satellite states, such as Kazakhstan, were one of the scapegoats for the economic instability of the Soviet Union. And, it was not coincidental that this meeting took place at “Parliament.” In the artistic view however, this part of the plot also symbolizes a Russian drifter encountering another Soviet citizen confronted with a lack of true skill, identity, and culture, who has succumbed to crime to survive. The other roles portrayed in this film build on the notion that the only method of survival in a hopeless and unregulated setting, is corruption. In the film, Tsoi’s character, Movo, encounters his ex-girlfriend, Dina, who he ends up staying with while he is in town. He discovers that Dina, who is employed by a surgeon, is addicted to morphine. Not only is the surgeon, Artur, supplying Dina with the drug, but she is storing it at her apartment for him as well. Movo learns of this reality of his ex-girlfriend’s life and takes her to a place they used to go together on the Aral Sea.

¹¹⁷ IGLA Film (Movie) Plot and Review, (accessed 20 August 2018), available from <http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Hi-Ik/Igla.html>; internet.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Spartak is derived from Spartacus. In Russia, it refers to an international fitness and sports society and unites some countries of the former Soviet Union.

However, upon arriving there they find it is dried up like a desert. This part of the plot symbolizes the conflict a Soviet person faces when trying to make his circumstances better by going to what is supposed to be a secure place that holds the promise of a better future – the promise of prosperity. Through their encounter with the Aral Sea, the Soviet citizen evaluates his life and relationship to his culture and identity and discovers that what was once there, has simply evaporated.

Movo and Dina return to their home city in Kazakhstan after a few weeks. Dina seems cured, but she falls back into her addiction - another symbol of the unstable and insecure Soviet Union. Movo successfully fights off mafia members related to the surgeon turned drug dealer, Artur, who has wreaked havoc on Dina's life. This signifies that the Soviet citizen can beat the institution backed by corruption. However, this fight between Movo and Artur's "family" led to perhaps his own demise. The film ends with the low-level criminal from the film's beginning, Spartak, becoming hysterical and losing his mind. This reflects how all sanity is lost since he cannot pay back all of the people to whom he owes money, much less the amount he owes. Also, a loss of sanity is conveyed when Movo is stabbed in a park by Artur's "family" on his walk home at night with Dina. The film ends and raises the question of Movo's fate. In doing so, it also raises the broader question of the fate of the Soviet citizen. Is the Soviet citizen dead? Is the Soviet citizen paralyzed? Or, will he or she prevail against the corrupt and criminally-infused Soviet institutions?

Another perspective that would support *The Needle* as an illusory cultural product of power elite manipulation would be that it pinpoints the enemy not as corrupt institutions, but rather as the satellite states like Kazakhstan, which were notoriously the scapegoats for the issues in the majority Russian Communist Party and Soviet government. The controversy of having a film with drug use, something not commonly

seen for its time, also alludes the reality that drug and mafia issues were connected to the satellite states, not Russia. This is indicated by Movo portraying a character who stands against the mafia and drugs. The ending of the film seen in this perspective of Movo's fate and Spartak's hysteria pose a different question symbolic of the illusory culture pushed by the emerging power elites of the Post-Soviet structure, which is, "What will become of the Russians if they are to continue coexisting in a union with corrupt actors?"

The main characters and the actors who portray them, embody these dual perspectives in addition to the plot. Movo and Artur are both rock musicians in real life at this time. Interestingly, after *The Needle*, their lives ended up in very different, but significant places. Movo is played by the Soviet Union's leading celebrity and rock star of Kino, Viktor Tsoi. In the years following the film's release, Tsoi dies, and the remaining band members such as Yuri Kasparyan, go back underground, playing music with little said or noted about them since the release of Black Album. Artur, played by the front man of the Moscow band, Zvuki Mu, is portrayed by Pyotr Mamonov. Mamonov was linked to the Leningrad Rock Club, like BG, Tsoi, and other emerging rock artists allowed into the mainstream culture in the 1980s. Into the 1990s when the Post-Soviet structure was formed, in addition to creating numerous new songs and albums with his original band and others due to contentious relationships. Mamonov also produced and directed "several one-man theatrical performances, establishing himself as a cult figure in Russia."¹¹⁹ In the 1990s, Mamonov added Orthodoxy to his cult figure construction. He announced his faith and starting applying this aspect to his film and

¹¹⁹ "Vladimir Ruvinsky, "From punk rocker to holy fool," Russia Beyond, 10 November 2011, (accessed 16 August 2018), available from https://www.rbth.com/articles/2011/11/10/from_punk_rocker_to_holy_fool_13725.html; internet.

music persona. He was recognized and praised by the Orthodox Church's Patriarch, Alexis II.¹²⁰ It's suspicious how Mamonov's *Needle* persona, a mafia-tied man of the institution, relates to his Post-Soviet success and connection to state-owned film and music corporations, as well as his relationship with the Orthodox church, which shares an increasing connection to the Federation era's social-political structure.¹²¹ The end of Tsoi's death and the subsequent decline in Kino's notoriety and popularity in Russia was in contrast to Mamonov, who continued a career as a significant figure in Russian culture and identity. This raises questions about which of the two perspectives of *The Needle's* roles and plots they contended with. Tsoi's fatal car accident further contributes to the suspicion surrounding these questions, as it was found that no alcohol or drugs had been in his system for over 48 hours. Additionally, a tire from the car was missing. The car was nearly destroyed, yet the bus he was said to hit was not damaged badly, nor was the driver of the bus injured. There was also controversy surrounding that demo-track of Black Album that was reported to be in Tsoi's damaged vehicle. Kasparyan asserted that the demo-track was not in Tsoi's possession but was in his own vehicle.¹²² The band released the eighth album as a tribute to Tsoi in December of 1990, but nothing new was said of the band members after what seemed to be the death of their legacy. Information on the unfolding of *The Needle* director Nugmanov's life after the film and his artistic touches on the film, shed light on where Tsoi and Kino were at with their connection to the emerging power elites of the Post-Soviet structure during this time period. This was in contrast to their symbiotic relationship seen in the late 1980's.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Vladimir Ravinsky, "President and Patriarch: What Putin Wants From the Orthodox Church, Carnegie Moscow Center, 19 December 2017, (accessed 21 August 2018), available from <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75058>; internet.

¹²² Viktor Tsoi, (accessed 18 August 2018), available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Tsoi; internet.

Though the film does capture a dual perspective on the Soviet era, it must be remembered that it was produced by an open joint-stock company, Kazakhfilm. Characteristic of these companies, it was likely funded by emerging power elites related to Nugmanov's background at Moscow's State Institute of Cinematography, later the Gerasimov Institute. Given that Nugmanov studied there, he naturally knew other illusory cultural contributors from his time there. Nugmanov's life after the film and impressive intricate artistic detail he incorporated in the film, show that he essentially, "manipulated the manipulators" on their budget. In other words, he effectively out-manuevered them. Soviet cinema critic, Michael Brashinsky, notes that Nugmanov's "Kazakh New Wave" film reminiscent of French New Wave style, *The Needle*, incorporated numerous shots where Nugmanov filled the film screen with distinguishable Soviet technology, particularly Soviet television screens.¹²³ Brashinsky does not make the connection in his review of *The Needle* that Nugmanov's "trendy obsession" and "dedication to the Soviet television" correlates to the concept of "Big Brother is watching you," and Soviet censorship. But, it is quite clear that Nugmanov alluded to these concepts. Brashinsky draws on another extremely insightful artistic detail of *The Needle* that shows Nugmanov's appeal to the authentic dissent perspective of his film. Brashinsky notes, "the film, made by an ethnic Kazakh [Nugmanov] who never learned Kazakh and starring a Soviet-Korean from St. Petersburg [Tsoi], speaks in various tongues – Kazakh, Russian, Italian, German, and English – which creates the image of a Tower-of-Babel-like world, possibly facing a similar future."¹²⁴ The term, "Tower-of-Babel," refers to the Old-Testament biblical story where the united humanity of people on

¹²³ IGLA Film (Movie) Plot and Review, (accessed 20 August 2018), available from <http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Hi-Ik/Igla.html>; internet.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Earth attempt to build a tower that reaches Heaven.¹²⁵ The story follows that God knows of the peoples' unrealistic plan, so he "confounds their speech so that they can no longer understand each other, and scatters them across the world."¹²⁶ Brashinsky's use of this term in connecting it to *The Needle* decodes Nugmanov's intended use of his actors and language formats, which reflects the authentic dissent perspective of the film. In comparison to the Tower of Babel, the Soviet Union, composed of 15 different nationalities, developed unrealistic plans while lacking effective communication and coherence.

In addition to the artistic avant-guard disguised film details, Nugmanov's life after the film indicated that he was a proponent of casting *The Needle* in light of the reality of the Soviet Union and emerging Post-Soviet power structure. *The Needle* was a "critical success," particularly in the west, where he won awards at a variety of festivals. At one of these Nugmanov stated, "We demand no unified philosophy nor uniform artistic views on art. We are unified, instead, in our freedom and love of art."¹²⁷ There is irony in this context of dual perspectives. *The Needle* represents Nugmanov's choice to denounce uniformity in views, and instead, after the film's release, *asserts* that that uniformity exists in freedom and art. 1992 marked the end of Nugmanov's active directorial career for "unlisted reasons."¹²⁸ Coincidentally, Kazakh New Wave ended in 1992 as well. In 1993, Nugmanov moved to Paris, France where he lives today and has been an involved activist for international freedom since. Interestingly, Nugmanov currently

¹²⁵ Jacob Isaacs, "The Tower of Babel," Chabad.org, (accessed 22 August 2018), available from https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/246611/jewish/The-Tower-Of-Babel.htm; internet.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Horton, 38.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 39.

serves as “the General Director of the International Freedom Network, a London-based think tank created to foster democracy in the former Soviet Union.”¹²⁹ Among his work as an activist, he “has been responsible for the international relations of dissident organizations including the Forum for Democratic Forces of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, and For a Just Kazakhstan.”¹³⁰ One last detail to note on Nugmanov’s unfolding life since *The Needle*, he has denounced the political regime of Nursultan Nazarbaev, the leader in power of Kazakhstan since the year *The Needle* was released.

With the volume of multifaceted information available on *The Needle*, Rashid Nugmanov, Victor Tsoi, Pyotr Mamonov, and Kazakhfilm as an open joint-stock company, it is understood that Nugmanov, fresh from the Soviet state’s Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, impressively provided a realistic and an authentic dissent perspective in his film. In addition, he provided an illusory cultural perspective on his film as well. This perspective was promoted by the emerging elites of the Post-Soviet power structure, who funded *The Needle*’s production through Kazakhfilm. Notably, Kazakhfilm was an open joint-stock company. Some circumstances of Victor Tsoi’s death were suspicious in the context of his relationship to this company. This relationship also raises questions about whether Mamonov was obedient to the emerging power elites as evidence shows in his background and life after the *The Needle*. Both films, *Assa* and *The Needle*, which incorporated rock musicians as illusory cultural agents, reveal the significance, dependence, and manipulation of the *broader* culture by power elites in

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

both the Soviet era and Federation era, and *specifically*, music's relationship to power elites' agendas in both eras.

In light of the material related to particular products of culture produced in the Soviet era to include the films and actors as well as music and musicians, and other related actors, scholarly literature supports the "double morality" and "dual consciousness" of Soviet era society.¹³¹ In a study of Post-Soviet political culture in Russia, which assesses empirical investigations, done by scholar, Frederic J. Fleron, he references Robert C. Tucker, the author of many works in the study of Soviet and Post-Soviet structure such as, *The Soviet Political Mind* and *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia*. Fleron points out that "Tucker found evidence of the bifurcated personality in the era of Glasnost taking the form of cross-thinking (rather like having a cross-eyed mind), in which one part of the head pronounces correct words while another part guides actions quite incompatible with those words."¹³² Fleron built on Tucker's research by highlighting a key point that, "unless we are willing to believe that dual personae vanished into thin air with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, we need to be alert to their *present-day manifestations*."¹³³ Both Fleron and Tucker examined the correlation between the unreal nature of glasnost and the illusory culture that had been associated with both glasnost and perestroika, as well as the emerging elites of the Post-Soviet power structure. Fleron's emphasis on the necessity of following present-day manifestations of the "double morality" and "dual consciousness" in Russian society has been traced in the content of this chapter's subsection by examining key aspects of

¹³¹ Frederic J Fleron, Jr., "Post-Soviet Political Culture in Russia: An Assessment of Recent Empirical Investigations" in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 1996, pp. 238

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

the unfolding of the lives of key actors as well as institutions, like the Institute of Cinematography, in the Federation era. Fleron's prescription for understanding contemporary Russian political-culture through awareness and understanding of the perspective of the dual personae – the manifestation of both “double morality” and “dual consciousness” – is derived from not only Tucker's concepts, but also from the post-Soviet scholars, Sergejev and Biryukov. Fleron references their research when he writes that, “the most important single obstacle to the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic society is the incompatibility of the new forms of social life and the new political institutions with the political culture of the nation.”¹³⁴ This particularly important obstacle faced in both the Soviet era and the Federation era, was an obstacle familiar to most elites of both eras. Fleron's work supports this as he indicates:

...it must be added that this dualism had its origins not in Sovietism, but rather in Tsarist Russia, as much of 19th century Russian literature testifies. It was intensified and reinforced in the Soviet period.¹³⁵

Therefore, the elites in all eras of Russian history (Tsarist elites: emerging Soviet elites: the Soviet elites: and the emerging Post-Soviet elites), have consulted and manipulated cultural institutions, content, and figures to transition and mobilize the masses to either be in support of or to acquiesce in their political agendas. This is particularly evident through power elites' use of illusory cultural content and actors, with radically progressive and artistic appearances to match that of the unrealistic radical political changes that Russian elites attempt, *or so they make it seem*.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 233.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 238.

f. The Post-Soviet Structure to Putin's Russia

The plethora of complex information and details available to date on the collapse of the Soviet Union, related to this thesis research, is insurmountable. Rather than discussing in depth many of the historical events and details involving the collapse of the Soviet Union, this subsection's objective is to discuss key social, political, and economic concepts that scholars draw upon in analyzing and evaluating the new Federation era, which were evident in previous eras in Russia. These concepts include significant political-economic information relating to the emerging elites of the Post-Soviet structure, particularly, Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin and information on both the music and culture scenes of the Federation era.

Fleron's empirical study of political culture in Russia has been utilized to support the varying cultural perceptions and interpretations manipulated in all eras by Russia's power elites, in order to carry out their societal agendas. Building on the timeless nature of Russia's sense of the dual personae in its society, Fleron examined the concept of the dual personae as a distinctly Russian characteristic. This dual persona is comprised of an individual's "real" political culture and identity, and their "ideal political culture and identity."¹³⁶ One might wonder, 'who or what is the real persona?' In addressing this question, Fleron references Russian and Soviet scholar, Stephen White, who says the answer is, "oth." This is due to the fact that "both personae in fact share elements of both spuriousness and authenticity."¹³⁷ White elaborates further on this idea and states that:

¹³⁶ Ibid., 241.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 238

This dualism is the result of 'the institutionalized hypocrisy which the Soviet system continues to demand of its citizens if they are to live a normal family and occupational existence within its boundaries, and the ambivalence and "linguistic dualism" which these pressures imposed upon them.

Fleron's research reveals that when Russians have been assessed or interviewed on the perception of their political culture and identity, they respond with their *ideal* political culture and identity.¹³⁸ "Tapping into" the *real* political culture and identity can only be reflected in one's "actual behavior." Russians' actual behavior, however, has historically – and presently – been affected by the pressures of the power structure in all eras. Robert C. Tucker, in his piece "Sovietology and Russian History," validates Fleron's argument of Russia's enduring coexistence of the ideal and real perceptions of culture and identity (also known as the dual personae), due to the emergence of the post-Soviet elites desired systemic social-political structure, in interest of its economic interests, as Tucker states:

...the Soviet system lives on without the party core, which was simply a (replaceable) central mechanism of Soviet statehood... In other words, tsarist *elitism*, which rose again in a new form after 1917 and attained truly totalitarian dimensions under Stalin, has largely survived the Communist Party's demise. It exists still in state ownership of the land, resources and most of the economy; this was the main substance of the 'socialism' proclaimed in the Soviet period. *Elitism* survives in the resistance of very many administrators of state property to rapid and far-reaching privatization in transition to a free-market economy. It survives in the appropriation by many in the new Russian political elite of the privileged way of life enjoyed by the Soviet *nomenklatura*^{139**}(see footnote).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid., 241

¹³⁹ The "Soviet nomenklatura" is a term the author has used along "the emerging elite of the Post-Soviet structure." In this paper, it is used to mean: a category of people within the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries who held various key administrative positions in the bureaucracy, running all spheres of those countries' activity: government, industry, agriculture, education, etc., whose positions were granted only with approval by the communist party of each country or region.

¹⁴⁰ Robert C. Tucker, "Sovietology and Russian History" in *Journal of Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1992, 175-196.

In addition to the concept of the dual personae, Tucker and Fleron bring out a critical point relevant to my research. This point is related to what I have termed ‘the emerging elites of the Post-Soviet power structure.’ As my research has revealed its meaning, “elitism” can be defined:

The advocacy or existence of an elite as a dominating element in a system or society as expressed in the attitude or behavior of a person or group who regard themselves as belonging to an elite.¹⁴¹

The new Russian political elite, who emerged out of the power vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, utilized illusory ‘democratic appearing’ culture and policies to mobilize a desire within the masses to dissolve the Soviet Union and enter a new era. Research by Archie Brown states that “the link between attitudes and behavior [supportive of democracy in the former Soviet Union] has been shown to be greatly strengthened by *vested interest*.”¹⁴² This idea of ‘vested interest’ lies with the new Russian power elite. According to Fleron, “the strongest proponents of modernizing political change were the beneficiaries of those policies.”¹⁴³ Elites who benefitted from these policies did so throughout the 1990s, which included events like the 1998 ruble crash, as well as, institutionalization of key features of Post-Soviet ‘systematic corruption.’ Such features included stolen budgets, large-scale embezzlement and money laundering, and questionable open joint-stock company activity by Russian political leadership. According to the Russian scholar, Grigorii Yavlinsky, in the contemporary Federation era “democratic reforms have become associated in too many minds with robbing the [Russian] people and imposing hardship on the many for the

¹⁴¹ This definition is the author’s as compiled from multiple sources during her research.

¹⁴² Archie Brown ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴³ Fleron, 246.

benefit of the few.”¹⁴⁴ As the post-Soviet power structure emerged through the 1990s, the public learned that simply because “democracy,” -packaged in the form of democratic appearing policies, and cultural symbols, mimicking Western democratic symbols like rock music - was being incorporated into the new structure, this did not mean “democrats” were guiding the creation of democratic institutions. Peter J. S. Duncan’s 2005 research on contemporary Russian identity questions whether contemporary Russian policies and institutions are based upon Western ideas of democracy, or are simply “returning to a trajectory more in line with the autocratic and collectivist traditions of the tsarist and Communist periods?”¹⁴⁵ Duncan writes:

According to the prevailing orthodoxy of Western governments and international financial institutions in 1991, the key to consolidating democracy in Russia was to carry out the privatization of the economy as quickly as possible. This would create a new class of private owners who would have a vested interest in opposing any possible return of the Communists. The liberal economic transformations in Russia in 1992 were led by a group of El’tsin’s [Yeltsin] ministers including Egor Gaidar and Anatolii Chubais, known as the “young reformers’ and also by their own self-description as ‘democrats’; it is significant that before long the term ‘democrats’ was used in a pejorative sense by the opposition, to refer solely to such supporters of a rapid reform. Most accounts of the reforms produced prior to the August 1998 rouble crash and government default convey a confident optimism, with titles such as *The success of Russian economic reforms* and *The coming Russian boom*. Several of these were written by Western advisers to the reform process, or by Russian citizens who took part in the privatization process.¹⁴⁶

Dana Heller’s 2007 case-study on post-Soviet political culture and identity, finds compelling connections with Russia’s mainstream female music duo “t.A.T.u.” (which stands for ‘this one loves that one’; a reference to the underage teenage girl duo being sexually interested in one another). The popularity of this duo can be at least partially

¹⁴⁴ Nadezhda Azhgikhina, “Grigory Yavlinsky;s Program Gives Russian Society a Chance to Preserve its Dignity,” *The Nation*, 2 February 2018, (accessed 18 August 2018), available from <https://www.thenation.com/article/grigory-yavlinskys-program-gives-russian-society-a-chance-to-preserve-its-dignity/>; internet.

¹⁴⁵ Peter J. S. Duncan, “Russian identity between East and West” in *The Historical journal*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Mar, 2005), 278.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

attributed to the rapid and radical desire to “democratize” in order to obtain societal support in Russia for the new post-Soviet “democratic” economic reforms.¹⁴⁷ Heller argues that the controversies and inconsistencies in t.A.T.u.’s presentation, marketing, and performances are meaningful in the way they interact with the “larger context of ongoing debates over the redefinition of post-Soviet Russian national identity and Russia’s emerging role on the global mass cultural stage.”¹⁴⁸ Ivan Shapovalov, a former child-psychologist-turned-advertising executive, formed the female music duo in 1999, when the artists were fourteen-years-old.¹⁴⁹ These artists, with on-again-off-again appearances in Russia until the present day, are known as Julia Volkova and Lena Katina. Shapovalov sensed “homoerotic energy” between the girls, whom he auditioned and selected for his “underage sex project.”¹⁵⁰ He noted in an interview that ‘people visit pornographic sites above all others. My own research corroborated his findings and revealed that approximately 90% of people using the Internet go to porno sites first, and of these, nine in 10 are looking for underage entertainment. This means there is big interest as well as some dissatisfaction - their needs are not being met.’¹⁵¹ Shapovalov’s t.A.T.u. project was an “instant success in Russia.”¹⁵² Two years after the first album release of t.A.T.u. in 2000, produced by Trevor Horn, an English-language version of a single from their first album “All the Things She Said”; which climbed to the top of European pop charts, and made t.A.T.u. the first Russian pop performers to reach the

¹⁴⁷ Dana Heller, “T.A.T.u. You! Russia, the Global Politics of Eurovision, and Lesbian Pop” in *Popular Music*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May 2007), 195.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

No. 1 spot on the Media and Music Pan-European Singles Chart.¹⁵³ This indicator of success is not to say that t.A.T.u. was collectively well-received. Many audiences were shocked and confused by their content, especially originating from Russia, a nation characterized by predominantly traditional values. The Communist wing of government, not associated with the “young reformers” and Putin, in Russia attempted to prosecute Shapovalov for his musical project. They failed. Interestingly, t.A.T.u. was selected to represent the Russian Federation in the May 2003 48th Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), a sentimental and invaluable annual event occurring since 1956 with the intent of uniting the nations in post-war Europe. t.A.T.u.’s participation indicates that the music duo and their progressive homoerotic content won official cultural validation in Russia.¹⁵⁴

More fascinating than t.A.T.u.’s significant participation at Eurovision, is the success they met in their trial against those in the political sphere, opposite to Putin and his ‘family’ of “young reformers” and ministers. Economic and political crises throughout the 1990’s resulted from incompatible “democratic” economic and political policies implemented by Yeltsin, his ministers, and “young reformers.” The elites of the post-Soviet power structure supported the survival of the very radical progressive democratic cultural influence, namely t.A.T.u., to surge “democratic” sentiment and feelings into the culture. Perhaps in this context, the new power elites may have had an interest in facilitating the creation of such a phenomenon. Manipulative publicity of democratic illusory cultural figures can be used as a tool to increase compatibility and support for radical democratic economic and political reforms and policies. This is not a new active measure taken by Russian elites. The manipulative publicity utilized in the Soviet era, continued to be used by the emerging elites of the post-Soviet structure. The

¹⁵³ Ibid., 196-197

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 197

participation of t.A.T.u. at Eurovision is even more significant in its meaning for European – Russian relations, because by sending t.A.T.u. to represent Russia, power elites were not only saying ‘we support these democratic and progressive figures in our culture,’ but ‘we will *continue* to support this democratic and progressive content in our culture’ as well.¹⁵⁵ This was in contrast to past Soviet trial use of progressive democratic content that proved to be temporary. The typical ESC convention of nations sending “relative unknowns” was broken by Russia that year, as t.A.T.u. was already internationally successful. This showed Russia was seriously making their point of attaching democratic and progressive symbols to themselves, in enabling these figures to not only culturally associate and identify with Russians, but to represent Russia in an international context as well.¹⁵⁶

Heller includes fascinating details on her study of Russian political culture and t.A.T.u. as she discussed the music duo’s uncooperative and outspoken behavior at ESC, such as threatening to perform nude and to be overly-sexual with one another. In addition, she highlighted how they toured internationally and spoke with international media including BBC, German Magazine *Bild*, and more.¹⁵⁷ During a separate, but related, appearance on Jay Leno’s *Tonight Show*, the duo wore scandalous t-shirts that said, “Fuck the War,” and kissed during the break in their performance. The music duo infuriated the *Tonight Show*’s U.S. channel network, NBC, from which the artists were banned, as it underscored Western “incomprehension of the implications of misreading” reaction to perceived censorship. NBC executives did not realize after broadcasting the episode, the sharp international criticism that would follow their decision and the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 198

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

international marketing advantages that would be gained by Russia. This criticism also came from many who also did not support the US war in Iraq.¹⁵⁸ Aside from displaying Western incompetence and bolstering Russia's international image and market, the event was one which mocked the presumed cultural hegemony of the West.¹⁵⁹ Such mockery, as observable from t.A.T.u.'s US television appearance, was of calculated interest in the international sphere, particularly, within the Russian sphere.

One last point to draw on from Heller's case-study, is how she notes the nature of Shapovalov's skeptical statements and feelings on the presumed cultural hegemony of the West. She reflects Shapovalov's perspective through other key Russian cultural figures. In particular, Heller discusses a 2003 interview between British music journalist, Neil McCormick, and official Russian music journalist, Artemy Troitsky. Troitsky was the same questionable Soviet journalist and critic who met BG and created his notoriety and fame, as well as Victor Tsoi (Kino), and a plethora of other successful, well-known Soviet and Russian rock and pop artists.¹⁶⁰ Heller does not distinguish between Troitsky's Soviet past and his current Federation, contributions in covering each era's mainstream music-scenes and popular-culture. However, she does reveal, based on the orientation of the interview dialogue between Troitsky and McCormick, the particular manipulative publicity Russian elites associated with the new economic and political reforms intended to represent to Russians and the West. An excerpt from Heller's piece on the 2003 interview includes:

It is really funny that the Tatu [t.A.T.u.] campaign in the West goes in a very different way to how it went in Russia', says the Russian music journalist, Artemy Troitsky in an interview with journalist Neil McCormick. 'In Russia, this whole lesbian thing has never been taken seriously. When they've been interviewed on talk shows and asked, "Are you really

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 199

lesbians?”, they’ve said, “No, it’s a trick, we have boyfriends, we are normal girls, we do this for image”. And the same thing for pedophilia. In Russia this whole issue of dirty old men fancying Tatu in their school uniforms never even broke out. [In Russia], they were just like any other teenybopper pop group with a good gimmick’ (McCormick 2003).¹⁶¹

The nature of this seemingly casual interview is telling of a few important details. First, it is interesting how Troitsky makes it a point to begin a discussion with a Western cultural figure, McCormick, on the topic of the radically-progressive Russian cultural product, t.A.T.u.. Secondly, Troitsky, likely aware of exactly what to say, as a figure representing the ideals of particular elites’ vested interests, explains how the lesbian and pedophilia aspects of the initially underage homoerotic music duo are ‘not serious.’ Rather, it is done ‘for image.’ Troitsky’s explanation not only contradicts these Russian “democratic” and “progressive” cultural figures’ authenticity, especially in light of the inconsistent nature of the dual personae of Russian individuals, as well as the traditional and conservative wave linked with the resurgence of Russian Orthodoxy. Troitsky’s explanation exposes reasonable recognition that the true intent behind t.A.T.u. was for strategic international marketing and cultural image purposes, which furthermore can describe t.A.T.u. as mere products of manipulative publicity and constructive tools in building the “democratic” and “progressive” illusory culture compatible with radical economic and political reform.

In considering Heller’s research on t.A.T.u., and the events involving the band since 2003, it is important to understand that the duo has performed at a wide range of national and international venues and award events, all of which have been accompanied by mass audiences. The most notable of these was the opening ceremony performance at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. In keeping with the ironic

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 199

nature of the Russian music duo, their performance stood in contrast to the lack of LGBT rights in Russia, and the 2013 Russian “anti-gay law.” The duo responded to this law as they had in the past; that they are not lesbians, but they do what they do “for lesbians” and the gay community.¹⁶² Additionally, the duo have become inspirational references in books and films. In reality, there may be some truth to their assertion of authenticity and reputation. However, given the nature of related events, and other actors like Shapovalov and Troitsky linked to the music duo, their primary purpose serves the vested interests of particular Russian elites.’ Otherwise, they would have a story more similar to that of the arrested and imprisoned progressive Russian music and cultural figures, Pussy Riot.

Returning to Peter Duncan, and his research on the realities revolving the new Russian elites with vested interests in radical “democratic” and “progressive” reforms and policies, or in other words, self-proclaimed ‘faux-democrats’, he draws on important details about how Western critics, as well as Western advisors of the post-Soviet elite core, who became private owners and interacted with these Russian “faux-democrats.” The key distinction between the Western critics and Western advisors is that, the Western critics were publicly highlighting the misleading and manipulative measures of which these Russian elites were guilty. In contrast, the Western advisors were acting as “janitors,” essentially, cleaning up the convoluted and failed economic and political state, and the public media involving the subject. This was an effort to somehow revive the current circumstances in Russia in order to then achieve both constituents’ end-goal of a lucrative Western collectivist political-economic structure.¹⁶³ Such criticism from the

¹⁶² t.A.T.u., on Wikipedia, (accessed 20 August 2018), available from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T.A.T.u.>; internet.

¹⁶³ Duncan, 279.

West as well as the events advocated by Western advisers and Russian oligarchs to Yeltsin and his ministers, arguably led to the 'regime-state' under Putin. Duncan highlights the key events and details of these corrupt circumstances and the transfer of power in 1999 to Vladimir Putin in his research. He writes:

From the late 1990's, a group of Western writers produced histories which were very critical of the whole economic reform process under El'tsin and of the role of the West in promoting it. The journalist Chrystia Freeland, in her book *Sale of the century*, accuses: 'Russia was robbed in broad daylight, by businessmen who broke no laws, assisted by the West's best friends in the Kremlin - the young reformers.' Freeland goes on to show how the 'young reformer' Konstantin Kagalovskii drew up a privatization law in such a deliberately obscure way as to discourage foreign investment, in order to keep the prices of the assets being privatized cheap. At the time he was also working for the banker Mikhail Khodorkovskii, who was seeking to acquire the oil company Yukos. In the absence of foreign competition, Khodorkovskii, one of the 'seven bankers' mentioned below, was able to buy the company for a fraction of its value.

While Freeland describes the fanatical 'capitalist messianism' of the young reformers, Peter Reddaway and Dmitry Glinski write of the 'self-confident, almost messianic vanguard mentality of a self-appointed elite', aiming to impose a market economy on Russia, despite the lack of popular support for the aims used. Reddaway and Glinski's polemical but careful history of the 1990's describes the El'tsin regime as 'market bolshevism'. In their view, the conspiratorial dissolution of the Soviet Union, the violent dispersal of the Russian Supreme Soviet in October 1993 and the adoption, in rigged referendum, of a new constitution that concentrated power in the presidency two months later were anti-democratic moves which facilitated the transfer of economic wealth to ex-Communist elites and criminals. They conclude by referring to the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher, Petr Chaadaev, who suggested that Russia had been chosen to show the world a particular lesson. If, after 1917, the Bolsheviks had unintentionally demonstrated the folly of a dogmatic imposition of socialism on Russia, then from 1991 the application of free-market dogma by the Russian reformers, egged on by their Western advisers, again showed the world what not to do.

David Hoffman's *The oligarchs* tells the story of the rise, and partial fall, of the wealthiest businessmen in Russia and their influence on the El'tsin administration. They made their money by exploiting loopholes in the laws, by fraud and stealing, and by exploiting political connections. Faced with what seemed the likely defeat of El'tsin by the Communist leader, Gennadii Ziuganov, in the 1996 presidential elections, which might mean the end of their wealth and power, seven top bankers met. They decided to persuade El'tsin to fight a Western-style electoral campaign, to be headed by Chubais. Contrary to the belief that these oligarchs bankrolled El'tsin's victory, Hoffman shows that the state illegally provided the oligarchs with the money for the campaign, suggesting that the oligarchs in fact profited financially out of the campaign itself. Undoubtedly the television stations controlled by the bankers Boris Berezovskii and Vladimir Gusinskii were of major importance in taking votes from Ziuganov and building El'tsin's image. After the elections, El'tsin rewarded the oligarchs with further privileged access to privatization, and, in some cases, with official positions. The leading young reformers in the government, First Deputy Prime Ministers Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, resisted on occasion the greed of the oligarchs, and Nemtsov attacked 'bandit capitalism.

The crash of 1998 temporarily reduced the power of the oligarchs, with the new prime minister, Evgenii Primakov, appointed under the pressure of the Communist-dominated State Duma, seeking to investigate high-level corruption. This extended to the 'Family', a word used to refer not only to El'tsin, his influential daughter Tat'iana Diachenko, and his biological family, but also his closest advisers, including Chubais and Berezovskii. The latter fought back and persuaded El'tsin to sack Primakov. Having achieved great popularity as prime minister, Primakov gained the aura of a martyr. Appearing as a serious contender to succeed El'tsin in the 2000 presidential elections, the 'Family' saw it as essential to eliminate this threat. In August 1999, Primakov's successor, Sergei Stepashin, fell from El'tsin's favour and was replaced as prime minister by Vladimir Putin, a former career KGB officer from St. Petersburg, who had recently headed the KGB's main successor, the FSB. Berezovskii used his money and media resources to promote a pro-Putin centrist block of regional governors and Moscow politicians to contest the State Duma elections of December 1999. Primakov, portrayed as a sick old man, had his chances for the presidency ruined. On the other hand, the apparent success of the Russian forces in the second Chechen war, which Putin had personally co-ordinated, led to high popularity ratings for the prime minister. El'tsin resigned early as president on New Year's Eve, 1999, allowing Putin to become acting president. This was formally in accordance with the Constitution, but the deal with Putin explicitly gave El'tsin immunity for any wrongdoing while president. Putin used his control of the Kremlin to ensure his victory in the presidential elections, brought forward to March 2000, on the first ballot, with Ziuganov, again the Communist candidate, coming second.¹⁶⁴

Collectively, Duncan's analysis hints at the nature of the corrupt economic and political structures and power elites in Russia. It also hints at how cultural figures played a part in either highlighting this corruption or dismissing the suspicious actions. Or, euphemistically rewriting the facts of the circumstances at hand. Duncan's research and conclusions regarding the current Russian Federation, coming under Putin's authority in 1999, has developed even more systematically since the beginning of the Putin era. Like his predecessor, who was caught by Swiss magistrates who invested in the 12 million dollar money-laundering Mabetex case, Putin has been said by those closest to him in the past, to be involved in similar, more elaborate, scenarios with higher monetary figures at stake.¹⁶⁵ Several of these individuals who have denounced Putin's corrupt

¹⁶⁴ Duncan, 278-80.

¹⁶⁵ Nicolas Tonev, "Putin's Hidden Treasure," a documentary film, 2014. Accessed 24 August 2018; available from Netflix at <https://www.netflix.com/title/80135352>; Internet. This documentary film asserts that Putin's enlightened leadership is far from principled or altruistic. Indeed, the film makes the claim that Putin is possibly the wealthiest man in Europe as a result of his involvement in private and public sector corruption.

business ventures and political nature to include Yury Skuratov, former Prosecutor of Russia who launched the inquiry on Yeltsin and Mabetex; Andrey Illarionov, former adviser to Putin from 2000-2005 who resigned immediately after revealing the Kremlin planned to embezzle 12 billion dollars of the state's money through an oil company; Natalya Kalinovskaya, Rosneft; parliamentary adviser who worked on construction for Sochi and has exploited to investigators how the construction has entailed unnecessary projects that had cost overruns totaling over three times the announced projects' costs; and finally, Sergei Kolesnikov, one of Putin's businessmen from Petromed, in which Putin was the beneficiary under the name "Mikhail Ivanovich."¹⁶⁶ While each of these individuals arguably have been involved in activities that deserve investigation and consequences, any and all investigations to date, have only come from anti-corruption NGOs in other European countries, particularly France and the Czech Republic. In Russia, there are no investigations that successfully make it into the courts. On the one occasion when a court hearing on Putin's actions occurred, the case was deemed "unworthy of further investigation from a criminal aspect."¹⁶⁷ This case involved a 900 million dollar scandal, in which he signed licenses and documents the existence of which were denied, but had been seen. In order for the case to continue, either the acting mayor of Petersburg, or Putin himself, who was the mayor's assistant, would have had to sign off on the matter. Mysteriously, in 1996, less than three years after this scandal occurred, Yeltsin summoned Putin to work in Moscow, where 80 percent of the business in Russia took was conducted. A former Petersburg police officer and lieutenant colonel, "Officer Zykov," examined this sequence of events and revealed that as of 1996, Putin was either co-founder or co-manager of approximately twenty companies. He also

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Alexandr Urmanov, "The Creeping Counterrevolution in Russia: Local Resistance to Privatization," 26 September 2007; The Heritage Foundation – Backgrounder on International Affairs.

secretly owned a country home worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Putin accomplished all of this on only an officially reported 400 dollar monthly salary. Officer Zykov was fired. Putin was sent to Moscow as the appointed Deputy Chief to Presidential Affairs. Soon after, in March 1997, he was appointed the Chief of the Main Control Directorate. In July 1998, he was appointed the head of the former KGB, now FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation). Because of the Mabetex scandal, on New Year's Eve 1999, Putin was named the interim President. At this moment, the cult of personality and reign of the Red Tsar reemerges and has evolved into the Russian Federation power structure as it exists today, in August 2018.¹⁶⁸ This research only scratches the surface of the realities that undoubtedly exist. Based on the difficult legal investigations that critics face when approaching Putin and his impenetrable elites, a better approach can be taken by closely examining the manipulated publicity and illusory culture of Russia versus the “real identity” or perceptions, provided by the underground. In both identities observable in Russia, the cultural actors, particularly musicians, reflect progress in their content (i.e. rising action, climax, falling action, resolution). In other words, these actors can predict and reflect the state of the system. The masses and those with any measure of authority below a certain elite status *cannot*. In this sense, these actors exercise limited agency.

g. Conclusion

This chapter's goal was to provide historical and contemporary background and context regarding how Russian elites have historically manipulated Russian culture and identity to achieve their needs and desires – their vested interests. Beginning with the fall of Tsarist Russia in 1917 to the present day, the lengths to which power elites go and

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

the methods they use to manipulate culture and identity are matched to their agendas. I found that the selection of content that has been historically used by Russian power elites to fuse into their manipulated or illusory Russian culture and identity, is taken from the underground Russian culture of the era. This content is distinct from traditional Russian culture and identity and is symbolic of Western democratic ideals, making it appear favorably in light of political and economic liberty. My research reveals that the political and economic liberty hoped for is a myth. The filtered content ironically serves as a means of repression for the public and a vehicle for greater social, economic and political power for elites. This dynamic is incredibly fascinating in how it has seemingly perpetually existed in Russia, especially in light of the present Federation era under Vladimir Putin.

This chapter's "case-study" involving the emerging cultural stars; including Victor Tsoi, BG, and Manomov; as well as, the emerging elites of the post-Soviet structure, during glasnost, speak to this manipulated publicity; as the glasnost period was ironically resolved by the new undemocratic Russian Federation. The current Federation's underground artists have not filtered into the mainstream like the underground artists from the Soviet era. Rather, headline-making "faux" progressive pop-stars, like t.A.T.u., have been created. True unconventional genres have remained in the underground from what is observable in contemporary Russia, especially over the past seven years dating to 2011-12, when Putin was seeking re-election. t.A.T.u.'s heightened fame was conveniently placed when Russian elites needed more progressive and democratic adherence from the public. A story contrary to t.A.T.u., briefly mentioned, such as Pussy Riot, a music group who attempted to perform during Putin's re-election period and faced hard consequences that included seven months in jail prior to their trial, and a lengthy prison sentence in Siberia. While Pussy Riot did verbally attack Putin and the

Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in a less than 30 second performance that harshly punished, once can conclude that there are only certain democratic and progressive assertions that can be made in Russia, culturally and musically speaking, and it must be in support of the vested interests of power elites.

These conclusions correspond to the premise of my thesis question, as well as, the methods and findings of my own experience in Russia. This information colorfully and critically backdrops what I learned in my interviews with Russians on their preferred music choices; their knowledge on the music scenes of Russia; and in most interviews, their feelings toward their government; as well as the most known Soviet music symbol, Kino; and the most known Russian music symbol, Pussy Riot. My research reveals that there is a historic continuum of manipulated publicity and Russian culture and identity by Russian power elites. Proportionate measures of democratic sentiment is used in the manipulated illusory culture, based on compatible “faux” democratic policies desired by Russian elites. The way I arrived at this conclusion will be explained in Chapter 2, Methods. I will discuss my personal research into how the contemporary music scenes in Russia reflect current perceptions of culture and identity in Federation Russia under Putin.

Chapter 4

Methods and Analysis

“Literature, the cinema, the arts are levers in the hands of the proletariat, which must be used to show the masses positive models of initiative and heroic labor.”

Pravda, 1930

a. What I Planned

My thesis focuses on the following question: *“What is the relationship between power elites and the contemporary Russian culture and identity?”* Culture contains a variety of elements, and within such structure, I chose music as my ‘lever’ to gain insight and understanding into contemporary Russian political sphere. Music is a personal passion for me. I have been examining the conclusions and significance key scholarship on the relationship between music and politics. Therefore, I chose to explore the Russian political sphere through this particular window into Russian culture and identity. My literature review examined extensive sociological and political research on music, as well as, a study of music and politics conducted in Russia by Sabrina Petra Ramet, Sergei Zamascikov, and Robert Bird (1989). This was followed by an examination of the history and context of both the Soviet era’s and Federation era’s power elites’ efforts to shape and manipulate culture and identity to achieve their vested interests. This chapter includes a discussion of my use of a two-page survey which I used to guide my interview and interactions with Russian participants during my three week research trip to Russia. During this trip I visited Rostov on Don, St. Petersburg

and Moscow to conduct interviews, gather qualitative information and observations on my topic and interact with average Russian citizens.

My literature review examines key scholarship relevant to my thesis including that of Jacques Attali, Ray Pratt, John Street, and Thierry Cote who each uniquely emphasize in their work the social, economic, and political significance in the relationship between music and politics. I examined their main points to indicate why and how music is an effective 'lever' – a tool – in gaining insight and understanding of a society; and the relationship between a society and its politics. Including the material of the scholars, was important, not only for my own understanding as I made observations and collected information in Russia regarding Russians' music, but it also lends credibility to the findings and connections I made throughout this project, and particularly during my research in Russia, involving music, politics, and society. It should be noted that though these scholars are from the West, the information they provided was not exclusive to their native country, but applicable to any society and its relationship with music.

Ramet et al's 1989 study, examining the nature and relationship between Soviet-Russian music and politics, was incorporated in my literature review to serve as a model for my proposed methodology. My research was applied in the context of contemporary Russia, however, like Ramet et al, I analyzed song lyrics; built a survey to conduct interviews with Russians; and made field-observations while in conducting research in Russia. In hindsight, I especially find Ramet et al's study useful to my thesis research, as her findings and main conclusion supports what I uncovered in my context chapter discussing Soviet music and power elites. Why I looked at these areas of context and

history in Soviet Russia, in addition to contemporary Russia, was to create a comparative perspective that would lend understanding into the current relationship between Russian music and politics. Furthermore, it served to reveal how this relationship existed (in the Soviet era), how it exists now, and what can be understood collectively from the similarities and distinctions between these two periods? Ramet et al's ultimate findings in Soviet Russia from first-hand experience, which identified Soviet rock and pop-stars as the 'anti-Communist Party' genre, mobilizing the post-Soviet elites' political "democratic" agenda is meaningful to my study, because my findings from cultural and political actors present in Soviet Russia, scholarly journals, and "investigative" research, produced the same conclusion that Ramet et al reached regarding the relationship between Soviet music and power elites. Ultimately, in drawing similar conclusions to Ramet et al through other measures and perspectives presented in my context chapter, I believe the research methodology applied in Ramet et al's study was effective and sound.

Like Ramet et al, I chose popular music in Russia corresponding to the era of my thesis research, that being the contemporary Federation era. I took the same measures as Ramet et al in analyzing the rhythm, or beat, and lyrics of the song. I also asked people I met and interviewed in Russia, my participants, about these particular songs and their thoughts and perceptions of them. The songs I chose include:

- **"Baby Boy" by Alisa Vox; Малыш - Алиса Вокс (May 16th, 2017);**
https://youtu.be/lssu2b7_Hxg
- **"Freedom" by Ptaha; Свобода - Птаха (April 26th, 2017);**
<https://youtu.be/1vfo477CEAo>
- **"Skrepy" by Kasta; Скрепры - Каста; (September 2nd, 2017);**
https://youtu.be/rVYtS_cp-yc

- **“Putin will teach you to love the motherland” by Pussy Riot; Путин научит тебя любить родинуland (2014); <https://youtu.be/gjI0KYI9gWs>**

I wanted to keep the sample small, as Ramet et al had done. Primarily, I did this because of the limited time of three weeks I had for research in Russia. With limited time, and the necessity of retrieving as in-depth responses as possible from Russian participants, I found the best approach was to select fewer songs. The four songs I selected each uniquely represent key Russian social-political perspectives required for my research. I will now explain how I selected the four songs. I will also describe the musical context and political significance of each one.

Initially, I searched the top 100 listed popular songs in Russia in March 2018. The majority of songs listed in this chart were from either other European countries, the United States, or Australia. What Russian songs that I did find, were either club songs or pop-songs, exclusively expressing surface level love-stories in the lyrics. In addition to this chart, I sought out music that was either “indie” or political, however, I struggled to find Russian indie music on my own. The directly political Russian music I did find via online searches was not received by many in Russia, with the exception of Pussy Riot’s 2012 performance. I brought a list of material that I found to my friend, and Russian Fulbright fellow, Julia Danyushevskaya. I asked for her thoughts on my material and also if she could direct me to better sources of Russian music. The complication of finding Russian music, after studying the language for almost two years, was very real. I thought that my difficulty in finding adequate sources of Russian music for my study was attributed to a language barrier and lack of knowledge in Russian

music. However, I realized quickly after arriving in Russia, that the difficulty I had in finding non-mainstream music is a difficulty Russians generally have as well. I will return to this point more expansively when I discuss my research findings. Overall, if I had not consulted Julia, the selected songs and important insight gained from these songs relative to all of my research; would not have been discovered. Julia informed me of a mainstream artist pop-rock artist, Alisa Vox; a relatively known rapper, Ptaha; and a rap group, Kasta, who has remained relevant in Russian music for over two decades. Together, we listened to a variety of these artists' songs and chose from each the most suitable song selections for my research.

For my fourth song choice, I selected Pussy Riot's "Putin Will Teach You to Love the Motherland," (2014). This song was suggested by one of my thesis advisors. I was delighted to include Pussy Riot in this research, because of my respect for and familiarity with the punk-collective. Since I started my undergraduate degree, I have written three different research papers with Pussy Riot as a main subject. Additionally, I gave a presentation on Pussy Riot and Russian Politics at Shippensburg University Modern Languages Conference on behalf of the Russian panel in March 2016. After collecting my findings in Russia; evaluating the musicians' and social-political contexts within the Soviet era and contemporary Federation era; and applying these four songs to my study, the respect I have for Pussy Riot has significantly increased beyond the already high regard in which I held them. Pussy Riot's part in my research was essential.

Having discussed how the songs were chosen, I will provide musical and social-political context for each song and their artists. The first three songs I will discuss were

directed to me by Julia. The last song discussed will be Pussy Riot's most recent release. Ultimately, the main goal of drawing out this context of the songs will make it clear that I chose each of them for their distinctive relationship to varying aspects and perspectives of average Russians' sentiments on politics. These sentiments include: support of the current government in Russia and being against the opposition (Alisa Vox); support of neither side (Ptaha); and two examples that are each uniquely "against" the current government in Russia (Kasta and Pussy Riot). A category for "supportive of the side of the opposition" exclusively, was not included as I did not find any well-known songs that fit this perspective. However, in my findings this category will be discussed, as I did encounter this type of music when in Russia.

b. Alisa Vox - "Baby Boy"

Alisa Vox was born in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) in 1987. From the age of four until her high-school graduation, she was involved in different programs and centers of the arts affiliated with the state in her native city.¹⁶⁹ After graduating from the St. Petersburg State Academy of Theater Arts she moved to Moscow, where she began attending the state-owned, Russian Institute of Theatre Arts - GITIS.¹⁷⁰ Her background is important to note, because it is similar to other musicians or artists; 'groomed by the state', and later, used in Soviet and Russian power elites' creation of illusory culture and manipulative publicity. Beginning in 2007 while she was in Moscow, she began meeting people in the singing business. Alisa's rising notoriety was a result of her "overly sexualized" pop-performances. This, combined with her background and network within

¹⁶⁹ Williams, 164.

¹⁷⁰ Alisa Vox Biography, accessed 28 August 2018, available from http://alisavox.net/index_eng.html; Internet.

state-owned cultural institutions, led Alisa to join the famous Russian band, Leningrad.¹⁷¹ Leningrad has existed since 1997. Alisa was Leningrad's lead-singer from 2012-2014. After her split from the band in 2014, she pursued a solo-career. In retrospect, her two years with Leningrad seems as though it was a way to benefit from their extremely well-known status in Russia, but for obvious monetary benefits. Interestingly, Leningrad's 'leader', since the band's conception in the late 1990's, Sergey Shnurov, was reported receiving the highest income of all musicians in Russia in 2016.¹⁷² From this detail about her former bandmate, her background which shows her ties to state cultural institutions, the commercial success of her solo-career post-2014, and most significantly, the evident Kremlin-sponsored social and political messages within the lyrics of her songs, make it clear that Alisa Vox is more than just a mainstream pop-artist in contemporary Russia. She is a contemporary Russian illusory culture actor, who helps shape the public's opinion on matters deemed necessary to the needs of the power elites and oligarchs of contemporary Russia.

Alisa's pop-rock song, "Baby Boy" (pronounced in Russian "Malish"), was the most striking of her musical products relative to the current Russian power elites' 'illusory culture'. The song was released on May 16, 2017. "Coincidentally," this was during the time of a series of increasing anti-corruption rallies and opposition rallies in response to the policies and actions of the current political regime. These rallies occurred legally in 95 Russian cities (within the following year nearly doubling this

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Sergei Shnurov on Wikipedia, accessed 27 August 2018, available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey_Shnurov; Internet.

figure); in addition to the 95 cities. However, the rallies that occurred in Moscow and St. Petersburg were illegal, because they were not approved through the state registration processes required for any form of public demonstration by a citizen. This also applied to rallies taking place in four cities abroad: London, Prague, Basel and Bonn.¹⁷³ These protests were incited and encouraged most notably by “the man Putin fears most”, Alexei Navalny.¹⁷⁴ If anyone is to change the uncontested nature of Putin’s authority in Russia in the next decade, it will be Navalny. Navalny has a unique background. He is a twice failed Russian opposition presidential candidate. He is also a former Yale fellow and scholar of global security and finance. He has become a Youtube influencer of millions and has been arrested several times and incarcerated as a ‘political prisoner.’ Additionally, he has been a victim of suspicious attacks, including some that left him blind in his right eye from gas. He has also been the victim of raids on his home, as well as nefarious attempts to ruin his potential political career through false allegations of illegal financial activity.¹⁷⁵ Navalny was not painted as ‘just’ an emerging leader to listen to, nor was it considered wise to follow his call to join the opposition’s movement and rallies, according to Alisa Vox’s song “Baby Boy.” The English translation of this Russian song is as follows:

¹⁷³ Alexei Navalny on Wikipedia, accessed 27 August 2018, available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexei_Navalny; Internet.

¹⁷⁴ Will Englund, “Russian Blogger Alexei Navalny in Spotlight After Arrest,” *Washington Post*, 6 December 2011, (accessed 26 August 2018); available from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russian-blogger-alexei-navalny-in-spotlight-after-arrest/2011/12/06/gIQA5tZPZO_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.360855a13986; Internet.

¹⁷⁵ Alexei Navalny on Wikipedia.

Verse 1

On a beautiful sunny day
He goes to a rally,
With unhardened hands
He holds his picket sign
On his sign
There are four mistakes in two words
But his heart beats ardently
And there's anger in his eyes.

Chorus:

It's never too late
To learn from your mistakes.
When the heart wants changes
Then start from yourself.
(x2)

Verse 2

He failed his history exam
With "unsatisfactory"
But someone promised him,
Mountains of gold and euros.
He's just a marionette,
And he's bet his life away.
But his mother cries after him,
Telling him not to take off his hat.

Chorus

Verse 3

Mistake after mistake,
We'll learn to understand.
But I no longer need to
Step on the rake again.
There's determination in his eyes
To struggle and to change
And tomorrow morning, once again
He'll have to wake up early for school.

Chorus

Verse 4

Freedom, money, and girls,
You can have everything, even power.
Kiddo, don't get into politics.
Go do your homework first.¹⁷⁶

According to Keith Wagstaff from *Mashable*, Alisa stated in an interview 'she wrote' her song "Baby Boy," because she thought people were being deceived by Alexei Navalny.¹⁷⁷ The "someone" who promises "mountains of gold and euros" to the Russian student and youth audience; the same audience Alisa also targets in "Baby Boy"; is referring to Navalny. He said prior to Alisa's song release that the cause for the

¹⁷⁶ Malsh lyrics, (accessed 24 August 2018); available from <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/alisa-vox-lyrics.html>; Internet.

¹⁷⁷ Keith Wagstaff, "Kremlin's Secy Music Video Tells Kids Protesting Corruption Isn't Cool, *Mashable*, 29 May 2017, (accessed 28 August 2018); available from https://mashable.com/2017/05/29/alisa-vox-music-video-russia-corruption/?utm_cid=hp-r-1#juLFjNct7Eq4; Internet.

opposition and anti-corruption rallies would be backed by Europ, hence the mention of gold and euros. Altogether, her message to the listener is to “start with yourself” if they desire change, because attending “pointless” rallies is hurting their studies and family relationships. The most significant part of her message is arguably that if you are compliant and keep out of politics you will receive “freedom, money, and girls...everything – even power.” Instead of declaring these as the bribes for keeping out of politics and rallies and being a puppet, Alisa could have just said go into Russian oil or highway construction businesses.

Like Wagstaff, Vanity Fair’s Kenzie Bryant, also wrote an article on the disturbing message of the song; and a number of notable Russian Youtubers, including Alexei Navalny. All of whom shed light on Alisa’s 2017 summer hit. Alisa reportedly was paid by the Kremlin, receiving 2 million rubles, or 35 thousand US dollars, for “Baby Boy.”¹⁷⁸ One of the most interesting details revealed in the variety of those critiquing this particular song, was of the connection of Alisa Vox and Victor Tsoi, made by Youtuber, Ruslan Sokovolsky on his youtube-channel “Dai Znak!” (translated as “Give a Sign!”). Sokovolsky compared Alisa’s song “Baby Boy” to one of Tsoi’s most famous songs from the Soviet-Rock genre, “I want changes!” (translated to ‘hochuy peremen’).¹⁷⁹ The clips of the two songs’ official music videos shown by Sokolovsky, in addition to his comments on the songs’ odd similarity, showed the nearly identical sound, rhythm, and

¹⁷⁸ Russian youtuber and navalny vid, vanity fair, mashable

¹⁷⁹ Russian youtuber, (accessed 25 August 2018); available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usFsX3cP2ww>; Internet.

stage presence presented by Alisa and Tsoi.¹⁸⁰ My research on Tsoi and Kino, in addition to what I have found on Alisa Vox in my research, indicates both of these popular music artists, despite representing mainstream music within different eras in Russia, are cultural actors manipulatively used by Russian power elites of publicly dispersing social content relative to their political agendas and needs. The messages of their content appear different as Tsoi, and his band Kino, play a part in motivating and shaping the mobilization for the post-Soviet structure. In contrast, Alisa Vox motivates the audience to not rally against the former emerging post-Soviet elites, that are now the contemporary Russian power elites.

Through using Alisa's song, "Baby Boy," in my thesis research, I wanted to learn from my Russian participants' discussion of their thoughts on the song, as it is clearly sentiment that supports the current Russian power elites' agenda and denounces the efforts of the Russian opposition coalition under Alexei Navalny. I was not aware of the relatable relationship Alisa Vox has as an artist to Victor Tsoi prior to my research in Russia. This connection between Alisa and Tsoi was not established by my participants, but came from the sources mentioned.

c. Ptaha - "Freedom"

David Nuriev, better-known as Ptaha, 36, is a Russian rapper in Moscow, who has been involved in making rap since he fled from his native country of Azerbaijan as a teenager. The reason for leaving Azerbaijan were due to war, where he experienced

¹⁸⁰ Tsoi also had a song called Малыш. It can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hh18AOH6maY>; The rumors are that it is about his wife (and not his son). This is odd given the title is clearly masc - - see (it is in Russian) <http://www.day.ru/stil-zhizny/vibor-redakcii/5-luchshih-pesen-viktora-tsoya-komu-on-posvyaschal-svoihityi/5/>;

homelessness; participated in frequent street fights and battles; and witnessed deliberately ordered murders go uninvestigated,” according to an interview he did with CNN.¹⁸¹ As an individual who experienced the last decade of the Soviet Union living in Azerbaijan; as well as one who has experienced Putin’s Russia over the last two decades; Ptaha is critical of contemporary Russian mainstream rap, which is predominantly under the authorship of artists who are young and have only lived in Putin’s Russia.¹⁸² Ptaha, along with other individuals interviewed by CNN, such as Ivan Smekalin, co-owner of Moscow’s DiG record shop, says of young popular rappers in Russia that, “they just want to have money, spend money and all this consumerism stuff. They just want to have fun. Not only young rappers here, but all the young people in their 20s – they just want to hang out and chill.”¹⁸³ Smekalin plays a 1990s record from Bad Balance, one of Russia’s hip-hop and rap pioneers, for the CNN respondent. Smekalin then says, “you listen to the lyrics of these bands — and you can’t understand what they want to say. It’s a Russian poetic tradition — that’s why the lyrics are so difficult sometimes.”¹⁸⁴ Both Smekalin and Ptaha attribute the main reason for the current rap scene’s complacency and difference from the original underground rap scene to the fact that politics and social life were “raw” in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet restructuring. Smekalin states that “people could see these problems out in the open more easily. But now, Russian politics is different. People can’t see what’s

¹⁸¹ Kara Fox and Victoria Butenko, CNN Report: We Speak of Chains and Sneakers - The Battle Inside Russia’s Rap Scent, (accessed 25 August 2018); available from <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/03/world/russian-rappers-intl/index.html>; Internet.

¹⁸² *ibid*

¹⁸³ *ibid*

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*

happening, because the propaganda has become more streamlined. You can think that everything is fine here – you don't see garbage all over the street, there's lots of cafes and parks. That is why I think lots of young people can't catch what the government is doing – it's polished."¹⁸⁵ Not only do the young emerging rappers lack the comprehension of political reality in Russia, but CNN reports on young rappers such as Timati, who have benefited in their status and income from producing rap of the “complacent consumer” by supporting Putin publicly in the media during presidential campaign seasons.¹⁸⁶ As CNN pointed out, just because rap has made its way as a successful music genre in Russia does not diminish the fact that “along with those perceived gains [of free-market Russia], press freedoms have been increasingly limited, LGBTQ rights are nearly non-existent and safeguards for women and minorities have fallen into the shadows. The state dominates the economy, and bureaucracy pervades many aspects of daily life.”¹⁸⁷

Very few rap groups or artists have adapted a style of rap that has ‘actual’ value, let alone been commercially successful, aside from the plagued complacency of mainstream rap. Kasta, who will be discussed in-depth in the next subsection, was noted by Ptaha in his CNN interview. Kast is a rap group that has operated and existed since the 1990's in Russia. It is an “anomaly” unlike both typical Russian underground and mainstream rappers.¹⁸⁸ Ptaha's public statement on Kasta, combined with his

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*

unenthusiastic feelings towards Russian mainstream rap stating that it “is dominated by newcomers who lack depth – their tunes a reflection of a society suffering from collective amnesia about the past,” made me question Ptaha’s role as a mainstream rapper himself.¹⁸⁹ CNN used Ptaha throughout their article as a reference, but only indicated his own contributions to rap in captions under photos of the artist. These captions were written as *“Ptaha, 36, says he wants his music to bring awareness to problems he sees in society, but he does not support Putin or the opposition,”* and, *“Ptaha raps about achieving your goals regardless of what other people think.”*¹⁹⁰ The culmination of these brief notes made on Ptaha as a rapper by CNN, his views on Russian rap shared with CNN, and the existence and reception of Ptaha’s April 2017 rap song “Freedom,” left me with even more questions. These factors create a recognizable uniqueness of the Moscow rapper, Ptaha.

Ptaha’s song “Freedom” was a direct criticism of the anti-corruption opposition rallies and protests that had been occurring from 2016 to 2017, around the time of the song’s release. The rap lyrics and music video to the song indicate this connection quite clearly. “Freedom’s” music video incorporated video footage from the anti-Kremlin protests in Moscow on March 26.¹⁹¹ Alexei Navalny, as well as prominent Russian youtube vloggers, indicated that Ptaha did this to reconfigure the reality of the event with his own perspective, denouncing the thousands who attended as the “golden

¹⁸⁹ ibid

¹⁹⁰ ibid

¹⁹¹ Russian youtuber, 16 May 2017, (accessed 22 August 2017); available from https://youtu.be/xitxJb_v8qQ; Internet.

youth” with “Uncle Sam,” and referring to Navalny, behind them.¹⁹² The lyrics translated from Russian into English, “very rich hiding that you are from the Jews” and “it’s strange to be a patriot, but for Uncle Sam’s cache,” among other lines in the rap that talk about how the protestors do not “look hungry” and are merely acting out against their wealthy “fathers,” support Navalny’s – and other’s – assertion to this claim. The title of Ptaha’s song being “freedom,” and frequent use of the term “democratic” in the lyrics are used to communicate a sense of mockery. Ptaha clearly takes a stance against the power elites in Russia. His stance towards the current system of government is noticeable in his line “if I remembered democracy,” which given Ptaha’s background, reasonably alludes to his belief that it has never existed in Russia. Additionally, based on Ptaha’s sentiment expressed in his rap song addressing the opposition, who are recognizably pursuing democracy, he does not believe that democracy genuinely will happen under the current regime. Further research on Ptaha’s network of relationships and connections arguably reveal that he is perhaps discretely supportive of the current Russian opposition. By examining Ptaha’s instagram account, one can see his increase of wealth and followers in the last year, as well as his close links with pro-Kremlin personalities. These indications raise questions as to whether he is a supportive figure to Russian power elites’ agenda through his rap music that targets the side of the political opposition in Russia, or if he is just ‘fed up’ with the younger generation for their rap contributions, and more broadly their lack of depth on Russian matters? The Russian reception of “Freedom” was noticeably criticized more often from a negative standpoint by Alexei Navalny and other Russian youtubers, indicating Ptaha’s ‘lack of

¹⁹² ibid

intellect,' and criticized in both respects from Russian comments on the posts.¹⁹³ In either scenario, Ptaha's song "Freedom" is useful in this study for the perspective it represents.

d. Kasta - "Skrepy"

Kasta (which means "caste" in Russian), also referred to as the "United Kasta," has existed since 1997. What began as a small circle of friends in Russian city, Rostov-on-Don, making rap music recreationally in 1995, turned into an underground rap group exceeding twenty artists – that was in effect a network – living in a number of Russian cities. Their rap lyrics have explored topics of sex, consumerism, and other aspects that were relevant and "new" in the post-Soviet society. In particular, their rap songs directly address the poor conditions of average Russian life and the corruption in post-Soviet Russian leadership. Kasta is led by artists Anton "Zmey" Mishenin, Vladislav "Vlady" Leshkevich, Mikhail "Shym" Yepifanov, and Andrey "Khamil" Knife.¹⁹⁴

After researching each of the leading artists of the large rap group, I found Vlady's background to be the most interesting and telling of Kasta's true state of existence. Vlady is a solo-rapper, the producer and active member of Kasta, and is known as "one of the most respected in Russian hip-hop and rap." In addition, Vlady owns the "independent" label, Respect Production, which has eleven other artists in the hip-hop and rap genre contracted.¹⁹⁵ Beyond Vlady's dedication to expanding

¹⁹³ Youtube alexei

¹⁹⁴ Kasta on Wikipedia, (accessed 22 August 2018): available from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kasta>; Internet.

¹⁹⁵ Easy counter

underground rap music in Russia, I came across a fascinating aspect of his character. Vlady has been an actor in the cultural realm of television, among supportive figures in culture to the Russian power elites' including t.A.T.u.'s Lena Katina and Julia Volkova; as well as, popular Russian musician, actress, former official television broadcaster, book author, and state-renowned celebrity symbol, Anna Sedokova.¹⁹⁶ He has only ever played roles portraying himself, which raises additional questions regarding these Russian celebrity connections. The method of incorporating musicians into other realms of culture aside from their original area, to create a manipulatively designed cult of personality around artists compatible with particular Russian power elites' political, economic, and social agendas, has been discussed in my introduction and context chapter. Examples of artists in numerous realms of culture were analyzed in the context culture chapter. This chapter included Soviet-Rock artists, Victor Tsoi, BG, Pyotr Manomov and the contemporary Russian music group, t.A.T.u. Vlady's roles were mainly in several television series from a variety of popular mainstream television channels from 2003 onward. He most frequently has been portrayed in the series "Z.K.D." (Zakon Kamennykh Dzhungley, or Law of the Stone Jungle) that launched in 2015.¹⁹⁷ The most significant television-special Vlady had a role in was "Novogodniy Ogonyok (New Year's Eve) 2013," starring Anna Sedokova, a plethora of popular Russian musicians and cultural figures alike as well as other key members of Kasta.¹⁹⁸ This television-special airs on 'New Year's Eve' and features a variety of prominent

¹⁹⁶ Anna Sedokova on Wikipedia, (accessed 26 August 2018); available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Sedokova; Internet.

¹⁹⁷ imd

¹⁹⁸ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2835356/fullcredits?ref=tt_cl_sm#cast; Internet.

cultural figures in Russia; which raises key question. Among these are, “If Kasta’s musical content is genuinely in opposition to the current power elites’ in Russia, including Putin, why were they featured on a state-sponsored television special which would entail such a vast Russian audience?” And, “Was Kasta’s participation in this widely viewed television special intend to show that there is not total repression in Russia by allowing such content to exist? Or, was Kasta’s participation in this event supported by prominent leaders within the official opposition platform?”

Related to the questions I have posed, in the CNN article on contemporary Russian rap, Kasta was portrayed as rappers that have cultivated genuine valuable music content in regards to social and political realities in contemporary Russia.¹⁹⁹ The CNN authors begin the article by mentioning the eve of the presidential election in May 2018, where 2,500 people in Moscow crowded into a concert hall to listen to Kasta perform live. As a highlight of this performance, the CNN authors noted Kasta’s song, “Skrepy.” which I have also selected to analyze and incorporate into my research. The title of the song comes “from a term Putin used in a speech referencing a large safety pin that could hold the nation together.”²⁰⁰ The song’s lyrics read:

*“We want bad roads, we want to be oppressed by others
We want to live not sensibly, but in debts, just to make an example
To our sworn enemies, to give them a slap
They build intrigues for everyone, but for us most of all”²⁰¹*

¹⁹⁹ <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/03/world/russian-rappers-intl/index.html>; Internet.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

CNN's article, which utilizes Kasta and others from Russia, in order to convey the message that Russians recognize and address the corruption within their current system and leader, is important. CNN is one of the most widely known and widely respected news sources in the United States. The United States categorically is critical of Russia's lack of democracy. Therefore, it is not surprising that they published an article highlighting Russian citizens criticizing their native country and leader in a way that is analogous with Western criticism of Russia and Putin. This cultural exchange of shared opinions is a strategic move for the West, but indirectly a more strategic move for Russia. The coverage of this article reveals a direct insight and an indirect insight. The direct insight is that there is current opposition in Russia and Russian rappers and particular figures are indicating this. The indirect insight is that current Russian rap artists have the ability to express opposition, in Moscow, at state-owned locations like the city hall, which indicates that Russians have "democratic" rights to express music, particularly in rap, like in the West. However, rap just is not as popular in Russia yet. Taken from the perspective of the indirect insight gained from CNN's article, while it does hold valuable opinions and facts, it is lacking in substantive objectivity. It is ironic that a well-respected American news source published an article on Russian rappers expressing their nation's corruption in politics and society and at the same time how the mainstream rap is lacking in depth. Arguably, Russian rap exists due to the influence of American rap. The inception of rap in Russia, likely never would have occurred had it not been for the American rap scene that started in the 1980's and that has grown increasingly popular since. The author of the CNN article even notes that rapper, Ptaha, was sporting American rapper, Public Enemy's clothing in his interview as he mentions

he is a fan of both American rappers, Public Enemy and Ice-T.²⁰² This is evidence that the CNN author does not recognize the irony inherent in the situation. Russian rap has been modeled after American rap in its sound and style. It is also shaped by the fact that its content is not fully understood or appreciated in the mainstream. Yet, Russian rap remains an active voice critical of the government. It also models America. If Kasta is a rap group that is related to current Russian power elites' in creating manipulated publicity or illusory cultural perceptions, they do this through both their action and expression of messages showing that they are not targets or victims of the state despite their open criticism of the government. In other words, they show that "democratic" rights in Russia exist only to an extent. Furthermore, Kasta then succeeds in this image through channeling a popular Western music-genre, rap, which also produces content critical of its respective Western society, government and or leadership.

Collectively, the main points drawn out from the CNN article include; the background of Kasta's leader, Vlady; and the Moscow performance featuring politically outspoken content *with no arrest or consequences*; Kasta, as an "anomaly" in the Russian rap world. Based on my research into Ptaha, all of this represents a great mystery. They are an underground band with only 3 albums in 21 years of existence. Yet, the band has received a number of MTV Russia and Russian Street Awards. Additionally, they have maintained strong connections in Moscow with Russian celebrities and cultural figures. Finally, they continue to operate throughout Russia with a central production label located in Moscow. Most significantly, they have seemingly

²⁰² Kara Fox and Victoria Butenko, CNN Report.

broken the threshold of typical commercial success for an underground Russian music group. Yet, they are not widely popular enough to be considered mainstream. What has been discussed in this subsection, along with an analysis that I will now present, on Kasta's song and music video "Skrepy," strongly suggests that Kasta has become, over time, contributory actors in the creation of an illusory culture who *either* support contemporary power elites' in Russia or *potentially emerging* power elites' of the post-Putin Russian era. In other words, those representative of the official opposition party and Russian "Solidarnost" (Solidarity) movement connected to Alexei Navalny, and the late Boris Nemtsov. Nemtsov is significant not only as a former successful Russian liberal politician and physicist, but also Yeltsin's Deputy Prime Minister 1997-98. Nemtsov became an openly public critic of Putin starting in 2000 and remains so today. Most notably, he has drawn important attention to the corruption surrounding the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, victim of numerous unjustifiable arrests and attacks, and assassinated in February 2015).²⁰³

The uniquely complex musical products and context of Kasta, in comparison to all other artists mentioned in my thesis research, make it difficult to identify the true perspective of Kasta and who they are directly or indirectly supporting. Kasta's background corresponds more to that of the noted illusory cultural figures of Soviet and contemporary Russia who have been examined in my research. They are significant because they have been successful in Russia's hub, Moscow; have been recognized through awards and major news branches in the West; and they have taken part in

²⁰³ Boris Nemtsov on Wikipedia, (accessed 21 August 2018); available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Nemtsov; Internet.

other realms of culture, like film or television. Unlike other recent contemporary Russian musicians, such as Alisa Vox who supports the current Russian power elites' primary goal to halt opposition interference in a direct approach, Kasta could be supporting leaders of the opposition movement in a direct approach or supporting current Russian power elites' in an *indirect* approach. Like Soviet-Rock in the 1980's, who helped mobilize and shape the desire for a new regime; I am curious if Kasta is representative of the opposition's rising party and *Solidarnost* movement; which would explain why Kasta has broken past their Rostov-on-Don underground status, yet have not made it 'big'. This is similar to the opposition having broken through to the Russian public, particularly through the use of the internet and social media, yet are still not 'big' in the sense that they have mobilized mass public opposition to social and political authority. Similar to rock music in the last decades of the Soviet era, rap has been slowly integrating its way into Russia. CNN notes that rap is now one of the most common genres (Russian rap) listened to by Russians in their 30's and younger.²⁰⁴ In 2009, Putin made his "official stamp of approval" to the Russian rap communities as he appeared on the TV show, "Battle for Respect." While featured on the show, Putin expressed his appreciation to rappers "for bringing societal issues to the forefront, saying that although the street rap was rough, they'd brought a certain "Russian charm" to it."²⁰⁵ By "charm" Putin could either be referring to what was previously noted by Ivan Smekalin, Moscow record store co-owner, about rap traditionally being formulated in a difficult and poetic syntax, like intricate riddles. Or, in contrast, Putin could be referring

²⁰⁴ Kara Fox and Victoria Butenko, CNN Report..

²⁰⁵ Ibid

to the nature of Russian rap which often has been seen to mock the West directly (i.e. “I’m dropping the West” by Face) , as well as indirectly through Russians emulating the Western rap-genre to manipulatively create ‘an acceptable place’ for government criticism.

Kasta’s content does contain politically critical content. However, that content is neither explicitly nor implicitly an attack on Putin, like the content of Pussy Riot, who will be discussed. In particular, Kasta’s lyrics in “Skrepy” convey the message that the corruption in Russian society cannot be solely blamed on either Putin or the Russian government, but that every ‘caste’ contributes to Russia’s corruption. This distinction of the ‘blame recipient’ seeks to strengthen the idea of Kasta’s loyalty to current Russian power elites’ in relation to several key points regarding: Kasta’s celebrity connections and appearances in other Russian realms of culture. These points include the fact that Kasta has not been arrested for their music or punished – either physically or personally, the group’s ability to hold relatively sizable performances in city halls in Moscow - a reality which would never be allowed for a typical underground musician or band, especially given the nature of their critical content, and finally, rap becoming an accepted music genre in Russia, particularly by Putin. As I explain the Kasta’s lyrics and music video of “Skrepy,” it will be further revealed how this rap group can be interpreted as actors of illusory culture in contemporary Russia either in favor of the current Russian power elites,’ or in favor of the Russian opposition party and movement.

The structure of the song includes: verse one; chorus ‘a’; chorus ‘b’; verse two; chorus ‘a’; and chorus ‘b’. Though there are six ‘movements’ in the song, there are four

voices or groups being represented. Verse one is rapped by Zmey who is posing as either a Russian oligarch or Putin, himself. Chorus 'a' is sung by character who represents a Russian National Guard. However, all of the other characters 'chime in' at different moments in the National Guard's lines. Chorus 'b' belongs to the Russian police. Verse two is rapped by a Russian citizen preparing for his initiation in the mafia. Chorus 'a' and 'b' are repeated in sequence after verse two.

The music video begins with a Russian national guardsmen reading a graffiti message. Written on the street wall, it states, "all that you will see further is artistic fiction." The frustrated guard paints over the graffiti and the song begins. It is interesting that the music video begins with this message in the context of the question I posed about their authenticity, and for whom Kasta is working – power elites, or opposition. This graffiti message could be indicating that the 'top-down' hierarchy of corrupt organizations (i.e. oligarchs, guards, police, and the mafia) in Russian society; represented by the four characters in the song; are fictitious in reality. This would be reasonable logic if the current Russian power elites' are supporting Kasta, as the initial scene announces that the content to follow is, as they put it, "artistic fiction." At this same moment in the video that the guard is painting over the graffiti, Zmey, portrayed as an oligarch, drives a golf-cart past the guard. Zmey's passenger is a crowned Middle-Eastern leader, who then gives the 'middle-finger' to the camera.

At this point, I became curious if this scene involving the 'middle-finger,' widely recognized as a derogatory symbol in the West, was reflective of Putin and Assad's relationship. Or, was it broadly reflective of Russian oligarchs involved in the oil business with the Middle-East and how these relationships cause Western tension with

Russia. I researched whether ‘the ‘middle-finger’ is a derogatory symbol in Russia’. From what I could recall from Russian classes and Russian friends, I understand that their symbol for this derogatory meaning is expressed traditionally with a thumb motion. According to Roger E. Axtell's book *Gestures: The Do's and Taboos of Body Language Around the World*, Russia identifies this obscene symbol like other Middle-Eastern countries with their thumb.²⁰⁶ So this use of the Middle-Eastern leader giving the middle-finger in “Skrepy”'s music video could very well be a signal towards the West, which would make sense if the true perspective of “Skrepy” is a supportive illusory cultural tool of the current Russian power elites. The following scenes and lyrics further indicate why it seems more believable that “Skrepy” is supportive of current Russian power elites’.

Zmey and his Middle-Eastern passenger then arrive at a luxurious golf-course, and are shown enjoying champagne and ‘shash-lik’, or Russian barbeque prior to engaging in a game of golf. Zmey’s character, struggling in his golf-match with the Middle-Eastern oligarch throws a ‘temper-tantrum’ on the middle of the golf-course after which the Middle-Eastern elite disperses Russian rubles into the air with a Western-brand “Supreme” money-launching device. He proceeds to anoint Zmey’s character with his golf club. The lyrics of this first scene, delivered by Zmey’s character are as follows:

I did not finish the school, I didn't like to get up at 8 am

²⁰⁶ Brendan Koerner, “What Does a Thumbs Up Mean in Iraq?” *Harvard Business School Executive Education*, (accessed 2 August 2018); available from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2003/03/what_does_a_thumbs_up_mean_in_iraq.html; Internet.

Mother told me: "I'll wake you up when the time comes, so sleep"
I slept and saw myself tearing rubber hot water bottle into pieces
While teachers nagged others,
I was educating myself day and night watching TV
I pumped iron, I swallowed methane, mom was giving me money.
It made me relaxed, my eyes went dry, and I didn't believe my eyes,
While professors pressed others in the university.
I never read a book, for I am as wise as Solomon without it.
I don't know any foreign languages, but I know that my language is rich.
Then mom told me: "OK, get up! It's time to make money"
And she made me a deputy of somewhere.

The final line in verse one, “and she made me a deputy of somewhere” strongly resonates with Putin’s background as he started out as a deputy in the KGB. In addition to this connection of Zmey and Putin, in the music video, Zmey flashes a lavish wristwatch to the camera a number of times. This action could be merely part of the “privileged” consumerist persona he is portraying; or rather, intentional signals regarding the notoriously mocked, luxury watch-collection of President Putin, originating from a 2012 video posted by the opposition party, Solidarnost. In this video, it is estimated that the watches Putin has been seen wearing alone cost over 500 hundred-thousand euros. This completely contradicts the official annual income he declared in January 2012, before the 2012 election, where he listed receiving 140,000 euros annually as well as a modest list of assets.²⁰⁷ If Zmey’s action in the “Skrepy” video was intended to mock President Putin for this reality, then it is reasonable to conclude that Kasta’s loyalty is

²⁰⁷ Tonev documentary

with either their original identity as underground rappers, or the Russian opposition. Zmey's character's temper tantrum followed by Russian rubles being carelessly dispersed into the air; and then Zmey's anointing by the Middle-Eastern leader; are all also important to consider. Taken from the interpretation of Zmey as a Russian oligarch or as Putin, this depiction illustrates the nature of the relative inferiority of Putin and the Russian oligarchs in their relationship with their Middle-Eastern business partners, who they depend on for their wealth and status.

As this verse and the golf game ends, chorus 'a' begins, and is sung by the Russian national guardsmen who had discovered the graffiti on the wall. In one respect, these lyrics mock the voices' and public messages' of Putin and the current Russian power elites in control. If the lyrics of the guardsman's chorus is meant to mock the current Russian elites, then this supports an interpretation that Kasta is contributing to the messages of the Russian opposition party and movement. However, there is room for interpretation. Through the first chorus' lyrics and the portrayal in the music video, Kasta could be contributing to a message supportive of the illusory culture beneficial to current power elites. The translated lyrics of the chorus are as follows:

From cradle till grave
We are as gloomy as the sky over the Tagil river.
Wherever you look, there are absurd and morons everywhere
A-a-a, the situation isn't bad!

From cradle till grave
We are as gloomy as the sky over the Tagil river.
Wherever you look, there are absurd and morons everywhere
A-a-a, the situation isn't bad!

In the case where Kasta may be representative of an illusory cultural tool used by current Russian power elites, the lyrics and scene of chorus 'a' by the Russian national guardsmen can be interpreted as a message of mockery from all of the castes of criminals portrayed in "Skrepy." They collectively sing to this first chorus, unlike chorus 'b' which is only done by the Russian police characters. The lines "wherever you look, there are absurd and morons everywhere" adds to this perception that the corruption in Russia is collectively widespread. Also, portrayed in the music video, the national guardsmen is seen making his rounds around public places. However, he does not interact or encounter any other individuals during these rounds. This leads to the interpretation that his presence exists, but is not active in repressing the public life. The following scene with chorus 'b' by the police build on this point, as the national guardsman waves at the camera and appears as a bystander to the police who have appeared to make an arrest.

The police's part, chorus 'b', is presented like an interrogation or lecture in the first time it is sung. They sit in a police van with a man who they have arrested as they sing their part. The man who has been arrested is wearing a Tommy Hilfiger sweatshirt and Adidas sweatpants. Perhaps, this is coincidental and unintentional, or this detail was intentionally done to create the perception that the unlawful character relates to Western symbols. Chorus 'b's explicit lyrics are as follows:

Why are you like a schmuck? Why are you like a piece of shit, ain't you a patriot?

Hey, you wanker, are you full of brains? Hey, what the fuck are you doing, huh?

You are baptized! Hey, you are not a nigga, huh? very fucking well!

Do you want to be enslaved?

Hey, I repeat it for you once again:

Why are you like a schmuck? Why are you like a piece of shit, ain't you a patriot?

Hey, you wanker, are you full of brains? Hey, what the fuck are you doing, huh?

You are baptized! Hey, you are not a nigga, huh? very fucking well!

Do you want to be enslaved?

Hey, I repeat it for you once again:...

This relation of the man that has been arrested symbolically wearing Western apparel is further drawn out as the police sing the lyric “ain’t you a patriot?” As the police sing “you are baptized!” and “do you want to be enslaved?” they convey the message that they are reminding the man they have arrested, that he is a Russian and it would be wise for the sake of his freedom not to convolute his personal image or loyalty as a Russian. The police let the man go free of charge after they deliver their ‘lecture.’ While a ‘bribe’ is not explicitly shown here, one could also presume that when the national guardsman waves at the camera standing in front of the police van that a chain of bribery has just occurred. As I was doing my research in Russia, and in several instances in my sources from my research, I learned that it is commonly understood that police in Russia collect bribes from people to let them go. Furthermore, it is understood that it is typically the reason why they arrest people - to collect bribe money. Similarly, the police bribe levels of authority higher than themselves for various reasons. In this video, it is shown that the national guardsman may have received a bribe from the police for a reason connected to the man arrested as being representative of Western symbols. Overall, this chorus and scene depict a mockery of

Russian nationalism combined with potential anti-Western sentiment in one interpretation. In another interpretation, it depicts the nature of Russian corruption and its 'system of bribery'.

The second verse is then sung by Shym, portraying a Russian man seen in the local mafia community in a park-setting, preparing for his mafia initiation. Shym's character is seen smoking and drinking alcohol as he raps, which are poorly perceived habits in contemporary Russia, alongside a female mafia-associated character. He gropes the woman during his verse and is seen rapping among his new 'family'. The verse's lyrics are as follows:

We want bad roads, we want to be oppressed by others,
We want to live not sensibly, but in debts, just to make an example
To our sworn enemies, to give them a slap
They build intrigues for everyone, but for us most of all.
And though our yoke is heavy, but we have "skrepy"
We are all as one here, our "grandpas" from the tomb are with us
And though they know at last, that such people exist on the Earth,
They have a Tsar, there's God above them
And a wild devil with them, but we don't care anyway,
And if it is necessary, we can make a stand, standing in rows shoulder to
shoulder,
But if you are not with us, then, pal, get up,
It's time for you to inhale the humus

The line "we want bad roads, we want to be oppressed by others" refers directly to the highway construction projects that have made many Russian power elites' more wealthy. In either scenario, Kasta could be lending illusory culture support to the current

Russian power elites' through expressing 'democratic' opinion without consequences; or in contrast, Kasta could be lending support to the similar messages of the Russian opposition party and movement. The lyrics two lines after the first line, "to our sworn enemies" could either be referring to Russian power elites' or rather the West. Shym's verse leads into mentioning that Russians have, in Putin's words, "skrepy," "a large safety pin that could hold the nation together."²⁰⁸ "Skrepy" can either be represented by Kasta as mockery to Putin's term as the music video and lyrics show that Russia's "skrepy" is a collective societal pyramid of criminals. Or rather, Kasta is highlighting in this verse and noted lyrics that Russia's "skrepy" is reflective of Russia's corrupt measures to pursue and protect its national interests against the Western powers. This term "skrepy" is also the title of the song, which places primary significance on its meaning to the song. The fact that the term, "skrepy," was notably used and discussed by the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, indicates that Kasta is seeking to connect their song's content to relevant Russian political content. In doing this, Kasta is either exposing the contradiction of the term used by Putin through portraying the levels of corruption in Russian society; or in contrast, Kasta is highlighting that unity or "skrepy" is necessary to maintain among the various castes in Russian society for the interest of Russia. In other words, "skrepy" means collective Russian business. Overall, Kasta selected their song title "Skrepy," to intentionally attach feelings and meaning to the politically used term from either a critical stance of the current system of Russia, or

²⁰⁸ Kara Fox and Victoria Butenko, CNN Report.

rather a supportive stance of essentially traditional Russian measures to ensure Russia's national interests.

In the final three lines of the verse, Kasta calls for listeners to become aware of the situation in Russia and "if it is necessary," in a united faction, "to make a stand." First, one must consider the music video's initial scene of the graffiti message, where Kasta indicates that what they will present audibly and lyrically in "Skrepy" is "artistic fiction." Following this consideration, one can ask, "What is the actual reality or situation in Russia according to Kasta; and why are they being passive about their call to action through the lyrics, "*if it is necessary, we can make a stand*"? If Kasta is suggesting through the graffiti message that the content of "Skrepy" is not reality, then it becomes questionable whether Kasta is telling their audience to "wake up" and realize that this is not how these levels of Russian authority actually present themselves. As seen in other parts of the song, they want to remind the audience that "the situation is not bad." If this interpretation and meaning is the case, then this indicates Kasta's support as an illusory culture tool to current Russian power elites'. On the other hand, this could be a deliberate message that the lower castes of society will unite and take action against those who are above them, something analogous to a contemporary Russian proletariat revolution. This is an interpretation which points to Kasta's possible support as a communicative tool on behalf of the Russian opposition party and movement.

After the second verse, all castes of criminals in Russia sing chorus 'a', shown in their respective settings; the Russian elite and Middle-Eastern leader in the golf-cart, the national guardsman marching on duty, the police in their van, and the mafia in their outdoor park location. Following the repeated chorus 'a', chorus 'b' is sung again, by

this time, one of the two policemen, portrayed by Vlady. The setting of this scene in the music video is important. Vlady, seen as a policeman, delivers his same 'lecture' previously directed to the arrested man from the street representing Western symbols, to a lecture-hall of university students. He redelivers the same lyrics of chorus 'b' passionately from a script, pointing at different students, and even reprimands one of students for being 'glued' to his cell-phone during the 'lecture'. The students' response to Vlady's character's 'lecture' is applause. Vlady, seen as the policeman, walks out of the building with a deceitful grin. He then re-encounters the Russian national guardsman. He pauses in front of the guardsman with a look on his face that reads disapproval and distrust, then proceeds to walk past. The guardsman looks back at Vlady, the policeman, with clear confusion as the song and music video end. The closing scene of the music video, where chorus 'b' is repeated in a similar, but different context and setting, is arguably the most significant part of "Skrepy" in terms of the song's true message. In the interpretation that "Skrepy" is an illusory culture tool to current Russian power elites, the university students are representative of the future and Vlady, the policeman, is lecturing them; or rather, reminding them like the previous man he arrested and freed, that they are Russians, generally baptized, and to be wise about their behavior and actions. Details that support this interpretation are again, the significance of the first man's Western apparel and the fact that the Russian policemen exemplified that they have the power to take and give back one's freedom. In the final scene, Vlady's character's reprimands the student on his cellphone in class, and the class filled with Russian youth showing their approval of Vlady's character's 'lecture', applauding him as he leaves the lecture-hall.

The detail involving the cellphone in this scene is noteworthy, because it is recognizable by both current Russian power elites and the Russian opposition party and movement, that technology and social media are imperative in shaping the views of the younger Russian generations, socially, economically and politically. For example, Twitter and Youtube are among the primary sources of mobilization for the Russian opposition party and movement, most notably used by Alexei Navalny. Without technology and social media, it is questionable if the Russian opposition party and movement would have still gained the level of prominence it has over the past decade, or whether it would even exist at all. Overall, technology and social media have altered the 'game' of content production and restriction in Russia; which makes it reasonable to see why current Russian power elites would gradually incorporate, or allow, the rap music-genre in Russia (a known critical music-genre developed in the West); and furthermore, that these elites would manipulatively control the degrees of success and critical content such as that rap artists produce. For example, Kasta is an original underground rap group, critical of the Russian society and government that has experienced an uncommon, though gradual degree of success and acceptance for underground musicians in Russia. This indicates that they represent 'acceptable' and 'democratic' musical freedom granted by current Russian power elites. The limited degree of Kasta's commercial success and criticism of Russian corruption, combined with the unavoidable nature of technology and social media, where content of opposition to the current Russian government culminate via vlogs, music, and more; it is reasonable to suggest that current Russian power elites are responsible in addressing cultural figures like Kasta and influencing their material. If this is the case, then Kasta

represents a unique breed of a *dual personae* illusory culture tool in contemporary Russia for the current power elites, even more psychologically calculated than its past Soviet or Russian illusory cultural forms.

The contrary interpretation of the cellphone being addressed by Vlady, as the policeman, in the final scene of “Skrepy,” could also be a signal addressing the ‘consumerist complacency’ for which younger Russians are increasingly criticized. However, given that the figure reprimanding the inappropriate usage of the cellphone in the lecture-hall is a policeman (a figure of authority), and that the student is seen applauding his approval of chorus ‘b’'s lyrical message; it is more reasonable to believe that the previously discussed interpretation fits this scenario better.

The last part of the final scene where the policeman confidently walks out of the building and encounters the national guardsman, shifting into a defensive facial appearance, represents an interesting exchange that could either play into the mockery of the corruption in Russia’s society and government, or be a signal of the increasing prominence of the Russian opposition party and movement, as the ‘lower’ castes of society are seeking to align against those above them. In the interpretation that this exchange is portraying mockery, the policeman’s glare represents acknowledgement of the national guardsman, his ‘superior’, after just establishing to the younger generation of Russian students that they ought to be compliant and loyal to their national system. In the contrasting interpretation, the glare of the policeman towards the national guardsman reflects non-verbal aggression towards an individual more closely tied to the Russian government, after just emphasizing to the younger generation of Russian students that they should not be complacent and compliant in this system that is

manipulating them. It is ambiguous whether or not the students applauded the lyrics of chorus 'b', delivered by the policeman portrayed by Vlady, in recognition of the manipulative voices of the Russian system. Or, if they applauded in approval of their 'superior's' message to be loyal and not in opposition to their system. The defensive, yet puzzled, facial expression of the national guardsman after receiving the glare from the policeman, could either be a signal of the lack of preparation and control the Russian system has over the future generations of frustrated Russians; or the national guardsman's facial expression could indicate his hostility and confusion as to why a policeman would acknowledge him in such a way. In this sense one might reason that the national guardsman did not that the policeman has been seen establishing more "Russian order" in the public than the guardsman throughout the music video.

Overall, "Skrepy"'s musical composition, lyrics, and official music video hold significant and complex dual interpretations. Kasta claims "Skrepy" represents "artistic fiction," observable in the graffiti message within the music video. Yet, they disclosed in an interview about the song to Rostov-on-Don's magazine, *Nation Magazine*, that the song was essentially mocking the corruption in Russia's society and government, upon explaining how Russia faced oppression for three generations, or seventy years as they noted. But, they stated that they believe in this future and the present Russian generation. Interestingly, I could not come across any other reviews or comments on Kasta's song "Skrepy," aside from this interview with *Nation Magazine* and the CNN article. I looked into *Nation Magazine's* background. The owner of the alleged magazine is noted only as "Andrey." Coincidentally, this is Kasta member, Zmey's first name. *Nation Magazine* apparently has an office in Moscow at the Omega Plaza, in

addition to their central location of Rostov-on-Don, the progressive home city of Kasta, located 670 miles south of Moscow. Interestingly, I searched for information on Nation Magazine within the Omega Plaza's "business center" website page, but no mention of Nation Magazine was made.²⁰⁹ Based on the lack of resources traced on decoding the exact message that Kasta intends to portray in "Skrepy," in addition to their middle-ground musician status and content, it can be surmised that the message is that there is no message. The level of complicated details and connections "Skrepy" presents leads me to also believing that this song, and more broadly Kasta, acts as an unwitting illusory cultural tool for current Russian power elites in expressing perceived 'democratic' rights in a perceptively undemocratic contemporary Russia. Alternatively, Kasta and their song "Skrepy" could possibly be acting as a communicative tool supporting (and possibly supported *by*) the Russian opposition party and movement.

Through including Kasta's "Skrepy" in my thesis research, the intent is to gain first-hand Russian perceptions of Kasta and "Skrepy" as a music group and piece related to the emotions of the Russian opposition movement. All of this raises questions regarding whether Russians will recognize the dual perspectives of Kasta and "Skrepy" that I have indicated. Additionally, it is interesting to consider how this music group and their content are received by Russians, and how their reception of such "seemingly critical," yet unpunished, musical content relates to their political perceptions of Russia.

²⁰⁹ Omega Plaza Hotel website, (accessed 27 August 2018); available from <http://omega-plaza.ru/>; Internet.

e. Pussy Riot - “Putin will teach you to love the motherland”

Fortunately, the meaning and origin behind this song is clear. Unfortunately, the meaning, as well as the music video of this song, is bleak. Pussy Riot has arguably been contemporary Russia’s most internationally recognized music collective since their late February 2012 performance inside Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior, where they were arrested after performing for less than a minute. They were jailed for several months before their trial and the subsequent verdict in August 2012. As punishment, they were imprisoned under harsh conditions in Siberia for nearly two years for “hooliganism.” They were released on a pardon by President Putin prior to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. This was done intentionally to avoid negative press and criticism leading up to the international event and national spring elections. The music-activist collective is most notably comprised of Nadezhda “Nadya” Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, who were the two of the three members to serve prison time in Siberia beyond the 2012 trial. This collective also included the Pussy Riot roster that has had a varying membership of eleven other women since 2011.²¹⁰

Pussy Riot has been received every bit as well as Russian artists have been received in the West. These prominent artists and organizations that have recognized and supported them include Madonna, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Sir Paul McCartney, Amnesty International, and many others. In 2014, Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina were co-awarded the prestigious Hannah Arendt Prize. This prize “is a prize awarded to individuals representing the tradition of political theorist Hannah Arendt, especially in

²¹⁰ Pussy Riot on Wikipedia, (accessed 28 August 2018); available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pussy_Riot; Internet.

regard to totalitarianism” and selected by an international jury.²¹¹ Both Nadya and Maria have also each been awarded for their authentic justice and featured in a number of Western news sources, magazines, Youtube channels, and even television news channels as well as series such as “House of Cards.”

Pussy Riot’s highly regarded global reputation is not mirrored in Russia. Admirers and supporters of Pussy Riot can be seen being beaten by Russian National Guard forces and police on numerous occasions. These images are widely available via video footage on various news sources as well as the web and have directly resulted in the seemingly few ‘quiet’ supporters of Pussy Riot in Russia, and unresponsive interest in speaking openly about Pussy Riot. Additionally, these images have emboldened others who blatantly dislike Pussy Riot in engaging in verbal disapproval and even physical attack of those who might speak favorably of them. After the release of Nadya and Maria’s prison sentence, as they are at a McDonalds in the Russian city, Nizhny Novgorod, the women are verbally harassed and then physically harmed with chemical burns and head injuries by Russian citizens.²¹² Videos of this attack can be found on a number of different news sources that covered the story, in addition to Youtube. This incident was only one of numerous times Pussy Riot, particularly Nadya and Maria, have faced physical attack from Russian citizens and even Russian police since their prison release.

²¹¹Hannah Arendt Prize on Wikipedia, (accessed 28 August 2018); available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah_Arendt_Prize; Internet.

²¹² “Pussy Riot suffers burns and head injuries after being attacked at McDonalds, *America Today*, 31 May 2018, (accessed 25 August 2018); available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MOYU-q2dYc>; Internet.

Since 2012, Pussy Riot has been made an example by the Russian government, and particularly by Vladimir Putin. The level of harassment and intimidation that the Russian government and Putin have used to suppress Pussy Riot illustrates that what is not authorized to be publicly said in Russia, will not be publicly said in Russia. This abuse of authority raises the questions about why other Russian artists critical of Russia's society and government have not received this type of punishment. To answer this question, several points that need to be considered. Kasta, has produced milder critical content in comparison to Pussy Riot in two important ways. First, Kasta's content does not place direct 'blame' on the Russian government and leadership for societal corruption. Instead, Kasta's musical content places blame for Russia's corruption on the collective Russian society. This is neither a personal attack on 'Putin' nor is it globally uncommon, especially in the rap music-genre, for a music artist to make light of their society collectively having issues. Second, Kasta performs at more modest venues for which they have been given the necessary legal permissions. Pussy Riot is different in both respects. Pussy Riot's February 2012 punk performance took place illegally inside one of the most sacred Russian Orthodox churches in all of Russia. Imagine a jarring female punk-music group performing at the Vatican or Mecca and singing about how the nation's respective leader is manipulatively using the church's influence to secure their votes in the upcoming election in addition to brainwashing their people with their social-political views. This scenario did not go over well in Russia. Pussy Riot's lyrics have remained consistent in their brutal honesty and have been consistently directed at President Putin since 2012. This is evident in the 2014 song I selected for my research "Putin will teach you to love the motherland." The lyrics for this song are:

50 Billion and rainbow ray
Rodyna [Russian motherland] and Kabayeva will pass you the torch
They'll teach you to submit and cry in the camps
Fireworks for the bosses. Heil, Duce!
Sochi is blocked; the Olympics under surveillance
Special Forces, weapons, crowds of cops
FSB-argument, Interior Ministry-argument
On [state-owned channel] Russia-1-applause
Putin will teach you to love the motherland
In Russia, the spring can come suddenly
Greetings from the Messiah in the form of a volley from
Aurora, the prosecutor is determined to be rude
He needs resistance, not pretty eyes.
A bird cage for protest, vodka, nesting doll
Prison for the Bolotnaya [activists], drinks, caviar
The Constitution is in a noose, [environmental activist] Vitishko is in jail
Stability, food packets, fence, watch tower
Putin will teach you to love the motherland
They will turn off Dozhd's broadcast
The gay parade has been sent to the outhouse
A two-point bathroom is the priority
The verdict for Russia, is jail for six years
Putin will teach you to love the motherland
Motherland (x3)²¹³

²¹³ Julia Ioffe, "Watch the Music Video that Pussy Riot Filmed While Cossacks Beat Them, *The New Republic*, 20 February 2014, (accessed 27 August 2018); available from <https://newrepublic.com/article/116668/pussy-riot-releases-new-music-video-sochi>; Internet.

The translation of these lyrics was written specifically in connection with the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics as the song and music video were released on Pussy Riot's Youtube account on February 19th, 2014. The music video displays live footage of the women, dressed in their bright neon simple-style clothing and balaclavas (ski masks), attempting to stage a performance at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and then being beaten alongside their small crowd of supporters. The overall composition of lyrics to this song are difficult to distinguish. However, the main lyric "Putin will teach you to love the motherland" is a clear message, which indicates that manipulative measures will continue to be utilized by Putin to ensure the illusory loyalty and perceptions of Russians. The use of Pussy Riot in my thesis research was primarily to gather Russians' insights and perceptions of Pussy Riot and particularly, their 2014 song "Putin will teach you to love the motherland." How a Russian receive these two is reflective and useful in understanding his political stances. Pussy Riot and their music is widely known and controversial, so I feel that their part in this thesis research is beneficial to further understanding the relationship between contemporary Russian culture and identity and current Russian power elites.

f. Field Research Survey

I utilized the following survey as a framework for guiding and informing my conversations and interactions with average Russians during my field research in Rostov on Don, St. Petersburg and Moscow.

1. Songs

Alisa Vox - "Baby Boy" [Малыш]

Птаха - "Freedom" [Свобод]

Kasta - "Skрепу" [Скрепы]

Pussy Riot - "Putin will teach you to love the motherland" [Путин научит тебя любить родину]

2. Questions (in English)

Do you speak English?

How old are you?

Where are you from? Where were you born?

How long have you lived in Moscow?

Are you a student? Do you work?

What genre of music do you listen to most?

What are your favorite bands?

Do you know these songs [give 4 songs]?

In one word what is your opinion of each songs?

Rank the songs from which you like the best to which you like the least? Why is #1 your favorite? Why #4 your least favorite?

3. *Lyrics with Accompanying Questions (Print out lyrics/Have songs ready to play Questions

Do you agree with what the artist is saying in each of the 4 songs?

- 1) What is the artist saying?
- 2) What is the artist saying?
- 3) What is the artist saying?
- 4) What is the artist saying?

4. Questions in Russian

Вы говорите по-английски?

Сколько вам лет?

Откуда вы? Где вы родились?

Как долго вы живете в Москве?

Вы-учитесь? Вы работаете?

Какой жанр музыки вы слушаете больше всего?

Какие ваши любимые группы?

Знаете ли вы, эти песни [дать 4 песни]?

Каково ваше мнение о каждой песне одним словом?

Ранг песни, из которых вам нравится лучшее, к которому вы любите меньше всего? Почему #1 ваш любимый? Почему #4 наименее любимый?

Проранжируйте песни от той, которая вам нравится больше всего, к той, которая вам нравится меньше всего. Почему №1 нравится вам больше других? Почему №4 нравится вам меньше остальных?

5. вопросы

Согласны ли вы с тем, что художник говорит в каждой из 4 песен?

1) что говорит художник?

2) что говорит художник?

3) что говорит художник?

4) что говорит художник?

Chapter 5

Findings and Conclusion

“When music and courtesy are better understood and appreciated, there will be no war”

Confucius

a. Findings

On Tuesday, July 9th, 2018, I stepped foot onto Russian soil for the first time. My perception of the world’s geographically largest country had only been traced with ‘pencil markings’ up to this point. Every moment from that Tuesday in July forward, traveling on my own, I was adding to my canvas of Russian perception with raw interpretation and detail that could not conceivably be replicated had I not gone to Russia. On Tuesday, July 31st, 2018, I left Russia with much more than what I have the capacity to describe. These were among the greatest days I have lived *yet*. Separated into subsections by the Russian cities I traveled to, I will discuss my thesis research findings and observations.

b. Week One: Rostov-on-Don

I arrived late at night on July 9th, to Rostov-on-Don, a southern city in Russia with a population of roughly 1 million people. This city has been mentioned in my thesis research in the Methodology Chapter, as it is home to the rap group, Kasta. My friend,

and former Russian Fulbright fellow, Julia Danyushevskaya, is a resident of Rostov-on-Don, which is what led me to incorporate this city in my Russian experience and research. I spoke to her about going to St. Petersburg and Moscow, and she immediately offered that I visit her, as well. The rest is history. While she hosted me on three nights during my time in Rostov-on-Don, I primarily stayed at her family's vacant flat in Taganrog, 40 miles outside of Rostov-on-Don, which afforded me not only the opportunity of commuting in the "marshrutka"²¹⁴ a handful of times, but also, I had plenty of time to collect meaningful research and observations from several of my new Russian friends.

1. The Ziferblat Meeting

The day after I arrived in Rostov-on-Don, Julia took me to the 'anti-cafe' or time club, Ziferblat [translated as "clock-face"], where she and I had arranged for me to hold a discussion with Rostov-on-Don locals about Russian music and politics. The manager of Ziferblat asked if I could come in and meet with her to discuss exactly what it was I was planning to talk about with those attending their Friday evening event, at which I would be their guest. I was both polite and cautious in my meeting with Ziferblat's manager. I realize that the nature of my research topic involving politics, in addition to the fact that I am a young unestablished American, lends curiosity and intrigue to a Russian regarding my reasons for being there. I told the manager how I am a dual major in Political Science and Russian and Eastern European studies; and that my studies have led me to research the connections between Russian music and politics.

²¹⁴ a 'jammed-packed' van of people uncomfortably transported on relatively long distances; a true Russian experience

Furthermore, I elaborated that the reason I came to Russia was to learn about Russians' perceptions on Russian music and Russian politics, as well as their perspectives on the material I have come across in my thesis research.

The manager bluntly stated that I could not bring up politics. I was not concerned about this request. I understood her logic, as I realize that she holds a somewhat precarious position, as it is potentially dangerous for Russians to speak about their politics from an honest and open perspective, especially to an American compiling research on that particular matter. It is still interesting however, that in one of Russia's most notably progressive cities, 670 miles away from Moscow, at a specific anti-cafe location where people go to discuss their social and political views; I was told that I could not talk about politics at an arranged event.

I left the anti-cafe agreeing to only speak about Russian music on the following Friday. I provided them pictures and some information about me upon their request, from which they created an advertisement for on their Vkontakte [Russian social network] and Facebook pages.

2. Ziferblat – The Setting

If you are an 'extroverted introvert' like me, then the anti-cafe, Ziferblat, is your kind of heaven. It is located on a smaller street off of the main street in Rostov-on-Don, Pushkinskaya Ulitsa, and includes two stories and a beautiful backyard. The first story is comprised of the tall stairs leading to the main rooms, and a small ice-cream parlor. The second floor has a cafe area, open to Ziferblat visitors to make their choice of coffee or tea and also, an attached room with: a small stage, chairs, couches, tables, and a plethora of bookshelves and minimalist art. These rooms embodied the essence

of an 'open-concept' structure with the various furniture and open cafe-bar. A balcony and stairwell leading to the backyard were located on the second story. Their backyard arrangement included comfortable outdoor furniture and a large table, where I held my Friday evening discussion. Strung lights and a fire-pit for "fireside" chats were also a part of this set-up. Ziferblat's setting was the perfect place to engage in deep and meaningful conversations. The 'vibe' was very comfortable and open. Also, it was relatively empty, which creates an in-depth personal opportunity to learn about the fewer number of people present as opposed to receiving bits of general information from a crowd.

In America, I have come across venues aesthetically like Ziferblat. In fact, as Julia and I were walking up the stairs to the main rooms of the anti-cafe, I laughed and turned to her noting that I could hear from inside the rooms of the second floor that a Band of Horses song was playing something that would commonly be played at a similar 'hipster hang out' in the United States, as a popular American indie-rock band. Julia's response, as it was my first day in Russia and evidently unbeknownst to me in my reaction, that it is completely common at any public Russian location for American and Western music to be played - a point to which I will later return.

3. Ziferblat – The Discussion

I arrived at Ziferblat on Friday evening, prepared to see who came for the 7 pm discussion. After a slow start, up to eight Russian people joined me in the fireside chat. I kept in mind that I was asked not to bring up or discuss politics. I also did not bring my survey or notebook, as I wanted to be cautious and respectful of the Ziferblat manager's weariness of the inter-cultural event.

With Western indie music being softly played in the background, I engaged in a discussion of music with the Russians who had joined us at the event. I posed questions to them, most of which were questions included in my survey. I did this in Russian, but they told me they wanted to actually try to speak English, since all of the Russians present were eager to increase their English skills, especially with the presence of a native-speaker. Unopposed, we carried on the group discussion and initial greeting procedures, 'going around the circle' and taking turns speaking. At this point, there were six Russians and I. Below is a list of their first names (few names I have changed to conceal their identities, given the nature of the information they provided to me), ages, and professions:

- Anna, age 30, master's degree in chemistry
- Boris, age 47; local bookstore owner
- Alexei, age 48; industry worker
- Alexander; age 22; university student of chemistry and enlisted military
- Maksim; age 27; German-language instructor
- Zoia; age 22; university student of physics

From these individuals, once we moved past getting familiarized, I learned that everyone present, except Alexander, predominantly listens to Western-music as their 'go-to' music choice. Western pop and rock genres were among everyone's "favorite music genres," again with the exception of Alexander, the young military-associated student. His favorite genre was Russian rock, but he noted that he is not that interested in music. He noted his favorite Russian music groups as Zemfira and Leningrad; both

commercial mainstream rock successes in contemporary Russia. Below is a list of each individuals' favorite music genres and artists:

- Anna; Western rock; My Chemical Romance, Green Day
- Boris; Western pop; Susan Vega, Adele
- Alexei; Western pop; Ed Sheeran, Avicii
- Alexander; Russian rock; Zemfira, Leningrad
- Maksim; Western rock; Green Day, Nirvana
- Zoia; Western pop; Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus

At this point in my “almost undercover” research, I was feeling concern that my Russian participants had given me a sample indistinguishable from that of American participants. I wanted to gather more Russian music. So, I began to pose questions to the group about what Russian music they knew and liked, despite the fact it was not their favorite or ‘go to’ music. Then, the best thing that could have happened that night, happened. I saw a strange tall man and thin woman with dark hair walking over to the group. The man said before sitting down, “So where is the weird American girl?” Smiling, as it has been made very apparent that my visit to Rostov-on-Don as an American is unusual, even during the midst of the World Cup season, I raised my hand. The man and woman who joined fashionably late were Sasha and Mila, the dearest friends I made in my Russian experience. Below are Sasha and Mila’s ages, and professions:

- Sasha; 34; “unemployed but owns a business”; formerly lived and worked in Los Angeles for a few years; a former geomatics engineer

- Mila; 26; officially employed, but unofficially a German and English language instructor

The fearless nature of openness that Sasha brought to the group dynamic was very helpful in enabling me to dig deeper and gain valuable insights from our discussion. All of these proved important to my research. The energy of one individual can make all the difference. Sasha asked what we had been discussing when he and Mila arrived, and Boris, one of Sasha and Mila's good friends, responded quickly that I was inquiring about Russian music and musicians. Sasha then sarcastically retorted, "Well what exactly do you want to know? There's Spleen, depressing Russian music. Kino, more depressing Russian music. And then there's garbage sponsored by the Kremlin. There is no Russian music, actually. *It's a myth.*"

After Sasha shared his thoughts, the faces of the group were a mix. Anna and Maksim looked prepared to angrily join in common with Sasha's harshness; with their mouths open and eyes focused, they had a distinct look of passion for this topic. Mila and Alexei laughed as a sign that what Sasha said was their perception of the truth. Boris' facial expression and body language seemed to say, "Why Sasha, why did you have to disappoint our new American friend like this? We want her to like it here...but yes... it's a myth." Zoia appeared caught off guard, and likely unsure of the colorful English Sasha used, but did not join in on commenting after his remarks. It was as if she genuinely never heard this perspective before or possibly, just did not want to think about it. This leaves Alexander who had a facial expression of pure shock. Keep in mind he is the Russian military's "property." The music he claims as his favorite is Russian music. Given his identity, observable within the time we met that evening, he

had the greatest sense of Russian nationalism among anyone else there. Naturally, as he has only ever lived in free-market federation Russia and his daily environment consists of interacting with other members of the Russian military.

I will include my reaction to Sasha's thoughts on Russian music and musicians. I said, with much inner enthusiasm, "*Really?* Go on. Surely there has to be *some* contemporary Russian music worthwhile?" I hope it was not noticeable how excited I was that Sasha brought politics into the conversation.

Anna and Maksim added important thoughts bringing up two recurring points encountered in my Russian fieldwork. Anna said, "Everything in Russia that you see could be seen as a myth. Or even worse, there are things that are myths of myths, and then you don't know what to believe." I didn't know at the time of any examples to illustrate her point that would demonstrate what she meant, but I do research into this afterward. This 'myths of myths' concept would become what I observed from the rap group, Kasta. It is unclear as to whether they are genuinely in opposition to the Russian government and leadership; or if they are a 'tool' used in the manipulated illusory culture by current Russian power elites to deliver a discrete nationalist message, but in a misleading 'democratic' appearing presentation and genre. In other words, one of my conclusions from my research is that contemporary Russia has mastered unprecedented psychological "mind-foolery."

Maksim's key point from Sasha's outspoken comments on Russian music and musicians, was that there are Russian music and musicians true to their trade and content. However, they exclusively exist in the underground. Maksim built on this point by indicating that every city has its local underground. What is known in Rostov-on-

Don's underground stays there and won't likely be found in St. Petersburg, Moscow, etcetera, unless musician-friends traveling between towns and cities bring homemade burnt CD's or low-quality produced formats of their music. Maksim ended his thoughts with, "Russia is spread out over a large area. The only way to have anything known throughout Russia is if it is on a state-channel. Unless a musician's content benefits the state somehow, you won't be featured." I asked how this reality made Maksim feel. He responded that this is how it has always been in Russia, so he is indifferent to this reality. He doesn't take this matter personally, he feels that there are so many Russian people who have created music that it would be unreasonable that every single one would become nationally popular. He believes it makes sense that each city has its own music, so to speak. However he finds it unappealing that what has become nationally successful in terms of Russian music, is of unsophisticated quality lyrically and melodically, leaving the general population to turn to Western music.

Boris' response to Sasha was unique in comparison to Anna and Maksim. Only Anna, Maksim, and Boris had comments relative to Sasha's thoughts on Russian music and musicians. Boris had a particular look like Sasha was derailing my 'ignorant but blissful' tourist view of Russia. He said reassuringly to me about his good friend Sasha and Russian music, "Hayley, this is not true. Sasha is just cynical mad man. I can show to you good Russian music." Boris said this, but in further observations and time spent with both Sasha and Boris, I found that the two friends were on the same page in their political opinions. Sasha is just blunter than Boris. Boris is innately characterized by cautiousness and unlimited human compassion. The music Boris gave me to check out included Reels, a Russian folk band reformed in 2007 originally from the Soviet Union;

and the Rostov-on-Don Monte Carlo FM radio station featuring Russian pop and soul genre music.

The dialogue that ensued from Sasha's remarks about Russian music and musicians was only the first of Sasha's Russian 'glimmer of hopeless' ideas shared with the group. What followed became even more interesting. I asked if anyone knew of Alisa Vox, Ptaha, or Kasta; not mentioning that they were heavily analyzed components of my also unmentioned thesis research. No one had heard of Ptaha or Kasta. I found it unsurprising that they did not know either of the rappers, because although it is still a relatively recent installment to Russian culture, Russian rap is more common in contemporary Russia than it ever has been. In contrast, I found it surprising no one had ever heard of Kasta seeing as that group is originally a product of the Rostov-on-Don underground music scene. Alisa Vox as a solo-artist, former singer of the mainstream pop-rock band Leningrad, did receive some recognition from the group majority (Sasha, Mila, Boris, Alexei, Anna, Maksim, and Alexander). Zoia, the non-contender, and a young Russian with exclusive Western music tastes, did not recognize Alisa Vox. Alexander particularly liked Alisa Vox and her contributions to Leningrad, but all of the others expressed both nonverbally verbally, that her content was not 'real'. Anna brought up that Alisa Vox is paid by the Kremlin for her music, which I also did note in my analysis of Alisa and her song "Baby Boy." Sasha said "Yes. See. she is not good. 'Example A' of Kremlin garbage. But she is good we love her!! [spoken with cheerful mockery]." Alexei said "Leningrad is better off without her," to which Maksim and Mila laughed; and Alexander sat in silence. No one had any input to provide on the song "Baby Boy," which I had included in my research and methodology. A few of the

Russians present said it was familiar, but I did not press the matter. My intrigue with Alisa and the song notoriously connected to the Kremlin would have appeared abnormal and suspicious at that point.

After we discussed Alisa Vox, Ptaha, and Kasta; I then brought up the 'big one', Pussy Riot. I did this as casually as possible. I knew that the Ziferblat manager told me I could not bring up politics, and that Pussy Riot is virtually synonymous to Russian politics. However, I figured that if I mentioned Pussy Riot in a way that it appeared I was coming from a lack of subject comprehension that would be my 'best bet.' I came 5,000 miles to talk about this with Russians and fear not for my own sake. However, for their sake, I would put the topic to bed if it did not spark any interest in discussion. With only one way to find out, I casually asked, "So what about Pussy Riot? Everyone knows them, right?" Sasha immediately burst into odd laughter. Alexander remained silent; seemingly still sour from learning Alisa Vox receives state money for her musical products. Now, he was being reminded of more Russian corruption i.e. Pussy Riot. The rest of the group: Mila, Alexei, Boris, Zoia, and Maksim; were laughing and smiling with Sasha, but in a less absurd manner.²¹⁵ Sasha then said after catching his breath and switching to a serious tone, "Pussy Riot are idiots. But these idiots are Russia's bravest musicians." I asked why he regards Pussy Riot as "idiots." Sasha said, "They are idiots because they stand no chance against Putin and they believe that they do. Russians should not be so hopeful." The group grew silent. Alexei shared, after the

²¹⁵ Keep in mind that the act of laughter has been discussed and analyzed in scholarly research to be a response to circumstances linked with depression, hopelessness, fear, and anxiety. This response of laughter, and what is said following relating to Pussy Riot and Russian politics is not funny or silly, it is real.

collective moment of silence, that he liked Pussy Riot. No one had heard of their 2014 song “Putin will teach you to love the motherland” that I used in my research. However, Mila and Sasha indicated that they knew about Pussy Riot attending the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics to unofficially “perform” and were beaten in response. The mood was solemn after Sasha’s comments on Pussy Riot. Against the wishes of the Ziferblat manager who was not present at the event, the group conversation continued about Russian politics for the remainder of the night.

Maksim, Anna, Alexei, and Zoia left after the Pussy Riot conversation. It was around 9:30 pm at this point, so it could have been that they left because it was getting late, or because they did not want to participate in an open discussion of Russian politics with a ‘random’ American. In either case, I said my goodbyes with these people and we exchanged contact information.

The remaining Russians left at the table were then Sasha, Boris, Mila, and Alexander. Sasha said to me, “You know, this is good time for you to be in Russia. You could be journalist. Right now the situation is like 1936 Nazi Germany.” The eyes were large on Boris’ and Alexander’s faces. While Boris understood where Sasha is going with this, and again wanted me to appreciate Russia; Alexander, as a student enlisted in the Russian military was not on the same page politically as Sasha and the others. Alexander in particular, seemed not on any distinct page to be frank. However, based on his life experience thus far and his association with Russian institutions, it is commendable that he stuck around for the whole night listening to such critical discussion and not opposing it. Mila lives with Sasha, so this discourse had no effect on her. She sat there patient for Sasha to finish his thoughts. My response to this

comparison was short, “*really?*” Sasha says “ah, ye-e-es.” He continued to describe a plethora of issues and corruption in society, to which no one objected or disagreed, and then said, “Boris has agreed to take you home to Taganrog tonight. Tomorrow, Mila and I will pick you up. We will explain more of what Russia is to you.” I did not expect to hear that Sasha and Mila were prepared to set aside their Saturday for me. The event on behalf of Ziferblat was fantastic to experience, but given the initial greeting “so where is the weird American girl”, it was to my delight that they were fond enough of me to give me their time and a glimpse into their thoughts about Russia and its politics.

4. Friday night: The ride back to Taganrog

As I sat in Boris’ relatively new Volkswagen sedan, I began feeling sick in the stomach on my ride home to Taganrog from Rostov-on-Don. We didn’t talk that much on this ride as compared to other long rides he had given me while in Southern Russia, but what he elaborated on during this first ride is well-worth mentioning. Boris knew that the discussion at Ziferblat on the topic of Russia had ended in a state of bleak hopelessness in respect to Russia’s future. He wanted to reassure me that though the situation for Russia involves a number of people with power making ill-natured decisions, he believes in the power of the “Russian spirit” to change the majority power-holders from their ways. Boris said that in his lifetime, he has been around the world, lived in two different Russia’s [Soviet Russia and Federation Russia], and has kept close to literature from every corner of Earth, which has made his depth of familiarity with humanity rich. He built on this thought by sharing a familiar phrase “people are people,” they are not inherently bad and can be changed by the good of others. I saw in this car ride through Boris’ thoughts, that Boris and I, from two opposite ends of the

world, juxtaposed generations, and of the opposite genders; completely related in this thread of thought. Reaffirming that “people *are* people” and that despite societal shortcomings, I will always see the good in Russia and Russians.

5. The Final Word on Rostov-on-Don

While I desire to share in this thesis research many other experiences that occurred in Rostov-on-Don, as well as the detailed information learned regarding political matters, for the purpose of keeping this research concise in its purpose to examine contemporary Russian politics, culture and identity, through the ‘tool’ music; I will focus on instances where my methodology and music as a ‘tool’ were applied. In addition to the Ziferblat event, I did experience an hour long meeting at one of the local English language schools. At this school, I was a guest-teacher with six respective students from the ages of 20-28. Naturally, since this setting was state-owned, politics were not very open to discussion. The ‘air’ of this crowd was much quieter. This discussion revolved more around me speaking about the United States. However, I was able to gain information and some understanding of their music-genre preferences and favorite artists, all of which were of Western music. I then asked who their favorite Russian music artists were. The list consisted of a variety of Russian musicians, characterized as underground Russian music. In concluding my findings in Rostov-on-Don, I found that Western music is most commonly listened to; Russian underground music scenes are different in each respective city and are rarely known outside of their city’s boundaries; Pussy Riot represents a symbol of repression and the reality of contemporary Russian politics; and popular Russian music is generally recognized for its link to the Kremlin. Therefore, it is not consulted by the average Russian. Additional

insights gained in Rostov-on-Don will be re-examined in my final conclusion section about what this experience contributes to understanding the role of current Russian power elites and Russia's culture and identity.

b. Week Two – St. Petersburg

On Tuesday, July 16th, I made it to my hostel in St. Petersburg. At my hostel, I conveniently found three beneficial contributors to my research. Two of the three, I fondly call my “ruskii bratye,” or my Russian brothers. The remaining contributor, was the hostel owner, Alexei. On another note, in St. Petersburg (or ‘Petersburg’ as it is often called in Russia), my experience with locating Russian participants for my research did not go as planned. The plan was to go to cafes, a typical location where people have time on their hands, and politely approach people who would be of service in my study. I took this approach at five different cafes in Petersburg, and was unsuccessful. My perceived constraints on this method approach using my surveys in local cafes included: a lack of desire to participate due to the content; a lack of desire to participate due to the time (i.e. they were busy); a lack of desire to participate due to the language barrier; and also, the high-volume of tourists remaining from the recent World Cup, overcrowding certain cafes and making the setting unsuitable for interviews. Given these realities as I was discovering them, I adapted my research methods. I decided that I would engage in routine conversations with average Russians, but still work my original survey questions in during the course of the conversation. This led me to the record shop, Phonoteka, which gave me direct access to the Petersburg underground music scene.

1. Phonoteka

This record shop can be found off of Nevskii Prospekt, one of Petersburg's main tourist streets, about a kilometer down Marata Ulitsa. I walked in and after several minutes of checking out their Leonard Cohen selection, was met by a sales associate, Artem. Artem, 29, is a Petersburg underground musician himself. Not only did he point me to great Russian underground music, but he met up with me later that evening to bring me to meet other Petersburg underground musicians and followers for an underground music performance. While in the shop, he introduced me to his other co-workers and two people who also were in the shop and were friends of the shop-workers. This was a first-hand glimpse of the underground Petersburg music scene community.

Following my modified research methods approach at this point, I name-dropped Alisa Vox, Ptaha, Kasta, and Pussy Riot to everyone I had met in the shop including:

- Artem; 29; underground musician and record store worker; favorite genre: Russian underground indie-rock and shoe-gaze
- Maria; 28; "officially" unemployed; favorite genre: Russian underground indie-pop
- David; 52; record shop worker; favorite genre: Russian underground rock
- Mikhail; 39; record shop worker; favorite genre: Russian underground rock
- Fedor; 30; underground musician; favorite genre: Russian underground shoe-gaze

Ptaha and Kasta were not known to this group, and Alisa Vox and Pussy Riot received little comment. This group was excited to tell me about their underground music scene in Petersburg, and play it for me while conveniently accessible to the shop's high quality record player. I did not press the matter, but the reluctance of

Russians to address or even acknowledge Pussy Riot was something increasingly noticeable and evident as my trip came to its close - an observation later to be discussed. As for Alisa Vox, she's a mainstream pop-artist in Russia, so naturally she was not favorable or respected topic in this crowd.

Before I begin discussing the underground performance I attended, there are two key points from this successful encounter to be noted. First, it was here that I gained an important insight from Artem about Victor Tsoi. I asked him what he thought about Kino and he said, "Ah no, that music is no good... I used to like him, but now I don't. It's a long story. I will tell you another time." That conversation stuck with me and I wondered what Artem meant by those thoughts in the weeks to follow. I didn't realize until doing further research on Victor Tsoi and Kino that they had connections to the emerging elites of the post-Soviet structure. I had the hints in mind from Artem, and Ramet et al's study, which called Soviet-rock the beat for the mobilization of the Soviet Union's collapse. However, it was the connections I linked from Tsoi to Aquarium's to BG to state-owned film producers and more, that I became aware of who Victor Tsoi and Kino had been directly or indirectly linked with, in regards to Russian power elites.

In addition to important insights gained from that day in Phonoteka, I learned that the underground music scene of Petersburg incorporates genres of many sorts. These genres I observed in the shop were very similar to the independent Western musicians I am familiar with in my regional area of the United States. I've indicated the indie and shoe-gaze genres making an appearance in the Russian genre-repertoire, which I did not know existed until coming to Phonoteka. This insight reminds me of what I learned in the research included in my context chapter, how the underground music in Russia

mimics Western progressive styles that are categorically more divergent from the status-quo; which further provides insight that the 'real' Russian identity and culture is on a similar page to that of the West, provided that there are evidently similar symbols in the form of cohesively shared music-genres.

2. The Underground Performance

The first underground performance I attended in Petersburg took place at a 'basement pub' away from the main streets of the city. The room was as big as an ordinary cafe or bar, and it became packed in once the musicians started playing. The only light present in the dark room was shining from a revolving disco-ball. Everyone had drinks in hand, some people brought their dogs, and one couple even brought their baby. People were dressed in all different glittery or ordinary fashions. This was just a glimpse of the community of the Petersburg underground music community.

The musician holding the performance played a very interesting 'set' including a DJ for digital sounds to combine with his electric cello. One could consider this "shoegaze" for its off-beat, distorted, and 'other-worldly' sound. Artem told me that he calls it "space music." It's purposefully unusual and is exactly the type of music that one would never see becoming significantly popular while there is still a system of government in place. This can be said not just for Russia, but likely any country, as reflected in my literature review of Attali's *Noise*. It is important to note that this type of genre is occurring in both the United States and Russia is telling of each nation's citizens' personal beliefs and values. Additionally, this raises a significant question. That is, "What can be learned through uncovering the reasons why both Americans and Russians similarly create and cultivate this distinct genre?" Music speaks to languages.

There are lyrics, and there is the language of the notes used to create particular sounds, rhythms, and melodies. If we listen closely to the language of the music composition, we can potentially receive a totally different message than what is said in the lyrics. If we compare the music composition's message, used in various nations with their respective systems and social-political cultures, important realizations can be revealed. This point brings me to indicating that it is stereotypically perceived and portrayed in Western media that the identity of contemporary Russia is synonymous to "backwardness," but in experiences like Petersburg's alive underground music scene, this is not the case.

3. The Final Word on Petersburg

In respect to using music as a 'tool' to learning about contemporary Russia's politics, culture and identity, Petersburg provided me with the following key insights and observations: Pussy Riot is taboo in Russia, especially the closer in distance one is to Moscow; the Petersburg underground music scene incorporates genres seen in the United States independent indie music scene; and like I have previously noted, state-owned channels, predominantly one called "LOVE" play at nearly every public Russian location, which plays a variety of popular Western mainstream music and mainstream popular Russian music.

c. Week Three: Moscow

I reached my final Russian city destination on Tuesday, July 24th. Thunderstorms and a bad case of stomach-pains were troublesome factors during this final week of observation and research. My original method of conducting interviews at cafes was attempted twice, again with no success; due to the same constraints faced in

Petersburg. The atmosphere of Moscow was much like the atmosphere I know of New York City; people are busy and not interested in discussion with strangers. The methods for retrieving information then came from a series of different appointments. On one occasion, a friendly Russian woman who works for Gazprom, took me around the city in her personal driver's luxury vehicle, accompanied by her 16 year old daughter. Two other appointments were thankfully met through the network of Fulbright fellows my friend Julia put me in contact with. The last two participants were a young man who approached me at Gorkii Park, and my hostel "father." Here is the information I was able to gain from them:

- Natasha; age 50's; Gazprom employee; music-genre preference: classical Russian
- Sonya; age 16; student at a school in London; music-genre preference: UK indie and alternative
- Anwar; age 25; "officially" unemployed; music-genre preference: Western pop
- Ay-Suu; age 24; English-language instructor; music-genre preference: Tuuvan throat-singing, and Tuuvan underground rock (Tuuva is a Russian city)
- Stepan; age 29; magician; music-genre preference: Western 90's rock and alternative
- Alexei; age 56; hostel owner; music-genre preference: Western and Soviet rock

1. The Political Atmosphere in Moscow

None of these individuals knew of Alisa Vox, Kasta or Ptaha. When I mentioned Pussy Riot to Anwar and Ay-Suu, supposing that they might feel inclined to speak about Pussy Riot based on their brief time living in the United States and being familiarized with Western attitudes. Both Anwar and Ay-Suu had the *same* reaction. Their facial expressions read fear and nervousness and they both said something along the lines of,

“Yea...” before changing the subject. It was at this point in my Russian experience that I established, when in public, it is rare that anyone will talk about Pussy Riot, irrespective of their views or background, in the city of Moscow. The most noticeable expression of Pussy Riot, or more broadly of Russian politics, occurred in ‘safe’ settings within the parameters of Rostov-on-Don, 670 miles south of Moscow. In Petersburg, the second largest Russian city, even in the most ‘honest’ and ‘music-appreciative’ community, the discussion of Pussy Riot and Russian politics were not of interest. Moscow however, the topic of Pussy Riot and potential criticism of Russian politics seemed to be *fearfully* avoided.

I didn’t bring up Pussy Riot to Natasha and Sonya, because I knew Natasha as a loyal Gazprom employee who exhibited views and beliefs supportive of Russian nationalism, would not enjoy me mentioning Pussy Riot. The three of us were together the whole evening, so this did not allow me to privately mention Pussy Riot and Russian politics to Sonya. As for the remaining two participants, Stepan and Alexei, one was helpful and one was not. Stepan noted he does not involve himself with Russian politics, nor did he have anything to say about politics in general. Alexei, my hostel ‘father’, gave to me a written list of books to read if I wanted to learn about Russian politics. He said that he could see a social-political revolution in Russia happening after another decade or so of Putin, but said the opening of that “power vacuum” will lead to an ugly and unpredictable competition.

2. Final Word on Moscow

Using music as a ‘tool’ to gain insight into contemporary Russia’s politics, culture and identity was not specifically successful or unsuccessful in Moscow. I was not able

to gain substantial details or insights on key aspects of my research. However, when I applied my methods in Rostov on Don and Petersburg I was able to gain more details, thoughts, information and insights relatable to my research. The outcome of my research in Russia revealed more indirect findings than a lack of direct findings. The fact that 'presumably willing' people were unwilling and identifiably fearful in both their verbal and non-verbal expressions to discuss or acknowledging my research subject indicates the strong tone of Kremlin authority in Moscow. However, in the interaction and discourse with my Moscow participants, I noted the same sense of personal comfort and 'warmth' I had previously seen and experienced in the people I met in Rostov-on-Don and Petersburg. With more time spent in Moscow to build relationships and establish trust, one would undoubtedly be able to unlock the various perspectives and perceptions on contemporary Russian politics, culture and identity of Russians in their capital city.

d. Final Conclusions

Taken together, the conclusions of every chapter of this thesis, as well as the conclusions made through my findings and observations in Russia combine to create the overall conclusion I have come to regarding the following question stated in my introduction: *What is the relationship between power elites and the contemporary Russian culture and identity?* Using music as the primary 'tool' in each phase of my research and in each chapter of this thesis to provide answers and thoughts to this overall question, I have found that while power elites in contemporary Russia have jurisdiction over the 'ideal' Russian culture and identity, the Russian public holds the authorship of the 'real' Russian culture and identity. Furthermore, these "two" Russian

cultures and identities have a *symbiotic* relationship, which leads to the conclusion that when one of these perceptions of Russian culture and identity experiences change(s), the other must effectively adapt, or the state of its respective Russian identity and culture decreases in legitimacy and authority. The 'ideal' and 'real' identities of Russians is a concept that incorporated and described in my research as the concept of the Russian dual personae. The 'ideal' identity is what is exhibited publicly, while the 'real' identity is reflective of a Russian's actual behavior and beliefs. The 'ideal' Russian culture and identity remains under the authorship of Russian power elites, observable in 'official' cultural outlets (i.e. mainstream Russian music endorsed by the Russian state, state-owned television channels, state-produced film and ballet performances). The 'real' Russian culture and identity is difficult to capture as it is not publicly featured.

In the context of contemporary Russia, my research has led me to conclude that there is a 'new breed of illusory culture' being produced by *either* Russian power elites or the Russian opposition party and movement. In unraveling the background and musical context of Kasta, there is considerable reason to see that this music group could either be a 'test run' for a new type of illusory culture that seems to mock the system and hold critical sentiment, but it actually delivers the indirect message that the Russian government and leadership is not the sole blame for corruption and repression. Rather, it sends a message that the blame belongs collectively to various castes in Russia. Why this would be considered a 'test run' and not a fully state-endorsed public policy is an indicator of the lack of comfort or familiarity Russian power elites have with this approach. If this is the case, then Kasta and other similar cultural artists should be researched to gain insight into how their future content and reception correlates to

Russian power elites' agenda. In contrast, another form of this 'new breed of illusory culture' could be supported by the Russian opposition party and movement, which indicates another significant sign. Though there was a force of emerging elites in the post-Soviet structure which used the rock genre to mobilize the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a key distinction exists in this comparison. That is, the contemporary Russian opposition party and movement has grown out of the masses, not from within the existing government structure or circle of power elites, as it did during the Soviet era. My research and observations collected in Russia contributes to the existing body of knowledge on this topic in the following specific observations. Anna's point about contemporary Russia's "myths of myths," the reluctance to speak about Russian politics the closer one is to Moscow, and the strong sense of protection and community Russians have among one another, are all indicative of the fact that there is no societal security granted by the Russian system. Overall, in concluding this thesis research, the relationship between contemporary Russian power elites and the 'ideal' Russian culture and identity are sound due to the power elites role as the uncontested author. However, the relationship between contemporary Russian power elites and the 'real' Russian culture and identity are growing further apart with the rise of technology's capacity to spread the authentic '*Russian spirit*'.

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