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NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PRIVATE LIFE AND PUBLIC ACTIVISM:
Ethnographic case study of LGBTQI rights movement in Saint Petersburg, Russia

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In the past three years (2012-2015), several repressive law amendments have been introduced in Russia, focusing on controlling the civil activism. "Foreign Agent Law" (2012) on Russian NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), the adoption of a federal "Homopropaganda" law (2013) and, most recently, a law on "Undesired NGOs" (2015), have contributed the most to the hostile attitudes towards civil society, namely LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, trans-gender, queer and intersex) movement. These law amendments together with a growing and professionalizing LGBTQI movement have gained attention both in Russia and beyond its borders.

This thesis investigates the LGBTQI movement's differing methods of trying to raise awareness among fellow-citizens. People who are active in the movement negotiate the ways of taking part in the LGBTQI movement in St Petersburg within the movement and under the restrictive policies towards LGBTQI activism. Not only do these negotiations concern domestic questions but they also have a global character, as participants modify different ways of participating in activism to fit the local circumstances. In addition, Soviet history has a key role in both explaining today's civil activism and LGBTQI movement in Russia but moreover in understanding the repressive policies.

The data were collected during the years 2013-2015. I have employed ethnographic research methods by interviewing, observing and being a participant-observer within the local LGBTQI movement. In addition, my data consists of my field diary and the LGBTQI activists' blog writings.

LGBTQI people are marginalized in public rhetoric which has turned public actions highly political and similarly suppressed some of the social aspects of it aside. At the same time, LGBTQI activists argue these to be the most important motivations for their actions. Combining private life with public activism has become one the biggest challenge for the participants and a debate within the local LGBTQI movement. Taking part in the movement has turned not only a fight for democracy but also a fight for more modern Russia. Participation in the movement include large value-based questions of loyalty, devotion and individual needs.

Key concepts: Russia, Soviet Union LGBTQI NGO, LGBTQI activism, Democracy, Civil Society, Social Movements

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Viimeisten kolmen vuoden aikana (2012-2015) Venäjällä on asetettu voimaan useita kansalaisyhteiskuntaa rajoittavia lakeja. Erityisesti ”Foreign Agent” -laki, ”Homopropaganda” -laki sekä viimeisimpänä laki ”ei-toivotuista” järjestöistä ovat lisänneet negatiivisia asenteita ja toimia sekä järjestöjä että yksilöitä kohtaan. Lait ovat samalla nostaneet HLBTQI-henkilöiden (homoseksuaalien, lesbojen, trans-suokupuolisten ja intersukupuolisten) oikeuksia ajavat järjestöt erityisen tarkkailun kohteeksi.

Tutkielmani tarkastelee pietarilaisen HLBTQI-liikkeen jäsenten neuvotteluja toimintatavoistaan muuttuvassa ja haastavassa toimintaympäristössä heidän pyrkiessään lisäämään kansalaisten tietoisuutta seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöistä sekä heidän oikeuksistaan. Tutkin lisäksi liikkeen sisäisiä määrittelyjä sopivista toimintakeinoista samalla kun poliittinen keskustelu ja päätöksenteko siirtävät toimintamuotoja laittoman toiminnan piiriin. Tässä ilmapiirissä yksityiselämän ja julkisen aktivismin yhdistämisestä on tullut monelle HLBTQI-liikkeeseen osallistuvalla yhdeksi suurimmista haasteista. Liikkeeseen osallistuvat pyrkivät lisäksi uudelleenmuotoilemaan toimintatapoja, jotta ne soveltuisivat paremmin paikalliseen ja muuttuvaan toimintaympäristöön. Tässä yhteydessä neuvostohistorialla on olennainen rooli sekä tämän päivän kansalaisaktivismin että HLBTQI-henkilöiden oikeuksia rajoittavan päätöksenteon selittämisessä.

Keräsin tutkielmani aineiston vuosina 2013-2015 hyödyntäen etnografisia tutkimusmenetelmiä kuten haastattelua, havainnointia sekä olemalla itse osallistuva havainnoija paikallisessa HLBTQI-liikkeessä. Lisäksi aineistoani ovat HLBTQI-aktivistien blogit sekä oma kenttäpäiväkirjani, jota kirjoitin Venäjällä ollessani. Lisäksi valokuvasin erilaisia kulttuuritapahtumia, suosittuja tapaamispaikkoja ja mielenilmauksia.

Uusien toimintakeinojen luominen, julkisen aktivismin politisoituminen sekä jännittynyt ilmapiiri vaativat henkilökohtaista sitoutumista liikkeeseen. Liikkeeseen osallistuminen on taistelua demokratian mutta myös modernimman Venäjän puolesta. Samanaikaisesti emigroituminen on todellinen vaihtoehto joillekin toimintaan osallistuville. Liikkeessä toimiminen sisältääkin laajoja arvopohjaisia kysymyksiä, jotka koskevat lojaaliutta, omistautuneisuutta sekä yksilöllisiä tarpeita.

Avainkäsitteet: Venäjä, Neuvostoliitto, HLBTQI-kansalaisjärjestö, HLBTQI-aktivismi, demokratia, kansalaisyhteiskunta, sosiaaliset liikkeet.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“The repressive laws, they will try to put pressure on us. We can’t solve it by running faster. We have to stop and think how to survive from all this and make a plan to survive and to find our borders.

At one moment I understood that when you’re trying to run faster and be stronger with our – not the enemies, but with the state and the nationalists, and they are really strong – and I realized that they are much stronger. We should find other way because otherwise we will not win.” (Valery, 3 September 2014)

My research focuses on the effects of three recent law amendments that repress the sphere and methods of NGOs and namely LGBTQI NGOs and activists. I am willing to find out how LGBTQI movement negotiates and acts under these recent law amendments. In addition to this, and despite the fact that the Russian government refuses to admit it, these laws also violate the human rights of LGBTQI individuals, especially young people. Since the introductions of these laws, the violence aimed at sexual and/or gender minorities in Russia has grown remarkably. However, the reporting of them has increased as well because of the mobilization and professionalization of local LGBTQI NGOs. The Geneva Conference Report (as of July 2014) on the situation of LGBT people in Russia, expressed 12 cases of violations and several other cases violating the rights of gender and sexual minorities in Russia (see for example Kirichenko and Kozlovskaya 2014)

The present attitude in Russian politics towards civil society is negative and does not recognize the role of NGOs as supplementing and combining its services. It supports NGOs, but its financing is scant and highly selective. The NGOs receiving governmental aid are both governmentally driven groups such as the “Nashi”¹ and other organizations that concentrate on the well-being of heterosexual nuclear families, i.e. support the well-being of mothers and children and work to prevent orphanage and to increase the quality of life for the elderly. These organizations are entitled to tax reductions and special state funding provided by the Russian government (see for example Meri Kulmala 2013). Thus, government aids civil society on specified social issues. What is also notable is that it refuses to see the benefit of civil society in political and economic fields. In addition to this, it is noteworthy that these organizations promote more or less traditional values, heteronormative society and patriarchal gender roles. The activities of those NGOs not fitting to the set criteria are claimed to be a threat to the sovereignty of Russia by expressing and propagandizing “Western

¹ The group "Nashi" was founded in 2004 with its main stated goal being to fight against the "unnatural" union of oligarchs and liberals who want to abandon the sovereignty and independence of Russia. In addition, they wish to promote the transformation of Russia into a global leader in the XXI century. Furthermore, the primary goal of the "Nashi" group is the opposition to nationalism and xenophobia in Russia, as well as anti-fascist counter-productive organizations and nationalist sense. They hold that Russia is a multiethnic, multicultural country and any conflicts on ethnic or religious grounds will certainly lead to its disintegration. (Source: <http://nashi.su/>) Whether these liberal values are really valued among the participants is questionable.

values” within Russian society. In all of these previously mentioned law amendments depict Western values as somewhat opposite to the “Russian” values.

In this light, it is not surprising that the recent law amendments repress the abilities of NGOs who represent liberal values, such as the rights of same-sex couples and their families. These organizations are silenced from the public discussion with specific restrictions (see for example Alexander Kondakov 2014). Often this is done with those NGOs who are receiving foreign financial support and/or who criticize Russian policy towards ethnic and sexual and gender minorities. Despite the fact that the organizations would not consider themselves as political subjects, they are often depicted as such by Russian government. Restrictions show their importance for certain social groups and their impact on the wider society. Many such organizations are labelled "foreign agents"².

In addition to the "Foreign Agent Law", according to ILGA Europe's³ annual country report on Russia (2014), the adoption of a federal “homopropaganda” law⁴ has contributed to increased antagonism towards and within civil society and to increased hate crimes and inhuman and degrading treatment against LGBTQI individuals and their supporters. Perpetrators of hate crimes argue that they aim to unify the country and reinforce “traditional” family values (ILGA Europe 2014). Sadly, this forces some LGBTQI individuals and groups to stay invisible. When seeking help, many are obliged to do it anonymously. For the same reasons, telephone help-lines (горячая линия)⁵, psychological help, peer-to-peer aid and closed meetings are perhaps the most popular services provided by NGOs. However, I agree with Debra King (2006, 873) and argue that in addition to constantly suppressed capacity for resistance, civil activism aims at using proactive rather than reactive methods. The activists whom I interviewed were keen on trying new methods in activism and mostly did not plan to retreat from the public sphere.

2 According to the Ministry of Justice in Russia, there are currently 35 NGOs labeled as "Foreign Agents" in Russia (Source: <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx>).

3 "ILGA-Europe is the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. ILGA-Europe works for equality and human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans & intersex (LGBTI) people at the European level. " (Source: <http://www.ilga-europe.org/>)

4Article 6.21. Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors (translation by LGBT Network Russia): Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors expressed in distribution of information that is aimed at the formation among minors of non-traditional sexual attitudes attractiveness of non-traditional sexual relations, misperceptions of the social equivalence of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations, or enforcing information about non-traditional sexual relations that evokes interest to such relations, if these actions do not constitute a criminal offence, - is punishable by an administrative fine for citizens in the amount of four thousand to five thousand roubles; for officials – forty thousand to fifty thousand rubles; for legal entities – from eight hundred thousand to one million roubles, or administrative suspension of activities for the period of up to ninety days.

5 горячая линия – Help lines offer support and aid for the LGBTQI persons or their relatives via telephone. This aid is aimed especially for the ones who do not have NGOs or other supportive groups nearby

Some of the methods for street activism are modified or even copied from the West, but this is pre-digested vision. Western influences were most visible in the early 1990s Post-Soviet Russian LGBTQI movement. Western actors founded new NGOs in Post-Soviet Russia which would then employ the Western methods for advocacy. This received mixed responses in Russia and some of these NGOs were short-lived. However, the impact of Western strategies and methods are not followed systematically today, as Suvi Salmenniemi (2008) and Kulmala (2013) have shown in their research. According to them, the 'Western' models of civil society have been followed unevenly within the collective actions of Russian NGOs. Russian actors modify the methods and strategies for local context instead of imitating them. Thus, the claim of negative "Western influences" imported by some NGOs, as expressed by the Russian government, is simplified and false.

It is important to analyze what exactly the objectives are that the recent law amendments aim at. Both of the laws, the "Foreign Agent" law and "Homopropaganda law", have serious and negative impact on the work of local LGBT NGOs in Russia. The ways in which these laws are represented makes it clear that they have a special focus on LGBTQI NGOs. I will focus more on what these laws mean in practice in the following chapters. Nonetheless, I will start by introducing what the term LGBTQI stands for in my thesis.

1.1. Challenges of term LGBTQI: the case of Russia

Although LGBTQI rights are human rights, I argue that LGBTQI rights activism should not be generalized here as a human rights activism. My focus group used precisely the term LGBTQI or LGBT when they discussed activism within the Russian LGBTQI movement. In some cases they also participated in demonstrations for other human rights. On these occasions, they underlined that their participation did not specifically aim at the rights of LGBTQI people but was more generally oriented towards rights for all. Nonetheless, the term LGBTQI was always employed when discussing specifically about demonstrations for the rights of LGBTQI people.

The reason I do not use the term gender and sexual minorities is that my focus group always referred to LGBTQI or LGBT. Interestingly, they used precisely this term even when we discussed in Russian. They preferred this shortened version from the Russian term "gender and sexual minorities" (Сексуальные и гендерные меньшинства), although this is often in use in more formal publication of LGBTQI organizations. Nonetheless, Russian officials employ the term "non-traditional sexual orientation" (Нетрадиционная сексуальная ориентация). Among my interviewees and more broadly within the LGBTQI movement, this term was considered highly offensive. Naturally, the term used by officials was also highly criticized and questioned on several public occasions. The definition "non-traditional" sexual orientation has no factual

basis and it is thus highly questionable to employ it in the first place. Having no public critical discussion on this term shows the power that the regime has on civil society.

Most commonly defined, gays and lesbians are people who commit sex acts with partners of the same biological sex. However, there are problems with this definition: What are these acts, and how many of them could count for being a gay or a lesbian? In fact, sexual orientation is multiple and complex since biological sex of the partner might be just one part of what an individual desires in a partner (Leahy & Cohn-Sherbock 1996, 90-92.) In my thesis, I argue that the person is a lesbian or gay if he/she has more or less long-lasting desire (whether physical and/or psychological) for people sharing the same biological sex. I agree with Leahy & Cohn-Sherbock (1996, 90–93) and define the sexual orientations of lesbians and gays as a stable and characteristic desire to engage in sexual conduct with members of the same sex. What is notable here is that this definition excludes the ones who consider themselves asexual⁶ individuals. I conclude that the same principle could be adapted to bi-sexual persons: the desire for people both from same and different biological sex. It would be important and interesting to discuss the definition of sexual and gender orientations at length. However, I will not have the opportunity to do this within the framework of this thesis.

The shortened version of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) is a controversial term. I claim this to be especially so in the Russian context. Firstly, the term does not originate from the Russian language. I argue that it even benefits the rhetoric used by the people who are against LGBTQI people and the movement in Russia. These groups argue that sexual and gender minorities are something foreign to Russia and that they only reflect influences from the West (see for example Kon' 1995). Therefore, their sexual and/or gender orientation is often depicted representing something external to Russian culture. Secondly, categorizing the topic as LGBTQI, the discussion may end up evolving only around and within LGBTQI people. Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse (2011, 118-120) focus on this issue in a broader way by arguing that the term lends itself to essentialist reading. This means that if for example the activism on sexual and gender equalities is termed as LGBTQI activism, it becomes rather automatically lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, queer and intersex issue. This might prevent the participation of other groups and those who include themselves in the heterosexual majority, yet who wish to support equality and are against discrimination based on sexual and gender orientation. Secondly, the term reinforces the notion of homogeneity in these movements. Furthermore, perhaps the whole idea of labeling can be questioned.

⁶ Asexuality can be defined as individuals experiencing no sexual attraction towards another person. On the other hand, this may exclude a number of individuals who have low sexual attraction identifying themselves as asexual individuals. More information about problematics of conceptualizing asexuality, see for example Morrison, Morrison, Carrigan & McDermott (ed.) 2011. *Sexual Minority Research in the New Millennium: Social Justice, Equality and Employment*. New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc.

Should not the people be free to label themselves as they wish?⁷ Thus, by employing the term LGBTQI, I perhaps exclude some important discussion. Nonetheless, I think that this is the best term I could find. In addition, I am willing to use the term in order to respect the term my focus group actively uses.

Above I focused on the problematic aspects of using the term LGBTQI in Russia. However, I wish to highlight that the term LGBTQI can be more informative and inclusive than, for example, the term gender and sexual minorities. This is because the term LGBTQI names the sexual and gender minorities who may otherwise be left out of discussion because of being a minority within the minority, such as transgender people and individuals with intersex conditions. At times, the term LGBTQI includes also a letter 'A' initiating asexuality. I exclude this term because none of my interviewees identified themselves as asexual. In addition, my interviewees did not speak about asexuality. However, I am aware that within the studied Russian LGBTQI groups there are people who have since created a lively online discussion groups about asexuality. The discussion about both asexuality and online-activism deserves to be the subject of its own study. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at the three law amendments that have had the biggest impact on LGBTQI NGOs in Russia.

1.2. The impact of recent law amendments on NGOs in Russia

Several bills restricting the work of NGOs were introduced already in 2006. These were all similar to the "Foreign Agent" law now in force. However, in 2009, during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, some improvements were allowed: vaguely defined possible "threats" from NGOs for the government were removed from the law. In addition to this, lists of documents that NGOs were required to provide officials on demand were limited. Smaller organizations with donations of 3 million rubles or less were exempt from annual financial reporting. Despite these improvements in the demands made of NGOs in 2009, organizations faced the increasing time burden for reporting and complying with such demands affecting their capacity to do human rights work. After the stormy inauguration of his third presidency, Vladimir Putin signed the law on foreign agents in July 2012. It came into force in November of that year. It is important to note that the law was not a stand-alone measure but rather a series of amendments to already existing laws (namely to the laws "On public Associations", "On Non-commercial Organizations" and "On Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism"). (Freedom House 2014.) Next I will focus on the three previously mentioned law amendments in more detail.

⁷ Photographer Sarah Deragon has made interesting photoproject of different gender, sexual and overall identities where the ones being photographed speak out their identities. Together with the photos their self-articulated identities comply interesting and eye-opening experience for the viewer. Deragon visited St Petersburg Queer Festival in September 2015. More info at http://www.mtv.com/news/2343980/identity-project-lgbtq-identities/?xrs=_s.fb_issues

The so-called “Homopropaganda law”, “Foreign Agent” law and the newest law of “Undesired organizations” have had a direct impact on the work of local NGOs. The most recent of these laws, the law of “Undesired NGOs”, also affects those actors who cooperate with the NGOs in question. However, I will not focus on this latest law amendment in my thesis, since it has only been in force since May 2015, after my fieldwork and the gathering of my data. The first of the law amendments directly affecting and even restricting the ways in which local NGOs work is the banning of “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors”. I argue that this law of has had the most harmful impact on individuals, since it basically prevents people from sharing openly regarding one’s sexual and/or gender orientation if it is considered as representing minority.

The law banning “propaganda” of “non-traditional” sexual relations was first introduced in Ryazan area in May 2006 by the Duma of Ryazan Oblast as an amendment to local legislation, Article 3.10, entitled “Public acts aimed at the propaganda of homosexuality (sodomy and lesbianism) amongst minors” (Wilkinson 2014, 366). In June 30th 2013, the law became governmental as Russian president Vladimir Putin signed the bill.

Article 6.21 (§ 135-FZ). Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors (translation by LGBT Network Russia, 2013):

Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors expressed in distribution of information that is aimed at the formation among minors of non-traditional sexual attitudes, attractiveness of non-traditional sexual relations, misperceptions of the social equivalence of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations, or enforcing information about non-traditional sexual relations that evokes interest to such relations, if these actions do not constitute a criminal offence, - is punishable by an administrative fine for citizens in the amount of four thousand to five thousand roubles; for officials – forty thousand to fifty thousand roubles; for legal entities – from eight hundred thousand to one million roubles, or administrative suspension of activities for the period of up to ninety days.

It is clear how the law depicts “non-traditional” orientation as something that is not inborn but instead employs vague words like “attitude”, “attractive” and “misperception” without further explaining how these terms are defined, nor on which grounds it can be argued that a given sexual orientation is “non-traditional”. What is conspicuous about this law is its consideration of the sexual orientation as influential. When law is based on distorted and negative views of sexual and gender minorities, it becomes easy to stigmatize and exclude these minorities from public and official discussion (see for example Kondakov 2014).

The law prohibiting “propaganda of non-traditional sexual orientation” does not stand alone but is instead amends already existing laws. Article 2 of the Bill makes a similar amendment to Article 14 of the Federal Law ‘On basic guarantees for the rights of the child in the Russian Federation’ which obliges the authorities to take measures to protect children from certain types of information and propaganda that are harmful to their health and moral and spiritual well-being . According to the Russian legislation, children are defined as persons under the age of 18. The law includes several types of prohibited information such as racial and social intolerance, alcohol and tobacco advertising and pornography. “Information propagandising non-traditional sexual relationships” extends this law to a certain minority. Interestingly, prohibition of social intolerance stands within the same bill. In addition, the under-aged who identify themselves as gender or sexual minorities are prohibited to gain information on this topic and may even themselves become involved in illegal activity upon sharing their sexual orientation.

The law banning “Propaganda of Non-Traditional Sexual Relations among minors” was not the only repressive law. In addition to it, the so called “Foreign Agent law” came into force in July 2012. Russian president Putin pointed out that there were 654 foreign-funded groups operating in Russia, while Russia sponsored only two foreign NGOs — one in France and one in the United States. The main target of this “Foreign Agent” law is politically active foreign funded civil societies (NGOs). How the political action was depicted, however remains highly problematic. I will discuss this in more detail shortly.

Similarly to the law against “gay propaganda”, the “Foreign Agent law” introduced amendments to certain legislation already in force in the Russian Federation. These amendments gave further rights to the authorities to make rules on the registration of new NGOs more restrictive. Government could deny the registration of an NGO if its “goals and objectives... create a threat to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, national unity, unique character, cultural heritage, and national interests of the Russian Federation”. In addition, according to this law, foreigners and stateless persons without residency are prohibited to found an NGO. Furthermore, NGOs are required to submit annual audits and produce supplemental reporting on activities and the sources and purpose of all funds. NGOs are also obliged to provide unlimited information on their daily management upon demand. (Freedom House 2014.) It is clear that the “Foreign Agent” law has given officials further scope to observe, gather information on and restrict those NGOs whose activities would not meet the government’s ideals. In this light, it is difficult not to consider the current Russian government as exhibiting an authoritarian character.

The core criterion for labeling an NGO a “foreign agent” was its claimed political activity. Those organizations that are determined by the state to be politically active and whose work is even partly funded by foreign actors or organs must to register themselves as foreign agents. It does not make any difference

if the foreign funding does not pay for political activities (Freedom House 2014). This reveals that the focus for the state was more on selecting certain NGOs whose activities were seen to be opposing the goals and even values articulated by the state. Namely those organizations which aim at influencing the decision-making of public authorities and changing public policy or public opinion with respect to government policy.

What does the label “Foreign agent” mean in practice? These organizations are forced to produce financial reports on their political activities quarterly, file documents describing the composition of their management bodies and activities semi-annually, and submit to annual auditing by the state. Any public action that could be labelled as political should be registered with authorities before the organizations engage in them. Any funding of more than 200 000 rubles is subject to mandatory monitoring. In addition, all material distributed by these organizations in any media, including the internet, must be labelled “foreign agent”. The NGOs targeted occupy a wide spectrum and comprise not only LGBT NGOs, although these are rather over-represented. Several environmental NGOs, NGOs aiming at transparency and democracy in political decision-making, and many research centres were also labelled as “foreign agents”. No criminal cases have yet been opened on the basis of the “foreign agent law”. Still, seven administrative cases have been opened, of which two were against LGBT NGOs. (Radio Free Europe 2015.)

By October 15th 2015, 93 groups were labelled “Foreign Agents” by the Ministry of Justice. More than 20 of them have since shut down, or “self-liquidated”. (Human Rights Watch, 2015). However, it is important to remember that some of them have registered their organization as commercial, thus enabling them to continue their activities at least partly as previously. Nevertheless, the labeling of “foreign agent” was not only about forcing NGOs to mark their publications with a “foreign agent” label. It was also about the increased amount of bureaucracy and surplus work force needed to meet the requirements of reporting to the government. For some NGOs, this asked too much in terms of effort and funds. Moreover, it required them to focus more on bureaucracy instead of their core work.

These two laws were not the only ones restricting the civil activism and the work of NGOs. Freedom of speech was also targeted. In May 2014, President Putin signed the Internet Law (known as “Bloggers Law”). It obliges any website with more than 300 visitors per day to be responsible for the accuracy of all information published. Fines for violators could reach up to 874 000 rubles. (The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2015.) Furthermore, the Russian government continued to elaborate its definitions and criteria for determining whether the activities of non-commercial organizations would be socially-oriented (SONCO), thus identifying so-called “political” NCOs. In July 2014, amendments of the new legislation on public actions came into force, affecting directly the freedom of assembly. Repeated violations of public

order during organized rallies could be followed with criminal penalties. (The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law.)

During my last field trip to Russia in May 2015, the bill of “undesired organizations” was imminent and on my way back to Finland my Russian friend sent an SMS telling me that “It’s on”. I was not surprised, yet I was once again disappointed. The final draft was approved in May 19, making it possible for the government to declare “undesirable” NGOs and to ban them from working in Russia. What does this mean in practice and what distinguishes its effects from those of the “Foreign Agent law”? The law on “undesired organizations” focuses specifically on the actions of the NGO in question and gives power to officials to hinder or even prevent its actions altogether. In practice, an organization’s subsidiaries may be closed, its accounts frozen, and its supervisors and staff may face civil and criminal penalties.

What sort of action may result in an NGO being labeled undesired? I think this is the trickiest part of the law. It is by no doubt extremely draconian in its nature, giving basically almost full liberty to the authorities to ban the actions of NGOs (Meduza 2015). According to the internet publication “Meduza”, about civil society in Russia, NGOs can be declared as “undesired” if their actions present “a threat to the basic constitutional order of the Russian Federation, its defense capability, or its state security” (Meduza 2015).

Its efficiency makes the law even more worrying. Just by publishing the name of the NGO on its website, the Ministry of Justice makes the organization “undesirable”. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice will create a special list, similar to the previous list of “foreign agents”. Unlike in “Foreign Agent law”, however, commercial organizations may also be denounced as “undesired” NGOs. When the “Foreign Agent law” came into force, some of the organizations decided to change some of their actions so that they could be registered as commercial NGOs, thus enabling them to continue their work. The St. Petersburg-based LGBT NGOs Side-by-Side (Bok-o-Bok) decided to do so in fall 2013.

What makes the newest “anti-NGO” law so harmful is that it actually does not only directly affect the Russian NGO in question but also affects the actors who are in cooperation with it. Anyone who works for an “undesirable” organization may face fines of up to 15 000 rubles for ordinary citizens, and up to 50 000 rubles for officials. 100 000 rubles will be faced by the NGO itself. NGOs that are labelled “undesirable” are forbidden to hold public events and possess or distribute promotional materials. In addition to all this, all Russian banks and financial institutions are forbidden to cooperate with the “undesirable” organizations. I think it is not exaggerated to argue that certain NGOs are being frozen out from Russia altogether. (Meduza 2015.) At the time of writing in fall 2015, a new draft law on the prohibition of correspondence with foreign academics without the permission of the official censor is being debated. This would hinder international

cooperation within academia and make the work of foreign academics more challenging. Moreover, it would endanger objective research. The constant flux and changes occurring in laws in Russia is itself worthy of further discussion, but I will now move on to discuss previous research on civil society and LGBTQI movements in Russia.

1.3. Previous research on collective actions and actors in post-Soviet Russia

Civil Activism in Russia has been rather widely studied (see for example Kideckel 1995, Pilkington 1996 & 2002, Tilly 2000, Yurchak 2006, Uhlin 2006, Jacobsson 2013, Alapuro & Lonkila 2014). Kulmala (2013), Salmenniemi (2005, 2008) and Anna Temkina (1997) have studied civil activism in Russia in the 1990s, with a special focus on its gender aspects. Alexander Kondakov (2013 & 2014), Olga Zhuk (1996) and Laurie Essig (1996) have concentrated on the history of the Russian LGBTQI movement and its legal and societal aspects. In addition to Kulmala (2013), Laura Lyttikäinen (2014), Katja Sarajeva (2013), Alec Ivanou (2013) and Zaira Jagudina (2009) have studied collective actions and actors by employing ethnographic research methods. I will take a closer look at all of these studies in following chapters.

Alec Ivanou (2013, 210) studied grassroots activism in a central residential area in Moscow. Despite all the limitations in terms of opportunity and resource scarcity, the activist group managed to bridge the aims of the individual and the state and thus contributed to the development of civil society. They did this by concentrating on multiple local, and extra-local issues. They employed multiple campaign methods, including confronting the state by litigation with officials. Thus, oppression and limited resources do not always forecast the result. Yet, it is undeniable that activism under these circumstances demands more creativity and multiple, coexistent actions. However, Ivanou's focus group employed interesting and improvised methods of activism of relevance to LGBTQI activism in St Petersburg. In many ways, their creative activism resembles that of St Petersburg LGBTQI activism.

Kulmala (2013, 312) did her ethnographic research on female civil activists in social movement organizations in the Sortavala area of Russia. She concluded that the socialist legacy cannot be ignored when discussing civil society in Russia. Soviet history brings indeed a specific character to the picture of social activism. However, the deeper Kulmala went in her analysis, the more she encountered challenges and possibilities for participating in civil activism that Russians shared with the citizens of other countries. Indeed, activists often face many of the same challenges in many countries. The scale of oppression differs, but the nature of the problems associated with bringing about social change is rather universal. I argue this to be very important to remember in order not to overemphasize the characteristics of civil society as something special and happening only in Russian context.

Despite wide interest in social movements and civil activism in Russia, I argue that my study addresses gaps in the scholarship. The LGBTQI movement in Russia needs to be studied with ethnographic methods in order to carry out a detailed and comprehensive analysis of it. The situations of t LGBTQI individuals and NGOs in Russia have been the subject of headlines in Western media since the introduction of "Homo propaganda law" in 2013. Still, I argue that the diversity of the Russian LGBTQI movement has not been the subject of sufficient discussion. Instead, the focus has been more or less on NGO activities and on specific individuals, often on ones who are considered adventurous activist-heroes. Russian LGBTQI movement tend to be depicted as one homogeneous group in the media.

I agree with Kulmala's (2013, 58) argument that studying micro-perspectives must accompany the analysis of macro-level structures. Kulmala states that "From below we can – and should – provide not just complementary information to the macro-level analyses, but also challenge these analyses through the picture of the "other Russia". I aim to show the multi-sited field of LGBTQI civil movements in today's Russia. This, I argue, is made possible through close observation and in-depth interviews, gathered during multiple field trips and through networking with the LGBTQI movement. Next, I will introduce my research questions and the focus groups of my thesis.

1.4. Research questions and objectives

My interest for the topic arose on a practical level: I worked for a St. Petersburg-based LGBTQI NGO (Non-governmental Organization) for three months as an intern during the summer 2013. At this time the "Foreign Agent law" and "). Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors" were already in force. Furthermore, they had begun to have an impact on NGOs, especially LGBTQI NGOs. The pressure and the limited possibilities to do advocacy brought inner tensions to the LGBTQI movement. While working there, I noticed contradictions in how people considered their belonging in different local LGBTQI groups. The image may be rather homogeneous for example in media and the position passive instead of active.

Upon getting involved in their activities, I noticed that some of them were active in almost all of the NGOs' activities whereas others intentionally took part in only some of them; others even withdrew themselves from them. However, this did not mean that people in the two latter categories were less active in LGBTQI questions in Russia. Instead, their opinions on what could help the situation(s) of LGBTQI people in Russia differed. Thus, the visions for effective strategies within LGBTQI civil activism varied. However, despite their methods, people within the movement were anything but passive. They employed new methods, thus creating new groups as others dissolved. As a background to all this was the constant and nuanced critical

discussion on what effective activism would and should be. The question of whether civil activism should ignore the repressive laws or follow them was being constantly asked. In addition, they pondered whether the actions should cover all within the LGBTQI movement or highlight specific groups? Should it look for models from abroad or invent its own? These were among the many questions that I found my informants frequently thinking about.

During the interviews I became increasingly interested in hearing and understanding the motives and argumentations for activists' and volunteers' differing participation in different civil society actions. I claim that participating in a specific collective action is a personally confronting experience. Participation involves managing one's own feelings and responses about the issues one seeks to address. Moreover, participation mirrors and is in discursive dialogue with other subjects within the movement. Participating in the LGBTQI movement is thus a constant flux of negotiation.

I argue that in order to organize and mobilize, any movement needs to share a common language, agree on the definition of the situation and formulate a shared vision. However, in the case of Russian LGBTQI activists, the goal allowed people to choose variable paths. It was extremely hard to find ways to impact society without breaking the laws. Some were not ready to cross the border to illegality or put themselves or their family in danger because of their public activities. Thus, my main question is:

How do the participants of the local LGBTQI movements negotiate between private lives and public activism in contemporary Russia?

As sub-questions I am interested to know

- *What impacts the new law amendments have on local LGBTQI movement?*
- *What methods the participants of the local LGBTQI movement use to adjust to the hostile environment?*

The focus group of my research are the volunteers and activists of the LGBTQI movement in Russia. My data consists of 20 interviews and about 60 pages of field notes collected from June 2013 to May 2015. I ultimately decided to use excerpts from only 19 informants' interviews in my thesis, as one of them focused on the challenges of a local HIV centre. This is indeed a very interesting topic as the statistics of HIV in Russia are rather alarming and the treatment of HIV there can be described as stigmatizing. However, I felt that the content of this interview was not suited to answer my research questions and objectives. In addition to

the interviews, I participated in over 20 public and semi-public events. I also took part in informal meetings with activists and volunteers and visited their favorite places during the years 2013-2014. Thus, I claim that my data is a unique, capturing a specific period within the LGBTQI movement in St Petersburg, Russia.

My data was gathered among people who are actively involved in the Russian LGBT movement. They were active in multiple and differing ways. Among my interviewees there were those who considered themselves volunteers, those who depicted themselves as activists and those in a process of withdrawing themselves from the movement altogether. Some of them had recently joined the movement, whereas others had been active for almost 10 years. Some were employees of the NGOs, others activists who participated in only some of the actions organized by local NGOs. During the interviews, I formulated the criteria of these groups based on the descriptions by my interviewees, which I will introduce more in detail in chapters 5 and 6. The focus group of the study is thus rather heterogeneous, including men and women, young and old, hetero-, bi-, homosexuals and lesbians, those who are more radical in their activism and those who are more “conformist”. However, a common feature they share is that all of them are active in LGBTQI movement but none of them is active in only one NGO.

Their motivation for activism was not driven by instrumental reasons such as financial ones. Instead, their choices of participating in activism are often motivated by, for example, a desire to feel a sense of group belonging, to strengthen their collective identities, and to support their own ideologies. I claim that participating in collective activities is in many ways driven by individual ideologies. I follow the definition of identification of certain communities introduced by Ken Plummer (2013, 83). According to him, people are not born into new communities. Instead, they “throw” themselves into them. New, postmodern communities are in a state of constant construction and dialogue with the surrounding world. Thus, they are “reflective” and people within them search for reasons to justify the existence of these communities. Therefore, communities are not just “there” and given. By identifying with certain communities, people tell stories, generate rules and identities and thus create their own cultural and social capital. This is exactly what became clear when interviewing the participants of St Petersburg LGBTQI movement. I will focus more in detail with the concept of collective agency, collective identity and new social movements in chapter 2. Now I will introduce the structure of my thesis.

1.5. Thesis structure

After this introductory chapter, second chapter introduces the key concepts of my thesis. Firstly, I introduce the term democracy, which naturally is a disputed term touching on variable concepts. Furthermore, democracy is challenging to define in a post-Soviet Russian context. Thus, I will focus on its multiple facets.

By doing so, I point out what I consider necessary for democracy to be realized in practice and to be sufficiently inclusive. I approach the concept of civil society through the ideas of democratic society. I characterize those forms in which civil society exists in Russia. I also introduce the paths of civil society and democracy in Russia, in which form it has existed and how it has changed. Furthermore, I try to take a look into the future, and what will happen to civil society in Russia going forward. In addition, I will introduce the term LGBTQI and discuss what problems the term includes and what the beneficial sides of its usage are. I will also attempt to shed light on the motives for collective activities and why people join movements. As a last topic, I will shortly introduce the impacts of Western sponsorship on Russian NGOs, namely LGBTQI NGOs.

In a third chapter I will focus more in detail on the Russian LGBTQI movement, its history, the birth of the movement and how it has developed to its current form. In this context, I will examine the alternative reasons for the repressive laws and how the history of Russian culture and state could explain this. Last, I focus on my main interest, the role of St Petersburg LGBTQI NGOs for LGBTQI people in Russia. In this chapter, I introduce the registered LGBTQI NGOs in St. Petersburg. Additionally, I highlight the most visible LGBTQI groups and associations that became familiar during my field trips. I don't claim that these are the most important ones; nevertheless, these are the groups and associations that my focus group most frequently referred to.

After introducing the phenomena of the LGBTQI movement in St. Petersburg and the frames for it, I move on to introducing my research methods. In a fourth chapter I describe the first steps towards my field, the LGBTQI movement in St. Petersburg, and I how I got there in the first place. I bring out some successful moments of my ethnographic field work but also share some moments when I felt that I had failed with my focus group. I shed light on what roles the interviews had and why it felt at times difficult to proceed with them.

By introducing the ethnographic research method and sharing my experiences in employing it, I will also introduce my focus group and their thoughts on how they have experienced the mobilizing of the LGBTQI movement in St. Petersburg during the last 7 years. By going through the short history of the professionalization of LGBTQI NGOs in St. Petersburg, I bring out the variable ways of participating in LGBTQI activities. I formulate the activist life cycle as my informants expressed it. Naturally not all those who are active in the movement have gone or will go through this path, but it seems to have been the most common. In this light, the question as to whether to participate in legal or illegal activities shows how divided the movement actually is. I introduce the varying opinions of effective and constructive activism according to

my interviewees. I focus on the topics that were present in most of the interviews. These were the divisions of activism/volunteering, emigration/staying and public/private.

In the last chapter, I focus on both the global and the local sides of the Russian LGBTQI movement. I argue that Pride marches represent the Western idea of the LGBTQI movement and activism. My interviewees formulate their ideas of how to combine the Western models of activism with local context. I analyze their ideas alongside the reality. Last but not least, I discuss emigration, which was present as a sensitive and disputed topic among my focus group. I argue that the methods of activism and the plans of emigration exist hand in hand. However, the methods develop alongside the movement itself and thus can respond to changes effectively.

2. CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Whether the former member countries of the Soviet Union are democracies is a debated topic. I argue that the debate originates from the varied descriptions of the term itself. Instead of democracies, these countries can be described as being in transition as part of a process of democratization (see for example Uhlin 2006). However, this argument can be disputed. In addition, the directions being taken within these countries differ. Present law amendments ("Foreign Agent law", "Anti-gay propaganda law" and "Law on undesired NGOs") represent examples of how strengthening democracy and building civil society in "Western" terms are not considered a desired path according to the Russian government.

I argue that it is important to remember that just like any tyranny and oligarchy, democracy is a kind of regime. Nonetheless, democracies differ from other forms of regimes in that, instead of the massive asymmetry, coercion, exploitation, patronage, and communal segmentation that have characterized most political regimes across the centuries, they establish fairly general and reliable rules of law. (Tilly 2004, 127.) In a process of democratic decision-making, all the participants accept valid norms as a rational discourse. Factuality of norms means validity and, in proper order, certified laws. The term facticity means more than just a written law. It also reaches to the "unwritten" laws and de facto accepted practical operations in applying the law. The factuality of the norm shows that it has a compelling power. The ideal democratic society keeps facticity and validity close to each other. According to Habermas' principles of democracy, only those acts and laws are legitimate which are legislated according to the democratic principles. (Habermas 1989, 203-210.)

Importantly, as Anders Uhlin (2006) points out, democracies are not just about elections and political parties. In addition, democracy involves struggles to eliminate authoritarian social practices. Uhlin (2006,

15-16) and Chris Hann (2002) both state that the concepts of democracies should be broadened. Uhlin continues by arguing that, especially in post-Soviet contexts, countries are often characterized by deep inequality and political exclusion based in gender and ethnicity. Post-Soviet countries could be thus considered as formal democracies but not as societal democracies. Among my interviewees, it was common to express that they are not politically active but instead aim at social change. Overall, LGBTQI NGOs stress how they are not political actors. Official policies are considered something in which they cannot and do not want to touch upon as they are considered thoroughly corrupted.

Uhlin (2006, 16 & 18) continues that democratization can be seen as “the creation, extension and practice of collective decision-making based on the principles of popular control and political equality”. Democratic transition may thus have been completed when it has de facto an authority elected in free and fair general elections. In addition, in a democratic country executive, legislative and judicial power do not share power with other bodies of legislation. I argue that perhaps democracy is too loaded a term to be used in the context of Russia and thus I focus more on civil society and look at democracy from that point of view.

Ideas of civil society have gone through different phases, that of Jürgen Habermas (1989, 178), who combined the Marxist tradition of exposing domination in civil society with liberal traditions emphasizing civil society’s role in guarding personal autonomy. For him, healthy civil society is one that is steered by its members through shared meanings “that are constructed democratically through the communication structures of public life”. Robert Edwards introduced civil society in terms of three variations: Civil society as part of society, civil society as a kind of society and civil society as the public sphere. The debate over the concept of civil society is still ongoing. (Edwards 2014, 14-15.) Ivanou (2013, 191) introduces two alternative ideas of civil society: that of promoting the idea of civil society as a helpmate of the state versus that which sees it as a political opponent. I claim that in recent years, the Russian government has showed clearly how it mixes these two aspects according to a common set of goals. When considering civil society as a helpmate, it encourages the actors who favor traditional and heteronormative values. These goals represent traditional values such as nuclear families, protectionism towards children, Orthodox religion and the well-being of elderly people, to name just a few. Unfortunately in Russia, this idea is supported by the regime only partially as I argued earlier. The government-supported organizations include caring for the elderly people and families with heterosexual parents.

However, Hann (2002, 9) argues that, in addition, the broader concept of civil society needs to be relativized and adapted to local conditions. The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 was a new opening for civil society. It was a rallying cry for dissidents to build strong enough social movements to overthrow authoritarian states. These two methods were a completely new form of civil society. Direct democracy was such a feature of

political change in Eastern Europe. Civil Society is today often understood on three levels: economic, political and social. The field of action for civil society is growing in all these areas. It is not only about the social level where civil society has traditionally worked. (Edwards 2014, 20.) I argue that the Russian government still sees civil society's work mainly on this social level, focusing mainly on NGOs caring for mothers, families and elderly. In the next chapter, I will focus more in detail on the democratization process of post-Soviet Russia and whether democratization is really happening in Russia, and if so, what path and specific character it holds.

2.1. Question of democratization in Russia

The rise of the democratic movement and "Western" civil society in Russia date back to year 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev initiated radical social changes in USSR. These amendments came to be known as perestroika, a term literally meaning reconstruction. Another term from this period is glasnost. The term means opening up and talking about the hidden past of Soviet terror such as work camps and executions. In 1987-1988, there appeared the first social movements, focusing on ecological (mainly because of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster in 1986), civic and cultural questions (Bliudina & Pilkington 2002, 8 and Yurchak 2006, 81.) In addition, glasnost uncovered several social problems that had been concealed and denied during the Soviet era. These were prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse and youth gangs, leading to the opening of the discussion about topics that had been previously a taboo, such as sex and sexuality. (Hemment 2007, 96-97.)

As an authoritarian regime, the Soviet Union restricted and suppressed the activities of citizens into highly restricted and monitored, state-orchestrated forms of "civil society", such as membership in party and trade unions. Oleg Kharkhordin (1998, 961) argues that "civil society makes sense only if it includes individual freedom". According to this description, Soviet collectives cannot be regarded as institutions of civil society. I agree with this, but I want to point out that despite the institutions and, as a matter of fact, because of them, people themselves created a civil society, albeit only semi-publicly. It seems that even today, within the LGBTQI movement, it is difficult to form a cohesive opinion on the publicity of actions and even the movement itself. Naturally the laws suppress their actions into a semi-public and even private sphere, thus heating up the discussion furthermore.

Formal membership in governmental-organized organizations was supported and even forced in the Soviet Union (Jacobsson & Saxonberg 2013 9). One example of this is the membership of Komsomol (Soviet youth movements). Everybody belonged to Komsomol, however some less than others. Nonetheless, there were also "voluntary" organizations such as women's councils, youth and disabled organizations and trade unions

(see for example Kulmala 2013). Nevertheless, these organizations were not autonomous from the party. They were part of the state and represented the interests of the state. (Kulmala 2013, 121 & Jagudina 2009, 18.) These organizations could be characterized as GONGOs, governmental-organized non-governmental organizations. In my thesis, I do not include GONGOs, MANGOs (manipulated non-governmental organizations) or GRINGOs (governmentally regulated and initiated non-governmental organizations) (Uhlen 2006, 22) as a true form of civil society. I consider for example “Nashi” to be an example of GRINGO. However, they may represent a possibility and an opening for civil society. These forms of “civil society” in Soviet Union could be better described as public rituals to which few paid further notice. As Yurchak's (2006, 83) interviewee stated:

“I would just go to the local election centre, vote and forget the name of the candidate a few minutes later”.

The performative reproduction actually enabled the emergence of diverse, multiple and unpredictable meanings of everyday life, including those that did not correspond to the meanings preferred by the regime. The mobilization itself helped the people to form semi-public unofficial movements. Young people felt forced to join the Komsomol because of the social pressure. However, meeting new people and those with similar interests enabled them to form new groups. One example are the “stiliyagi” (стиляги, “hipsters”) in Moscow during the 1940s to late 1960s. They dressed as yuppies and listened to American rock’n’roll on home-made records that were illegally copied to friends (see for example Ball 2003).

Interestingly though, participating in several events, such as parades, reproduced the collectivity of belonging in Soviet Union; People were asked to join by their friends and “it was a lot of fun to shout 'hooray' all together”, as one of Yurchak's interviewees stated. (Yurchak 2006, 15–16, 25 & 121.) Thus, despite the general vision of the suppression under the Soviet regime, it was not as uniform and overlapping as it has often been represented, mainly in the West (Kulmala 2013, 122). It becomes clear how the public participation in civil movements, whether state-orchestrated or not, is not a new phenomenon in Russia. For the same reasons, it is important to remember the specific context of civil activism in post-Soviet Russia. The people I interviewed were far from being paralyzed by the challenging situation. Quite the contrary, they actively searched for several strategies, whether organized by NGOs or by themselves, aiming at influencing the society around them. In a sense, in the chaotic atmosphere surrounding the new, repressive laws, people are keener, and thus freer to improvise new strategies.

It remains unclear whether Russia is really on a path of democratization. I argue that the Russian government plays power politics, which has many resemblances with the Soviet times. The Kremlin sponsors and monitors most of the mass media. Perhaps the only exception is the internet. Not surprisingly, many of my informants said that things would eventually change, as many young Russians do not follow TV,

nor do they read press media. Many know that virtually nothing said on TV can be regarded as truthful. It has become more difficult for journalists to stay committed to decent journalism without risking losing their jobs or their families' welfare. However, even previously rather independent journalism has suffered and been suppressed. The law on monitoring web-based publication, signed by Putin in 2013, has put journalists under surveillance. Some free journalists have been threatened, not to mention the horrifying murders of Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 and Natalia Estemirova – who was known also for her human rights activities – in 2009, and most recently journalist-opposition politician Boris Nemtsov in 2015. In this light, it is no wonder that self-censorship has become one method for journalists to keep their jobs.

2.2. Collective participation: the case of the LGBTQI movement

In this chapter, I will discuss collective action and collective identity from different viewpoints. Following Charles Tilly (1978, 84), I argue that collective action is a joint action in pursuit of common ends. Participating in an LGBTQI movement also refers to a deeper feeling of belonging and can be described as an identity project, where collective feeling is actively present. Furthermore, because of the multiplying number of specific groups such as anarchist LGBTQI groups, groups for bisexuals, leftist art groups for LGBTQI persons and, on the other hand, official voluntary work within LGBTQI NGOs, people can choose to join the groups they identify with best.

I argue that belonging to a group results from a value-based individual identity project. According to Collins (1981, 329), the experienced sense of identity and belonging arise through an active collaborative process in which individuals participate with others in creating and sustaining the sense of self and others. Especially important for the creation of this are certain activities that the subculture performs. These activities often hold a ritual character, for example taking part in Pride parades. All of my informants expressed having taken part in it even if they were generally against street actions.

According to Melucci (1996, 29), a social movement is a concept comprising three analytical dimensions. A movement itself is the mobilization of a collective actor defined by specific solidarity, engaged in a conflict with an adversary for the appropriation and control of resources valued by both of them and whose action entails a breach of the limits of compatibility of the system within which the action takes place. A social movement breaks the rules of the game and sets its own non-negotiable objectives; it challenges for example the legitimacy of power. This topic became one of the most discussed topics during the interviews. Non-negotiable objectives were for example the new laws. Especially the “homopropaganda” law was one of them. Some informants would even refuse to talk about their actions under this law because they thought that they should not employ the same rhetoric. For example, the word propaganda was one of the words

that some activists refused to use because of its vagueness and how the word is so loaded in Russia because of the Soviet history.

The question of community has been crucial to diverse political movements and theoretical frameworks. Sara Ahmed and Anne-Marie Fortier (2003) argue that feminist, queer, black, postcolonial and indigenous practices and theories have questioned what community could be for those who are already recognized as 'others'. In fact 'otherness' can be, according to Ahmed and Fortier (2003, 252-254), a bond rather than a division. This concept was also present among my interviewees and it was interestingly brought up when talking about loyalty among the activists. Helping each other with favors and money was common as it was seen as investing for the common cause. Being "other" within the society, did not obligate them into compromises or negotiate on something that could violate the general human rights.

However, I find it important to point out that, despite community and feelings of solidarity, this does not mean that the movement would necessarily be cohesive. Peter Martin (2004, 23-25) argues that subcultures are not homogeneous groups. Instead, they should be understood as bounded memberships. Still, self-identified groups usually consider their actions as a collaborative social action. This resonates the heterogeneity of culture in general. People's ideas, values and perhaps even their senses of identity are dependent on their experience of different social contexts such as class, community, occupation, religion, and ethnicity and so on. Thus, there will be a considerable heterogeneity in the culture of a modern (or post-modern) society. However, during Soviet times, certain minorities, namely gender and sexual minorities, were not discussed in public discourse. They simply did not exist and, furthermore, sexuality was excluded from the publicity. There was an ideal of a Soviet man and woman, forming a nuclear family. The ideal type of a man was described in a form of Homo Sovieticus. In a next chapter, I will focus more on how the discussion of sexuality opened up during the glasnost-era, in the late 1980s.

2.3. From private to public: Sexuality as a new public discussion

Keeping the focus on the legacy of Soviet collective agency, it becomes clear how participation in civil movements, whether under the state regime or not, is not a new phenomenon in Russia. For the same reasons, it is important to remember the specific context of civil activism in post-Soviet Russia. Jacobsson (2013, 7-8) claims that cynicism towards public organizations, originating from Soviet times, is still present in post-Soviet countries. She continues by arguing that instead of participating in a civil society organization, citizens prefer to participate in private friendship networks. This would mean therefore that personal ties are playing an important role both in getting into the type of activities being sought out and above all, in getting to know one's "own" type of people.

Ken Plummer (2003, 68-70) highlights how the public and private are not separate and autonomous spheres. Traditionally the spheres have been represented in terms of a dichotomy. I agree with Plummer and argue that the private in fact invades and shapes the public and vice versa. Habermas argues that the “public sphere is nowadays merely an aggregate of individualized preferences”. Thus, public places need to be created, they are not just “there”. Public spheres have to have occasions for identification. Habermas continues that public spheres should be judged according to their inclusivity: critical attention should focus on the ways in which particular groups or individuals are marginalized (Good, 26-28.) Thus, personal lives are interconnected with the public and political. The personal is indeed political, as feminists expressed in 1970s. This was also visible within the LGBTQI movement in St Petersburg, as the interviewees’ stories mixed both personal life, semi-public activities within the LGBTQI movement, and participation in LGBT actions.

Plummer introduced the term intimate citizenship, which designates “an array of stories and a multiplicity of voices, in which different lives, different communities, and different politics dwell”. Indeed, intimate zones, such as family life, are throughout socially produced, maintained and transformed. It is simply impossible to speak about an intimate zone that would be cut off from the public, social, and the political. In addition, I argue that it is important to remember that in order to talk about private zones, one needs to have a space for it. Spatiality has a special meaning for subcultures. The material creation of space happens through social, economic, ideological and technological factors as the “social production of space”. (Sarajeva 2012, 60.) Pierre Bourdieu (1999, 175) points out how “an agent’s position in social space is expressed in the site of physical space where the agent is situated (which means for example that anyone said to be ‘without home’ or ‘heart’ or ‘homeless’ is virtually without ‘social existence’). Indeed, many of my interviewees expressed their participation in a movement as an emancipating experience and claimed to have gained further understanding of who they are and where they belong.

When personal life turns increasingly into public and political, LGBTQI movements may develop their own visible and positive culture that leaks into broader public spheres and cultures, providing alternative countercultures. (Plummer 2003, 71-74 & 79.) However, counterculture does not need to mean that it would remain outside of public discussion. Silas Harrebye (2015, 129-133) defines creative activism as a practice that attempts to create a new political space in the attempt to revitalize the political imagination. In this sense, the creative activist does not declare herself ‘out’ of the community. Instead the activist questions the premises on which a critique can be made and then tries to change them.

I follow the definition introduced by Jagudina (2009, 33), who claims that minority groups insist on speaking publicly of their needs, which were previously depoliticized. By claiming for these needs a legitimate political status, they create new public discourses. Still, with the mass media under the control of the Kremlin, especially those not using the internet stay outside of the flow of free information. For example, TV brings politicians and others with authority close to the viewers. In this atmosphere, it becomes extremely hard as a minority group to influence people's minds. However, there is a contrary power to the media as well. Most of the informants held that the increasing daily usage of the internet would eventually liberalize Russian citizens. Nevertheless, extreme-rightist groups, such as any other group, have also mobilized themselves through the internet. Some extreme-nationalists have downloaded several videos on YouTube and other Websites. These videos include, among other things, the extreme humiliation of Russian homosexuals.

It is interesting how internet changes the dynamics and blurs the lines between public and private space. For example LGBTQI youngsters may contact the help-lines of LGBTQI NGOs via the internet and share highly intimate life stories, or perhaps report violence that they have suffered. Through the internet, their stories may be published and, in the best case, violence towards LGBTQI minorities may become more recognized within Russian society. I will move on to discuss in more detail Western aid for local NGOs and how it has changed the possibilities, environment and atmosphere of civil society in Post-Soviet Russia.

2.4. Western influence on democratization in Russia

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave space for a rapid and even uncontrolled liberalization of post-Soviet Russia. For many Russians this meant instability of income, accommodation and public services. In addition, it gave birth to Western-financed and ideologically influenced NGOs in Russia. Many Western-funded NGOs were born, supplementing some of the services formerly offered by the government. A turbulent period of democratic reforms gave space to new independent NGOs. It is thus no wonder that this period was later described as one of "NGO-ization", focusing on shaping Russia's civil society in a "Western" direction (Yurchak 2006). By 1990s, a sector of social service-oriented NGOs took form in Russia. In the post-Soviet context, civil society can be said to have been redefined from a notion pertaining to dissident political agency to a field of socially-oriented NGOs searching for solutions to the private problems of individual citizens (Jagudina 2009, 119) in shaping Russia's civil society in a "Western" direction.

However, by the late 1990s, the hopes of Western donors were partly replaced by disappointment. (Salmenniemi 2008, 9 & Kulmala 2013, 19.) Salmenniemi (2008, 6) argues that the main problem lurked in the ideological sphere. Western donors believed the West to act as a self-evident point of reference and

"Westernness" was depicted historically as the starting point for civil society. Some critics have identified civil society and democracy aid programs even as a way for the West to colonize the East. I think it is unarguable to deny the impact that the Western donors had on Russian civil society. However, this is not the whole picture. Kulmala (2013) & Jagudina (2013, 123) both point out that Western models of civil activism are not followed fully but instead unevenly or even reluctantly within Russian civil movements. However, as Jagudina (2013, 123) states, despite the difficulties of implementing Western civil society models in Russia, today many independent NGOs view foreign funding as a smaller threat to their autonomy than governmental funding.

As said above, the 1990s were a watershed for democratic movements' institutionalization in Russia. In this wave of democratization, the women's movement was also born. Nevertheless, this movement cannot be considered purely as feminist or as simply demanding gender equality. Behind it are heterogeneous, articulating different ideologies: democratic, communist and social-reformist, with gender views ranging from traditionalist to feminist (Temkina 1997, 22-26.) However, the cracks in the political systems and growing distrust opened up new possibilities for citizens to react and activate themselves on issues considered to be in need of support.

Binnie & Klesse (2011) and Kulpa (2011) argue that the influence of transnational power may have had its controversial effects since it may have tended to forget local differences and particularities. For example, Western European LGBTQI movements tend to be treated still as the model case of an advanced political culture around gender and sexual equality, which has significant consequences for the conceptualization of solidarity discourses in the field of transnational politics. The East vs. West binary can sometimes result in discourses that reinforce Western European cultural hegemony in sexual politics. In fact, the Polish LGBTQI activists whom they interviewed saw solidarity among the local intergroup networks as more important than transnational support as a further element of aid (Binnie and Klesse 2011, 107.)

James K. R. Dupuy (2012, 98) points out importantly how money from the outside turned civil society into a "vulnerable externally oriented community". This meant in practice that NGOs became foreign-funded top-down groups instead of local products. The needs of the local people and the actions and discourse unfortunately did not often meet. I follow the definition of localized vision of social movements introduced by Jagudina (2009) and claim that especially more or less grassroots movements have to be understood as embedded in the local landscapes and considered in the context of local histories.

According to Jagudina (2009, 19), the third sector was in fact shaped according to the neoliberal model, which was promoted by Western foundations. This meant that the state had to step back from public

arenas. At the same time, the so-called civil society of the non-profit organizations was crucial for developing market economy and democracy. In Russia, this movement meant that social activism became increasingly formalized. Not surprisingly, this caused the importing of Western feminism that was not sensitive to local cultures' bureaucratization, and the (re)production of social hierarchies and animosities among the NGOs. This also resulted in unequal access to funding. It also brought new vocabulary of which the term LGBTQI is one example.

Jacobsson and Saxonberg (2013, 7–8) highlight important details of the impacts of Western sponsorship on local organizations. They argue that Western-sponsored civil society organizations have become more interested in building a rapport with donors than in mobilizing the population or developing “grassroots” initiatives. In other words, they have become less interested in developing channels of accountability and participation concerning members and volunteers. Organizational matters have started to gain too much attention within these organizations, they claim. Furthermore, these organizations are said to be both institutionalizing and professionalizing, this creating hierarchical, centralized and corporate entities that focus on their own survival rather than trying to mobilize the society. Not surprisingly, this change is depicted as raising a gap between professionalized activists and the rest of society. Those activists who were more directed towards street activism and direct means of exerting influence would agree with the above-described situation. However, most of the interviewees agreed on the fact that local LGBTQI NGOs have a positive impact both for the LGBTQI movement and for its individuals. I will shed light more about their opinions in chapters 5 and 6.

I mentioned previously how the concepts of civil society and democracy are tricky in the Russian context since these are embedded within Western formations and fitting these concepts into the Russian context does not fully match. The problem turns into a practical one when internationally funded NGOs use imported discourses and frames that appeal to international donors. At the same time, they may become too distant to the local society and its needs, thus isolating them from their context (Jacobsson & Saxonberg 2013, 7-8 & Kulmala 2013). Therefore, civil society groups become co-opted since they are forced or encouraged to follow the priorities of grant-givers instead of pursuing their own goals or those of their local constituencies. A possible consequence of this is the de-radicalization of civil society, risking its critical identity. (Jacobsson & Saxonberg 2013, 8.) I agree on these aspects but I consider it extremely important to ask what would happen without international sponsorship.

However, Kulmala (2013, 50) argues that the international connections are important both because of the highly needed resources and in terms of shaping agendas. Professionalization of Western-sponsored organizations has its benefits as well. In the 1990s, many Russian grassroots NGOs were neither entitled to

any funding from the state nor could get income from membership fees or private contributions. Thus, in order to survive, the grants from foreign foundations and commercial actions were vital. (Jagudina 2009, 181.) From there on, the funding has increased their capacity of action⁸. On the other hand, organizations benefitting from foreign funding are nowadays punished with a label of “foreign agent”. I will draw attention in this more in detail later on. Next, I will focus on sexual and gender minorities in Russia by introducing the history of the LGBTQI movement and how St Petersburg has become the hub of LGBTQI NGOs. I will focus more in detail on the methods the local LGBTQI NGOs employ in their activities and how they have responded to the pressure caused by the new law amendments.

3. SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES IN RUSSIA

Sexual and gender minorities have been as a rule depicted as something foreign, outside of society. Their rights have therefore not been seen as important as those of other minorities in Russia. Laura Lyytikäinen (2013, 510-512) studied civil activism among young oppositional youth in Russia. She claims that the general suspicion and even discriminative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities and certain ethnic minorities are widespread in Russian society. This is reinforced by the state and church in such a way that these minorities have become political symbols. I agree with Lyytikäinen, as did my interviewees. Most of my informants also pointed out that they are often politicized in the public discourse. They stated how they always underline that their fight is not about politics but instead about human rights. However, it is interesting how Lyytikäinen’s interviewees emphasized that general human rights should be guaranteed first and only then should the rights of minorities be included. The rights of gender and sexual minorities were not considered as human rights. This echoes the governmental idea of sexual orientation being influenced instead of inborn.

Researchers Binnie and Klesse (2011, 110-112) studied an LGBT activist group in Poland. They describe how people who are faced with certain forms of discrimination can learn from each other’s experiences and utilize these independently. Thus, political struggles are a matter of mutual learning and collaborating. Their informants found the most important source of solidarity in local collaboration instead of international networks, no matter how large scale of support it would mean. The reason for this was that the acts of support from local activists created local networks and meant new collective action and addressed local forms of support work. Especially the support from local heterosexuals was seen as the most important

⁸ Anton Dmytrieev (2015) points out interestingly in his column, how Ukrainian LGBT movement, together with other Post-Soviet countries’ LGBT movements, lack of brave political participation and characters such as Harvey Milk. He was selected in a Public office in San Francisco in 1977, eight years after the Stonewall Riots in New York. Dmytrieev calls after taking clues of Milk’s public campaign and overall to be more brave and fierce participation instead of closed actions and discussions. The whole column available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/anton-dmytrieev/why-ukraine-needs-its-own-harvey-milk>

intergroup coalition. The activists pointed out that the critics of the Pride parades tended to see parades as a distant, 'gay thing'. When there were more local heterosexuals involved, the issue became closer to all the viewers and passers-by, thus creating an accepting and approving atmosphere.

Unfortunately this is not the reality in many FSU (former Soviet Union) countries. Kuhar (2011) notes how Pride marches in Slovenia have become more violent in recent years. According to him, the reason for this lays in a constitutive element of homophobic violence. The situation in Slovenia resembles in many respects that of Russia. Simultaneously with the mobilization of LGBTQI movement in Russia, the anti-gay campaigns are multiplied and the movement mobilized. Unlike in the West, where the Pride marches have become more commercial, playful and even depoliticized activities, in Central Eastern Europe they still hold the shape and content of political protest. Together with celebration, these parades accompany the fear of potential homophobic violence. Homophobic movement have become part of the political struggle where conservative majority bases on "the exploitation of the image of the enemy" (Bakhmetjev & Soboleva 2015, 279). Comparing these movements and whether they are in dialogue with each other would give interesting topic for a new study. However, I will move on and take a closer look on history; how sexuality was depicted during the Soviet era.

3.1. Undiscussed sexuality: sexuality as political dissidence in the Soviet era

Why has the Russian Federation adopted a public discourse aiming at restraining and even repressing the capability to speak for the rights of LGBTQI persons at this particular time? This runs contrary to the global trend of preferring the benefits of giving rights to the costs of attempting to take them away from LGBTQI minorities. James Wilets (2011, 633) points out that when homosexuality and sexual minorities are perceived as a product of contemporary Western society, it is unlikely that people will accept the protection for sexual minorities in their legal system. This resonates with the rhetoric of the new law amendments and public discourse in Russia. In addition to this conclusion, I argue that we cannot understand today's reaction towards homosexuality in Russia without taking a broader view on the topic and looking back to the history of Russia (and the Soviet Union). It can be argued that sexuality was banned from public discourse during the Soviet times and was hidden away in the private sphere of life. (Kondakov 2013, 23; Rotkirch 2000, 11; Kon' 1995, 67 & Ries 1997, 68).

Since the Tsarist-era, sexuality has been considered somewhat a threat and as an influence from outside the scope of 'Russian (or Soviet) behavior'. During Soviet times, sexual dissidence was seen as a form of political opposition. Sexuality and eroticism became generalized political symbols through which people expressed their own general moral-political views (Kon' 1995, 13 & 36-37; Essig 1999, 3-5.) According to

Zhuk (1994, 147-148), totalitarianism from the 1930s on was a new formation and thus was characterized with a rather strong polarization.



Picture 1. Extract of a video from the St Petersburg Pride 29th June 2013. In this photo, there are representatives of the three symbolic groups who are openly against gays: On the very left the Cossack-inspired nationalists with fur hats and leather birches, in the middle authorities of Orthodox church and on left extreme-nationalist, martial arts practitioner Andrei Kochergin, who is also active in Orthodox church. Source: You Tube (2014).

Essig (1999, 5) depicts how in the Soviet Union, sexual practices were in fact no longer affairs of the individual, but indicative of political systems. In short, sex was political and politicized: “The state must intervene in desire, or desire will intervene in the state”, went the common slogan during that time. In Stalinist Russia, the pervert was never a patriot but considered as a fascist, a threat to the sovereignty of the state. Interestingly the same idea of a threat from “outside” is still present in recent law amendments, such as in “Foreign Agent” law.

According to both Essig (1999) and Kon’ (1995), after the death of Stalin in 1953, the politicization of same-sex desire did not end. However, something crucial changed. The topic was no longer worthy of much notice from the state. In fact, the intercourse between two men was considered as a crime against the person. In addition, lesbians were almost unmentioned. However, once they were, it was usually in cases of psychological services and mental institutions. Essig (1999, 7) argues that this could have resulted from the assumption of lesbianism being withered away. In fact, complete silence surrounded the topic.

Homosexuality became the unmentionable sin, continuing to be so for many decades. Alexander Kondakov (2013, 403) argues that the silence and silencing are still present today in Russia and that they are resulting in exclusion and discrimination. In this regard, it is not surprising how for example homosexuality in Russia is considered as “non-traditional” sexual behavior that needs to be kept under control. It is depicted as a non-Russian form of behavior and as an example of a certain Western influence instead of inborn sexual orientation.

According to Kuhar (2011), sexual and gender minorities remain undiscussed at a national level in Russia and, thus, they are not considered to be part of a society. Kondakov (2013) agrees with these ideas by dichotomizing Russian public discourse as either silent or loud. Silence forces LGBTQI people underground whereas fuss and heated public discussion both enable them to be underground but also mobilizes people who are for or part of the LGBTQI movement to speak out against or at least correct the public discourse. However, Kuhar (2011, 159) points out that the sexual and gender minorities stay often ‘conscious’ outsiders. This means that in public discourse, sexual and gender minorities are positioned in a visible, yet separated psychological area within a society. Secondly, they represent a rebellion against social norms and the power relations that make the marginalized position of certain individuals or groups possible in the first place. This positioning can provide a space for speaking out. It also enables one not to settle with the discourse but attempt to change it. Being in opposition thus creates the possibility of forming new discourses. Nevertheless, Russia is not a special case; denouncing publicly one’s sexual orientation that is not heterosexual is still considered rather political act in many countries.

Evans (1993, 13 & 20) argues that modern societies accept the increasing sexualization but the gradual ‘liberalization’ of repressed innate instincts and desires, such that the extension of rights and freedoms to sexual minorities is often rejected. Calhoun (2000, 75-77) is more pessimistic from the previous researchers and argues that that lesbians and gay men are displaced from civil society’s future via legal, psychiatric, educational and familial practices. The central difficulty in developing the notion of lesbian and gay subordination is that lesbians and gay men, unlike women and racial minorities, do not appear to be located in any particular social structural places. This may be since gay men and lesbians do not occupy directly any specific socio-economic position.

By being excluded from so-called Russian culture, sexual and gender minorities are presented as something irrational, dirty or even pervert – outside from the culture and the status quo. At the same time, this discussion decreases the symbolic power from the person in question. Pierre Bourdieu (2008, 133) claims that symbolic power is a power (economic, political, cultural or other) in which one is recognized having the power over the situation or in a discussion. This person is then recognized in a public discussion. The specific

effectiveness of this power is exercised, not in the physical force, but rather in a meaning and knowledge. A curious example of this is the decision introduced by the Russian Duma of not using the term sexual minority or homosexuality, but instead non-traditional sexual relations (Russian government, article 19, 27.6.2013). This term hides the official term of sexual and gender minorities. In addition, an individual may not even know the real term for example his/her sexual orientation and may thus suspect him/herself to be ill or abnormal without a further understanding of it being part of his/her personality. However, Russian LGBTQI movement speaks against this silencing and raises the voices of LGBTQI people in multiple ways. In the following chapter, I will discuss about the birth of Russian LGBTQI movement. In addition, I will bring out how the recent law amendments have in fact enhanced the growth of the movement.

3.2. Strengthening Russian LGBTQI movement

By the 1990s, a sector of social service-oriented NGOs took form in Russia. I claim that the LGBTQI NGO 'Coming Out' is part of this wave as well, despite its official founding in 2008. Jagudina (2009, 18) claims that the birth of these NGOs was a "result of the formalization of the spontaneous socio-political activism that emerged during glasnost". The first group advocating to repeal of anti-sodomy laws and working to fight against AIDS in Russia was formed in 1984 and was called 'Geiy Laboratoriya' (Gay Laboratory). The group founders were inspired by the work of ILGA (International lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender and intersex association). Unfortunately, the group was short-lived and was disbanded by its activists by 1986 (Essig 1999, 20-30.) This may have been because the differences of cultural aspects between West and Post-Soviet Russia and partly unadaptable strategies in Russian society.

According to Essig (1999, 66-68), the start of the LGBTQI organizations was U.S.-led. The identity projects it proposed for the Russian LGBTQI community were not always very successful and many of the organizations were short-lived. Kulmala (2013) points out that perhaps one of the biggest problems in the Western-sponsored founding of organizations is that they did not focus enough on already existing organizations who were active during Soviet times. Instead, they tried to build completely new ones with new agendas. Often, these agendas did not work well in the Russian context because of a degree of incompatibility with the surrounding society. Still, despite the fact that the Western-model NGOs did not succeed in a long run, this movement helped to turn sexual and gender minorities from objectified groups into subjects and monologue into a dialogue (Essig 1999, 66-68 & 73.) Finally, in 1993 homosexuality (мужельство) was decriminalized.

Lesbians remained, on the other hand, unmentioned until the late 1990s. Olga Zhuk (1994, 146) studied lesbian subcultures and she was one of the leading characters in the Russian LGBTQI movement in the early

1990s. She argues that the lesbian subculture simply did not exist in the former USSR the same way it did in the West. It was a closed subculture, invisible to the broader Russian society. There were no public or semi-public spaces, nor any specific patterns of behavior. Only in the 1990s did the first mixed clubs for both homosexuals and lesbians appear. Interestingly, however, some of my interviewees criticized how in Western Europe there are no lesbian clubs. They considered Russian lesbian (sub-)culture to be more active in many ways, multiple lesbian clubs being just one proof of it.

In his research, Kondakov (2013, 403) points out that in Russia, the mechanism of discrimination is hidden under the shield of silence: the silence of state officials vs. the productive speakers of LGBTQI activists reveals the missing dialogue and possible progress of approval. Instead, homosexuality is considered as a topic not suitable to discuss in various contexts. This exclusion of public discussion occurs despite the fact that homosexuality has been decriminalized in Russia for more than 20 years (Homosexuality was decriminalized in Russia in 1993). Still, the forced silence with obvious violations of general human rights has gained public attention and thus increased the discussion of and shed light on the way LGBTQI persons live under these circumstances. This attention is very difficult to be avoided by the state. Therefore, interestingly, the repressive law amendments have in fact brought up the topic and helped activists and LGBTQI NGOs to mobilize and even increase their size.

Kondakov (2013) points out that LGBTQI activism in Russia emerged in an era of changes: in the late 1980s, when the Soviet state was announced as being in need of transformation. The work of these various agents was important concerning the “invention” of homosexuality in Russia. Two of my informants remembered that the first St Petersburg-based LGBTQI organization was Raduga (Rainbow) which started its activities in 1998. In fact, the term “gay” (гей), was shaped in the 1990s, thanks to these organizations and initiatives.

From the early 2000s, there emerged a second wave of the formation of LGBTQI community in Russia, an institutionalization of gay and lesbian organizations. These organizations were founded in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Arkhangelsk, Tyumen, Perm, and other cities and towns in Russia. In Russia there are about 15 NGOs profiled especially as LGBTQI NGOs. Their aims are located in the discourse of rights — they struggle for protection of LGBTQI rights, from the lack of which they argue to suffer. In addition, they organize a variety of advocacy activities and use different strategies. In the next chapters, I will focus on the St Petersburg-based LGBTQI NGOs more in detail.

3.3. St. Petersburg LGBTQI NGOs mobilizing Russian LGBTQI people

St. Petersburg is admittedly the center for LGBTQI people and activities in Russia. One could wonder why it is not instead Moscow. The reason for this lies in the government's response to the rising LGBTQI movement. I claim that Moscow as a capital represents Russia. At least partly in contrast to it are the LGBTQI issues. Just by studying these three new law amendments, minorities of sexual and gender (or indeed any other minorities) epitomize that which is seen as strange and outside of Russia. In addition to this, street activism is seen as showing discontent towards the government, not as an opening of discussion, for example. Therefore, street activism in Moscow is often quickly interdicted by the police and officials. In contrast to the situation in Moscow, several St. Petersburg LGBTQI NGOs argued how the officials there are working in cooperation with LGBTQI NGOs. I argue that the streets of St. Petersburg show their European heritage and openness towards a variety of different cultures, even subcultures. Cultural exchange influences also an openness towards a multiplicity of genders and sexualities.

The biggest LGBTQI NGO in Russia is 'LGBT-Network'. It coordinates the activities of other organizations all over Russia (Kondakov 2013, 410–412.) Unlike other registered St. Petersburg LGBTQI NGOs, it was not charged as a "Foreign Agent". The reason for this exception is difficult to know but according to the organization's communication manager (18th May 2015), the law does not apply to NGOs which work inter-municipally. In addition, it is not officially registered. As a coordinator organ, LGBT Network rarely organizes the events and actions itself, but instead funds and assists local NGOs in organizing them. Perhaps the most important task that for which LGBT Network is responsible is the "Help-line" (Горячая линия). It is a telephone service specially aimed at helping LGBTQI minors who have no access to the closest NGOs. Over the phone they can share their problems and get legal aid. Most importantly, all violations of human rights, such as physical violence, are registered by the employees of the "Help-line" and later used, for example, in the shadow reports of human rights violations in Russia for the UN.

The St. Petersburg LGBTQI NGO 'Coming Out' (Vykhod) depicts itself as the biggest grassroots LGBTQI organization in Russia (Vykhod 2014). It works regionally in Saint Petersburg. It was founded in 2008 and was registered by the government in 2009. According to the information on their website, it defends human dignity and equal rights regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or ethnic background in Russia and especially in Saint Petersburg. The work of 'Coming Out' consists of advocacy, educational and cultural events. It also provides free psychological aid for LGBTQI persons. Across their activities the principles include openness, visibility, non-violence and non-extremism. The last characteristics are underlined in their will to work constructively with the government. In addition, the organization emphasizes the "respect of

privacy, lawfulness and non-provocation”, which in Russian contexts holds special meaning. (Coming Out 2014.)

Coming Out’s goals include raising awareness and acceptance of a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities, together with the will to mobilize LGBTQI persons in Saint Petersburg. As an outcome of this, they hope to see the organization become an open and visible community with active citizenship. In order to gain these objectives, they call for cooperation with people and organizations sharing the above-mentioned visions and principles. (Coming Out 2014) The importance of grass-root organization is tangible for LGBTQI people, since many of them preferred moving to St. Petersburg from their hometowns rather than, for example, to Moscow. The biggest reason for this preference was the strong LGBTQI movement. Coming Out brings local LGBTQI people together through weekly-organized meetings and events.

Rather similar principles guide another St. Petersburg LGBTQI organization called Side by Side (In Russian, Bok-o-Bok). This organization offers events showing films about LGBTQI topics around Russia, thus trying to mobilize Russian LGBTQI persons even in smaller towns (Bok-a-Bok 2014). According to Kondakov (2008, 22), the Russian LGBTQI-community has welcomed the festival as a sign of a “wind of change”, aiming at bringing freedom to Russian queers. Unfortunately this has not always been as straightforward as the people in question could have wished: Side-by-Side has been prohibited from showing films by the local authorities in several Russian towns, usually just a few days before the event would have taken place, thus precluding the organization from re-scheduling it. Elvira, who is active in the organization, explains the situation as follows:

We started to do screenings in other cities from 2010. Every town has its own specifics in Russia. This means that for example in some towns, they may not have free press, in some town students have nothing at all. We need to think about these specifics beforehand. Depending on these differences we build a strategy, a strategy that takes into account what we really can do and where to organize the movie screenings. The unfortunate thing is that many partners are not willing to work with us. For example, we did screenings in Novosibirsk for three years but then it became impossible to continue because of the strong influence of the church. It is very influenced by the government. In addition to this, they are supported by nationalist groups. Last year nationalists entered the screenings, frightened the audience and in general it became really difficult for everyone – both us and the audience. The local volunteers were scared and worried for their safety. Therefore, we decided not to do it there anymore. Naturally, there are still towns where our activities improve the situation of the LGBT.

Elvira underlined that in recent years organizing public events has become more and more difficult because of the interference of city officials, nationalists and the church. People are scared and the events may in fact bring more harm and insecurity for the participants. Therefore, screenings are often organized within the communities, in their offices. Although in this way the information of the events won’t reach all who

would be interested, it is still important for the ones who are active within the local LGBT NGOs and communities.

In addition to these well-known and stabilized NGOs, there are other smaller local NGOs in Russia focusing in the rights of LGBTQI, such as an NGO called Alliance, which consists of heterosexuals for gay rights and LaSky, an NGO focusing especially in combating HIV/AIDS rise in Russia and helping people with HIV/AIDS. In St. Petersburg there are also several active informal groups, which may be unofficial, but which have their importance for many local LGBTQI activists. For example, movie nights and 'coffee drinking' evenings are often organized by loose groupings. People hear about these events via social media and e-mail postings. At times, they also organize pickets and street actions.

In addition, there is an internet project called Bilyubi focusing on bi-sexuals within the LGBT movement. Furthermore, there is a group called Yakor' (Якорь) for trans-gender people. The group 'Stop Hate' focuses on "the implementation of the rights of the LGBT community to life, personal integrity and freedom of assembly". They wish to improve the security of public events and assist other organizations in organizing secure street protests. Furthermore, every Thursday a film group Kino Vmeste (Кино Вместе) organizes movie evenings with movies focusing on human rights, such as the rights of LGBTQI people. The events are held in a centrally located gay bar 'Light-Blue Oyster' (Голубая устрица). Through these various groups, the active manifold field of the St. Petersburg LGBT movement can be seen. During my field work, I visited several movie screenings and other activities. By the time this thesis is published, I am sure that there are multiple new groups and networks founded. The challenging environment activates and keeps the LGBTQI movement in constant flux of change. In a next chapter, I will focus more in detail in the ethnographic research methods.

4. ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS AS PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

"We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are" -Anais Nin (1961)

In my thesis, I employed an ethnographic research method. In defining the ethnographic method, I follow the description from Michael Burawoy (1991, 34) and argue that ethnography consists of writing about the world from the standpoint of participant observation. Although the above-mentioned role of the researcher guides him or her to focus on micro- rather than macro-level phenomena, by collecting information at the micro-level, anthropologists can end up telling a lot more. Kulmala (2013, 57 & 60) states that ethnographers discuss their results in dialogue with larger social contexts. She continues by saying that "what happens at the grass-root level [-] is indeed greatly determined by the upper-level policies". I argue

that ethnographers are not only interested in studying a specific social situation, being the concern of the participant, but they also focus on learning from the specific social situation. Micro-worlds describe a lot about the surrounding society. Michael Burawoy (1991, 5) argues that what distinguishes the ethnographer from the participant; in other words, what does "observer" states for ethnographers, is their willingness to make causal claims that are valid beyond the studied situation. In short, observation should be analyzed to become explanation and data into theory.

The observer-participant role of an ethnographer may bring challenges when we aim at moulding micro-level data into macro-level conclusions. In this chapter, I will present the role of an ethnographer and the research both within the field, in the world of science, and, above all, to the broader audience. Bronislaw Malinowski (2012, 49–50) calls for the active participation of the ethnographer. The ethnographer needs to search for suitable situations for interventions, to become familiar enough for the informants and to learn the language the informants use as a mother tongue. The goal is to become as close as possible to the informants in order to gain open and detailed information. According to James Clifford (1998, 481–483), the ethnographer's biggest task is to transfer the data in its context so intensively for the reader that he thinks he is on in the ethnographic field. This term is defined as "thick description". In this light, the role of a participant-observer becomes palpable.

Fieldwork is crucial for the ethnographer to gain a broader picture of the participants. In order to manage to have the role of participant-observer, he needs to stay long enough in the field, to become familiar enough for the participants. According to Edward Schatz (2009, 6–8), ethnography is a sensible method that goes beyond face-to-face contact. This means that it is not just about interviewing or observing. Malinowski (1920) highlights how the result of the work should draw picture of a field, which, no matter how far geographically and culturally, suddenly feels very close and even intimate. In other words, previously possibly exotic and homogeneously depicted culture and society feels familiar for the reader. Clifford (1998, 39–40) continues that the effective gathering of data and the production of interesting analyses will not be possible without a personal investment of the researcher into the field. I agree with this by saying that ethnographic research is also a personal project; something where one has to involve himself as a person into the activities of the focus group.

According to Francis Boas (2012, 56 & 64), an ethnographer should become familiar with the thought that different types of civilization coexist at the same time, thus precluding the hypothesis of one single general line of development. With this comment, Boas was referring to traditional ethnographic study of comparing 'distant and unknown' societies to the Western European or North American researcher. Günseli Berik

(1996) points out that research of less powerful groups should be ethically weighed. Nationality, class, race, and ethnicity differences between the researcher and researched cannot be erased by research methods.

I collected my ethnographic data during 23 months (from June 2013 to May 2015). However, the unofficial collecting of data has continued until the moment of writing this as I have kept contact with the people who are active in the LGBT movement via social media. I have also visited the informants in Russia and other countries and they have visited me in Finland. Within the period of living and collecting data in St Petersburg and Moscow, I visited St Petersburg five times, my visits lasting from a weekend-long trip up to a three-month stay in St Petersburg. I visited Moscow only once, in September 2014 for four days, where I conducted two interviews and participated in a meeting of LGBTQI parents. However, I focus on LGBTQI activism in St Petersburg and use the data collected in Moscow only as a reference.

During the summer 2013 I mainly participated in the activities of two St Petersburg LGBTQI NGOs, Coming Out and Side-by-Side (Бок о Бок). My main interest was to get to know people and broaden my social network with the people involved in the movement in different ways. During the following visits, I focused more on my role as a researcher, writing down notes about the meetings, events and small everyday activities that I thought would be important for my research. In addition, I tested how the planned questions for the theme-based interviews would work by interviewing three persons.

From August to September 2014, I interviewed 20 people. Four of the interviews were conducted in English. During the interviews held in English, I noticed that the interviewees faced slight difficulties in expressing themselves sufficiently. Especially the emotional and sensitive topics were challenging for them. The reason why I ended up using English was simply because we were accustomed to using it and to adding Russian words when needed. In addition, these interviewees had known me for rather long, when my Russian was still developing. In addition, these interviewees knew English rather well and had lived abroad for some time. Despite this, I think it would have been better to interview them in Russian. I have interviewed Anna, Valery, Darya and Oleg in English. In addition to interviews, I wrote a field diary on daily basis and took photographs during my visits in Russia. I wrote the diary in Finnish. In the next chapter, I will focus more in detail on how it all got started: In which circumstances I started my project and how I got involved with the LGBT movement.

4.1. Getting to the field

In the spring 2013, I was selected as an intern for a St Petersburg LGBTQI NGO 'Coming Out'. In the first place, I wished to work in Russia within an NGO focusing on the rights of ethnic minorities. Rather

surprisingly, I was offered a place in an LGBTQI organization which I accepted with great curiosity. I have to admit that I was not very up to date on the situation of sexual and gender minorities in Russia before the summer of 2013. Although I had been studying Gender Studies in St. Petersburg during the spring of 2011 as an exchange student and had Russian friends who identified themselves as members of sexual minorities, I cannot say that I was following the activities of the Russian LGBTQI minority very carefully. Moreover, I was not involved in the movement and thus I had no first-hand information on the movement. However, the previously mentioned experiences had familiarized me with the gender issues in Russia, especially the changes of gender roles during and after the Soviet Union. In addition, my Russian friends talked about the recent law amendments that had suppressed the space for Russian LGBTQI persons.

While working for “Coming Out”, I became aware of the challenges and possibilities that the local LGBTQI activists and volunteers were confronting on a practical level. I often found myself shocked and stunned by the amount of aggression some Russians faced simply for expressing who they are. After that summer, I simply could not select any other topic for my thesis. It seemed so acute at the time and although it may not gather so much attention anymore, I argue it still to be important issue to highlight – especially as the suppressive law amendments have not been withdrawn by the government. Activism in such a context is also important to be analyzed and depicted. Their methods may reveal something universal about civil activism. In addition, the topic became personal to me as some of my friends were the objects of this violence.



Picture 2. (Photograph by Ria Novosti 2013) Photograph from the St Petersburg Pride 29th June 2013. During summer 2013, most public pro-LGBTQI rallies turned out to be open battlefields where the police could not fulfill its duty to protect the citizens. Photos like this were circulated mostly in NGOs' and international publications. However, in Russian press media they were not present.

Fieldwork intensified my immersion in the local culture. I was curious and naturally socially active within the movement. At times this caused challenges. Perhaps I was interesting and even exotic stranger within the movement. While in the field and even when not physically being there, I experienced situations where I felt I needed to back up in order not to be misunderstood. For some of my informants, my heterosexuality was an intriguing challenge. My notes from the first days in St Petersburg in August 2014, reveal my mixed feelings towards my friend/informant:

Anastasiya has found a room for me but it is available only starting from Monday. This means that I'll be staying at her place for three days. I feel uncomfortable with her being so protective towards me. Her attention seems too intensive and I wish to have more own space and especially other people around us. At the same time, I fear to show these feelings because I am aware of the efforts she has done in order to make my stay easy (room, registration and updating me about what is currently going on within our mutual social networks). In addition, she has helped me finding new interviewees. Yet what really troubles me is that people may consider us as a couple. In the uppermost are my fears that this might hinder me from getting my interviews done successfully. I want to be neutral, yet a participant because my priorities concentrate around the research. I just want to get to know as many people as I can during this month in order to get a comprehensive picture of the movement.

By Sunday, the atmosphere between me and Anastasiya has gone quite bad. In the afternoon, before my first interview, we have a walk in Vasilyevskiy ostrov. We are both fond of the area's architecture and it reminds us both of a nice movie called "Piter FM." Still, we are rather quiet the whole way to Marsogo Polye where we sit down to enjoy the weather and rest a bit. Our discussion feels forced. I just wait to go and carry out my first interview, which should be in less than two hours.

Suddenly I feel I am suffocating and I feel I need to lie to Anastasiya and tell her that I should plan the interview questions before the interview and if she would not mind, I would like to do it alone. She leaves me silently and I feel bad about myself. Still, I physically sense how the weight from my shoulders disappears as she walks away. From this moment, I know that I should maintain a bit more distance to her.

Even if I am a liberal and having a romantic relationship with a woman would not have been out of the question, I understood that within such small circles in St Petersburg, and employing ethnographic research methods, any romantic relationship could have unwanted effects and exclude me from certain circles that could hinder my capability to gather the needed data. These reasons could effect how openly my interviewees would behave with me. Egoistically thinking, I just wanted to keep it neat and simple but at the same time to be able to meet interesting people during my stay in St. Petersburg.

Despite the fact that I had instrumental motives – gathering data with an observant-participant method and collecting in-depth, open-ended interviews - I sensed that by that time I had been approved to take part in some of the circles within the movement. Many saw my dissertation as the opening of the culture of these

social circles and thus perhaps bringing something new in a discussion beyond the state borders. Perhaps even more, some were curious towards my persistent presence in social gatherings. Nevertheless, probably some were also tired of me for the same reason. In fact, perhaps I was actually a bit queer in their circles because of being the foreigner with a funny accent and in the beginning a bit awkward in my behavior.

Before approving my entrance into their circles, some challenged me into different discussions. Some also 'tested' my sexual orientation by asking direct questions about my sexual experiences. Some inquired about my political opinions and tested my knowledge of feminism. Still, some just were not interested in me as a person but more for other reasons. Mostly these people wished to have new social contacts with foreigners in order to practice their English and broaden their social networks. However, these instrumental relationships turned out to be fruitful addition for my data. Many of them were open about their opinions, perhaps even more than my friends who were part of the movement.

Some were interested in getting to know me whereas some just did not see the point of taking the trouble to talk with me. In addition, as I sometimes could not join the discussion, at least at stretches owing to language issues, some found it too much trouble to start a discussion with me. However, in order to become more of a participant in the movement, I noticed that the key was to participate in as many activities as possible, no matter how much of an outsider I felt at first. People gained trust by seeing me hanging around with the people they knew through the movement. However, most often I managed to have the most fruitful discussion in unofficial gatherings. Many interesting and spontaneous discussions occurred when having a beer, walking to the metro from some event or accidentally bumping into someone on the street. Not surprisingly, I was often without my recorder and could only try to memorize the discussion afterwards.

At times I felt exhausted; I was tired of going to the same gay bars and of hanging around with the same people. Naturally, I had to be constantly interested in their activities and at least try to hide my tiredness. Mainly I just went wherever I was invited; thinking I have only a short time to stay there and that I should take everything I could from this chance. I had to forget my own wishes for some time at least. For example partying turned out to be a double-edged sword: It enhanced my group-belonging but in the same time I felt that I was getting too close to my informants and could end up losing the role of a researcher. I remember vividly the moment when I wrote this extract of my field diary. It was probably seven o'clock in the morning, I had just arrived home and was feeling exhausted but I still wanted to write my thoughts down before I would distance myself from the atmosphere of that night. This excerpt shows the difficulty of finding the balance of the participant and observer:

Tonight was both interesting and confusing. After the meeting at Coming Out's office, me with eight other activists bought something to eat and drink and gathered at Ksusha's and Vera's place. We all knew that we would eventually end up in club Malevich as we so often did. We sat around a small table and after the meal started to play the game "I have never". The idea of this game is to tell something that everyone else around you has done except you. I found this game a bit challenging in Russian, especially as people talked fast and use slang words. The topics circled around sexual experiences. I made people laugh about my lack of experience of being with women. I noticed that this partly funny, partly embarrassing atmosphere made me closer to the people. Of course, this role made me also vulnerable but I thought it would be worth it in the end. In metro, when going to the club, some of the people with whom I had not being so close before, started talking with me in a very familiar manner. It seems that being a bit strange yet funny foreigner makes them approving me faster.

In the club, we started another game and this was far from being my favorite. We placed the bottle in the table and rolled it. The person who rolls it, kisses the one the bottle points at. The kiss can be long or short, on cheeks or directly to a mouth. If I could have chosen, I would not have participated in this game at all but as we were all already around the table, it was too late to back up. I decided go with it and try my best to behave according to the rules. At the same time I both feared and hoped no one would dare to kiss me. Finally the game went quite alright without too much of awkwardness but however, at this moment I was seriously thinking if I was going too far. Am I losing myself when trying so hard to be one of them?

These extracts show how both how easy and at the same time uneasy it was to take part in some of the activities. Furthermore, they reveal that I had to measure if it was wise to take part in them or not. Now, looking back, I think I could have just skipped some of the activities, which I took part out of desperation, fearing that otherwise people would not approve me part of their actions.



Picture 3. The entrance of club Malevich in St Petersburg. The entrance is very typical for local gay bars. There is usually just a small sign by the door referring to a gay bar, such as here the heart-shaped rainbow. Usually the sign is even smaller but as the entrance to club Malevich is located in the inner ward of the building, the

people do not go there by accident. Opposite to club Malevich, there is 3L, one of the three local lesbian clubs. There are always cameras next to the club doors and the porters of the clubs check everyone and ask you to show your passport. Only then can one enter the club. It was common to see people hanging outside the clubs, smoking cigarettes, kissing, dressed how they liked. Here, in the inner ward, it was safe to act freely.

People were curious about my comings and goings, which reveals that I was at least some way important for them and part of the circles. In addition, some of them became very important for me and when I returned back home from my field trip, I noticed missing the hectic tempo and active social life I had in St. Petersburg. My aim at finding as many interviewees and contacts as I could made me uncommonly social. Days were filled with hanging around in cafés, at organizations, meetings, visiting museums, restaurants, nightclubs etc. When returning to my little room in the suburbs, I was often physically so exhausted that I would just crash in my bed and fall asleep in seconds. As the social life became more hectic, keeping up the field diary became challenging. I simply felt I did not have enough time to write it as fast as I would have wanted. However, I noticed clearly the difference between writing the diary immediately and couple of days after the events. Whenever I wrote about the events and meetings a couple of days after they had happened, my writing seemed so flat compared to the feeling-filled writing that occurred right after them. I regret that I just did not take time to record at least short notes right after the meetings.

Especially the month-long field trip in August-September 2014 was intense. Probably this was because I was so aware of the limited time. I wanted to see and hear everything I could. This also caused problems as some days I could have three interviews, the last one ending late at night. It was difficult to stay focused during the last interviews and when listening to these interviews later on, I was disappointed in my own performance. I forgot to ask further questions, did not respond in a good way and in some cases my own behavior even seemed to flatten the discussion. After a couple of days like these, I decided not to be so ambitious with the amount of interviews and instead focus more on other issues, such as observing and sharing experiences with the people from the LGBTQI movement.

It is no wonder that after the trip, I just simply could not start transcribing the interviews and going through the field diary right away. I also felt myself strangely numb. It took me more than a month to have the strength to start going through the material I had gathered from the field. Going through the data took me altogether 6 months. Through university friends in Russia, I found people to transcribe my interviews. I paid them a small salary for their work. Now, in retrospect, I think I should have limited the interviews to last one hour and better select the topics beforehand. The amount of data was quite difficult to handle. However, I feel very lucky to have had the chance to get to know so many people and to know more about their lives, thoughts and their life histories. I will shed light on these in the following chapters in which I begin the analysis section of my thesis. In the following chapter, I will focus on my multiple roles in the field.

4.2. Intergroup relations in ethnographic fieldwork

I agree with Sarajeva's (2011, 20) notion that we are involved in several groups and thus share only some but not all characteristics. While doing my fieldwork, I was mostly an employee, an activist, a friend, a researcher, an expat and a student. These roles were all present at the same time, yet some of them were more present depending on the company I was with. In addition, as the time passed, I felt that my role changed from that of a foreign employee into someone who is aware of what is going on and to whom. This was rather natural since I interviewed and stayed actively in contact with the people who were amongst my focus groups. Therefore, in addition to the previously mentioned characters, my roles were constantly altering. Amanda Coffey (1999) rightly points out how considering the ethnographer as a stranger or as marginal may result in too stark a contrast between a culture and an observer. Furthermore, these images are over-simplified and thus even misleading. The ethnographic engages in complex and delicate processes of investigation, exploration and negotiation. These are not merely professional tasks. Thus I argue that ethnographer is involved in the field work more comprehensively.

Quite interestingly, anthropological fieldwork can also offer an opportunity for self-expression. Seeing, listening, touching, and recording can be, if done with care and sensitivity, even acts of solidarity. Ethnographic techniques aim at eliciting knowledge about people's lives, including practices and understandings as truths that reflect this social understanding. Thus, ethnographic encounters create new contexts. (Josephides 2012, 100.) The heroic and objective image of an ethnographer just does not depict the role of an ethnographer as an active and a whole subject. Coffey (1999, 27-30) continues that cultures are not themselves homogenous and never were. Therefore, who is a stranger or a member, an outsider or an insider, a knower or an ignoramus is all relative and much more blurred than conventional accounts might make us believe.

In order to see my role as objectively as it might be possible, I found it important to ask who I am to my informants. I was a foreigner, heterosexual, young woman, researcher, and despite my limited financial situation, often in a better financial position than my informants, who were mostly students and/or part-time employees for local NGOs. These factors might lead one to conclude that my life was very far from theirs, thus potentially hindering my capability to understand their lives. However, I have lived in St. Petersburg over longer periods and can speak Russian. I have worked in a local LGBTQI NGO, I talk openly about my opinions on the rights of LGBTQI persons and share facts about my personal life. In addition, I have opened the doors to my home for many of the people I have met on the field, both in Russia and in Finland. I have tried to help the people within the movement as many ways as I could. With most of my

informants I share some common social circles also outside the LGBTQ movement in St. Petersburg. During all this time, it has become impossible to hide my personality behind that of a researcher. I consider this openness to have become a more important factor for those within the Russian LGBT movement than for example my sexual orientation.

It is important which characteristics of the researcher become the determining factors for the fieldwork. For Sarajeva (2013), her bisexuality was less important for her informants than her Russian background. Shared cultural background enabled them to share the common experiences and to talk freely about their everyday lives. Ethnographer Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr (2012, 108–109) experienced during her research in Lebanon how her marital status was the most important piece of information for her informants. This, just like in Sarajeva's research, enabled her a role as an insider but also as an outsider. Sexual orientation may play a big role especially in research where gender and sexuality are in focus. Walter Williams (1996, 114–117) did his ethnographical study in reservation camps among Native Americans who identified themselves as 'mex-oga'-gays. Being himself a homosexual, Williams argued that it became an asset for his study. After identifying himself as gay for his informants, many agreed to talk more openly about their lives with him. In case of a heterosexual anthropologist, this may not have been possible. I think that ethnographers inevitably try to find the shared features with their informants and the ones that will play an important role for successful fieldwork. Thus, whether one shares the same nationality or sexual orientation is not the crucial question. Instead, how successfully an ethnographer manages to find connecting factors with the people in questions essential. I tried to get involved with the actions they were doing by volunteering and helping out in the local NGOs. I thought that the most important was that I was there, nearby, trying to help and engage myself in the same activities as they were. However, sometimes this just didn't happen and I simply couldn't find the needed connection. It was perhaps the worst when it happened during an interview. Here is an example of an interview that included quite awkward moments.

Pauliina: Do you think that gays have more power?

Irina: Do gays have the power –where exactly?

Pauliina: I mean in the society?

Irina: Well yes, they are more the most notable, indeed. But it is not called "to have the power" («есть власть»).

Pauliina: Ok, what do you mean?

Irina: In Russia, one man has the power, and we know, who this man is [referring to Mr President Vladimir Putin].

This excerpt of an interview makes me smile now because it shows vividly how me and my interviewee were not on the same page at all. Irina was totally unwilling to discuss certain topics that I on the contrary found important. Not long ago she had opened a Web-based forum for bisexuals whom she argued to be in inferior position within the movement. Therefore I wanted to know her thoughts on who has the power in the

movement. During the interview I felt literally close to the verge of tears as she didn't seem to want to understand me. It seemed just simply more reasonable to give in than to forcibly try to find the connection. Finally I did not ask that many questions, but let her lead the discussion to the way she wanted. I cannot say the interview went well but the direction was better after this.

However, it is not to deny that sexuality played an important role within the LGBTQI movement. I am sure that I could have had more integrated to the movement if I had also identified belonging to sexual and/or gender minority, Furthermore, sexuality was not considered a private issue. In fact, I had the feeling that in order for me to become part of the circles, I had to be ready to share rather personal issues of my life. For example, sexuality and even sexual life was openly discussed and joked within these groups. At times I felt that I had to share too much in too short a time for my informants but this might have been just because of different habits of behavior.

So far I have brought up the importance of an outsider's ability to acquire or even access all of the inner workings of a culture. Still, the reverse danger looms even larger over the analysis of an insider, as they can be assumed not to be able to distance themselves sufficiently in order to gain perspective. It is not just the role of an insider that is important for ethnographers. In fact it is the switching between the perspective of an outsider (etic) and that of an insider (emic). (Sarajeva 2011, 18; Sluka & Robbens 2012, 24.)

Coffey (1999, 32-36) points out how the threat lies at the threshold when an ethnographer becomes a spokesperson for her informants to the "macro-world" rather than a researcher. This may result in a distorted description and an uncritical, partial perspective and lack of awareness of one's sense of self in relation to the field and key informants. In short, it is crucial to maintain a self-reflexive approach and to engage critically with the range of possibilities of position, place and identity. This turned out to be hard for me. Even in the writing process I felt I should explain all and could not exclude almost anything, making the writing process an everlasting project. Next, I will go more in to details about the special meaning of interviews for an ethnographic research method in general and what impact it had on my fieldwork.

4.3. The role of the interview in ethnographic research

As a heterosexual I represent the majority in a society but a minority among my focus group if we are to make distinctions between homosexuality and heterosexuality. My position was thus always that of an outsider to a certain extent. Interviews offered me a chance to better understand the motivations behind the actions of the people within the movement. In addition, an interview was distinct from the routines around it. Thus, being non-routine, interviews combine idiosyncrasy, self-consciousness and a logically

formal set of outcomes and indeterminacy. In addition, interviews can offer a perspective on the possibilities of interaction and the actuality of particular talking-relationships (Hockney & Forsey 2012, 84; Skinner 2012, 20; Rapport 2012, 58.) The following excerpt from my field diary shows how some interviews just went perfectly and not only were informative about the LGBTQI movement in itself, but also helped to gain trust within the movement. I went to have the first interview with Lyubov in her home near the city center on 16th August 2014:

Her home was wonderful! The apartment was really tiny; only around 16 square meters. Its walls were of white tiles and a small kitchen was cozy with a little mess. The walls of the flat were decorated with books. Lyubov's cat Pusha circled around us, looking for attention. Lyubov asked if I would like to have coffee and put out biscuits and cheeses. I sat on an inconvenient and sultry bean bag. I felt the atmosphere was good even though I was nervous and felt that I sweated not only because the warm weather outside.

This was my first interview and I was so happy to notice that Lyubov was wonderfully talkative and nice to listen. She clearly enjoyed being asked about her life. Actually, I started to think that it's good I do not speak Russian so well. It perhaps gave more space for her. In addition, although some of my questions must have been a bit unclear, Lyubov picked up quickly on what I meant with them. Grammar did not play such a big role as we found common understanding with each other.

Interestingly, and quite differently from how I planned, I did not proceed to interview people with whom I became friends. With them I often discussed freely everyday topics, including their opinions and experiences regarding participating in demonstrations and the projects funded by local LGBTQI NGOs. Instead, I wrote about our chats and gatherings in my field diary. These discussions gave me a further understanding of the ways of doing activism, which were not often presented in the interviews. The small discussions gave me an important insight to the often hidden tensions between the small groups within the movement. Everyone was willing to give their own vision of the movement and what type of activism is the best in Russian context. Still, perhaps the most revealing were unofficial discussions and my observations. One evening on September 2014, I was sitting over a coffee with Nataliya and Vera. Despite the relaxed mood, the talk turned once again to their visions of effective and constructive activism:

I ask the girls whether they would take part in public demonstrations. They tell me that nothing can be gained through demonstrations. They emphasized how greater benefit comes from NGO activities that are not dangerous and better help the movement. According to them, the demonstrations taking place in the streets are particularly for self-interest, even self-PR, and would only help to obtain refugee status. I am stunned. It is surprising how strongly the girls express their opinion. Are some people really risking the movement's reputation and even their own safety just to gain personal benefit? Nataliya and Vera are both serious and their speech is passionate. Apparently, the overall situation raises the tension. I wonder whether the girls perhaps even envy those who can

be more involved in street activism. According to what I have seen so far, they are those who have the possibility to emigrate; who already have sufficient knowledge of another language, and who have international social networks. The girls, at least not to my knowledge, have neither of these. From there on, I started to focus more on the both openly expressed and more hidden motives for participation in the demonstrations.

It is visible how this discussion as an example gave important, interesting and revealing information on their opinions. They were so drawn to discuss about it that at times I felt they forgot my existence. Naturally, I cursed inside for not having the dictaphone with me.

Precisely because the interviews were non-routine, it felt difficult to change the discussions into a more official interview. I felt I would be less of a friend if I would switch suddenly into the role of a researcher. I had gained their trust and they had helped me find interviewees. Above all, they were the ones who familiarized me with others within the movement. Therefore, interviewing seemed slightly as if I would be taking advantage of them. The following excerpt from my field diary depicts these feelings:

I am visiting Ksusha and Vera, who have been a couple for four years already despite their young age. They are both from a small town "beyond Urals" like people often say here. They have moved recently and live rather far from the centre of St Petersburg, in front of a cemetery, next to a noisy street. Their flat is partly renovated and living room is still un-finished, making the flat seem messier than it really is. We have gathered around a very small kitchen table, sitting on shaky stools. This resembles Russia to me; small kitchens with little table surrounded by old, cranky stools. The kitchens look surprisingly similar no matter the economic status. It is not my first time at their place as I have been there at a pre-party during one of the evenings before outing in a local LGBTQI club. I cannot say that Vera and Ksusha would be my close friends but they have still become the people whom I know I can ask for help. They also share openly their sharp observations on local LGBT movement.

Ksusha is preparing a chicken soup from the scratch: the plucked chicken is laying on the kitchen table and Ksusha is cutting it in pieces. Their kitten is swirling around my feet, looking for something to drop. I fear it would pee on my feet as it had that habit and to be honest, the carpet looks rather spotted. Vera searches for music as we are chatting about our common friends and other everyday issues. It feels difficult to change the topic into something more serious because I am there as their guest and they're even preparing a meal for us. Only after an hour or so, Vera starts to tell me about their friend Ira, who is planning to have a child with her partner. The atmosphere of gossip fills the air, as Vera whispers despite the fact that we're alone in their flat, a cemetery being next to us. I ask if it is difficult to get children as a lesbian in Russia. Ksusha tells it is not difficult at all, but only through home insemination or having sex with a man during your ovulation. Nearly no one uses assisted reproductive technology (ART) such as in-vitro fertilization because they are extremely expensive. We slowly start to talk about the topics I wanted to discuss in the first place. I feel as if I am trapped in the situation and can't find the courage to start the interview myself. Finally Vera herself inquires if I want to start the interview for real already. I am extremely relieved and grateful, yet feeling myself a coward.

For some reason, I found it easier to interview informants I did not know so well and with whom I had agreed to meet mainly just for the interview. I found myself being particularly interested in those of whom

my friends talked about with disapproval or admiration. For one reason or another, they stood out from the rest. Thus, I was certain they would be important characters for the movement. Darina, Ekaterina and Evgeniya could be depicted as such informants. Therefore interviews with them were perhaps the most interesting. In addition I would have wanted to interview those who were already on the process of emigrating because their actions were the most colorful ones and thus divided opinions strongly. Unfortunately because of the unsuitable timetable I missed my chance for an interview.

I met my interviewees mostly in cafés, sometimes in Coming Out's room for psychological aid and sometimes in their homes. I noticed that the interviews held at the interviewee's homes were the most informative. The atmosphere was simply more open and intimate. In addition to interviews and informal discussions, I observed the behavior of different groups within the movement and the social circles of the Coming Out's employees in their office where I worked as a volunteer during the weekdays in August-September 2014. Spending time in the office was indeed a good way to get a grip on what was going on within the moment since the activists came by and naturally exchanged news. Employees also discussed current topics. This way it was easy for me to stay updated and, more importantly, to show my motivation to help the movement.

I visited several volunteer meetings and twice took part in film nights at a local gay bar called the "Light-blue oyster" (голубая устрица). Every weekend I joined the informants in their visits to gay clubs and other activities. Other evenings we often met over a dinner or a coffee. I took photos of the popular places where local LGBTQI individuals regularly visit. Altogether I recorded 20 interviews, of which I found 19 suitable for my thesis topic.



Picture 4. Weekly movie screenings at one of St Petersburg gay bars “Light-blue Oyster”. This time, 28 August 2014, we watched a movie ‘Heartbeats’ (2010) by Canadian-French director Xavier Dolan. After the movie, there was a sharp discussion about the themes of the movie.

The internet became overall very useful for my thesis as it enabled me to contact most of the activists, read the blogs they wrote and follow what was going on in the movement. The internet also allowed me to keep contact with the people active in the movement even after returning to Finland. Thus, I claim that the field did not disappear after my return home. Its shape merely changed and the information received was in a compact and perhaps thus more summary form. In the following two chapters I will focus on my data. I will start by the questions of space; what negotiations are included to the questions of public space and private lives.

5. THE LGBTQI MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA: BEING CAUTIOUSLY PUBLIC

In this chapter I will introduce the topic of LGBTQI movement in Russia by showing first the position that the LGBTQI people hold in Russian society and how they respond to the possible threats for showing openly their sexual orientation. How do they negotiate their position in the society through their acts?

“Whenever I say I am gay, I am so scared. Each time it feels like a new coming out. This is because I don’t know what the reaction will be. But I can defeat my fear. I start feeling better, I can be proud of myself.” (Nataliya 30th August 2014)

Nataliya’s comment is not specific to Russia. I argue that the situation can be the same everywhere else as well. What makes it special in Russia is the reaction. It could happen that if a person is in contact with

underaged people he/she can be fired. Extreme-rightist groups gather personal information about LGBTQI people, especially gays and may carry out acts of extreme violence. Both these examples have happened to my interviewees. In this context it is difficult to know how much a person can open up and share about his/her sexual orientation.

Protest movements, such as LGBTQI movements, articulate the injustice and forge strategies for transforming feelings of social alienation, frustration or shame. These result from a form of social oppression. The position is challenged through the work of movements by calling for new obligatory emotions and rules of feelings, which activists use in order to mobilize individuals for collective action. (Jagudina 2009, 40 & 275.) All my informants expressed how they want to be open and wish to show themselves as citizens with a sexual orientation, just like anyone else. Nevertheless, they underlined how they represent the minority since most Russian LGBTQI people decide not to make noise about themselves. Bakhmetjev & Soboleva (2015, 277) studied how Russian LGBTQI people explain the rise of homophobic campaigns that violate their basic human rights through problem-based interviews. According to them, their interviewees blamed themselves for “not being normal”. Interestingly, none of my interviewees expressed at least openly this self-blame. Below there are some examples how my interviewees described the situation in Russia:

Valentina: There is a vicious circle because people are afraid to talk about themselves. Naturally, it is understandable: Everyday they hear how gays are some savage sex-maniacs. In fact, gays are depicted as scary people with horns and tails. And what if someone who speaks like that, happens to live next to you? --- Still, I think that any public action is an occasion for conversation and discussion.

Nataliya: We have internal homophobia. That's why some never speak publicly, nor open discussion. This devours us from the inside.

Pauliina: Do you think it's important that the people who are not aware of, that there are street actions, or is it more for the LGBT-people?

Valery: If we are talking about street actions, it's important on the one hand as an opportunity for LGBT people who are not afraid, who don't want to hide and who wish to show that they exist and that they are just normal people and you can work with them and so on. It is also an opportunity to come out and stand up for their rights. I would also say that it's like a big platform where you can say who you are. It is also quite important for the other people who don't know about LGBT people and the movement at all. They have the opportunity to see what we want, for example that being LGBT is not just about having sex in public places and that sort of things.

Valentina, Nataliya and Valery expressed the biggest problem to be the silence. Inner homophobia is also a topic we discussed with my focus group. Additionally the sense of social alienation among LGBTQI people was expressed in their talk. Most of those who were working outside the LGBTQI movement expressed that they try to be open about themselves at work but feel that sometimes it is better not to share too much. In

addition, none of them talked about their spouses or families if it would include also talking about their sexual orientation. Thus, many were in a “transparent closet”. Those who did not work but studied, feared that they could be kicked out from university. I am not sure whether a person could be dismissed on the grounds of identifying oneself as part of a gender minority but the fear among my interviewees was nonetheless real. Interestingly still, they were active in local LGBTQI NGOs of which their colleagues could find out about. Some of the actions were even public.

Pauliina: Some people are afraid, maybe you are out of the closet today, and the next day you are out of job.

Ekaterina: And then what. Find another job; learn to live differently. (Найдешь другую, научишься по-другому жить, научишься).

Some of my interviewees were unemployed and were mainly focused on volunteering for local LGBTQI NGOs. They felt that finding a job is impossible because of being open about their sexual orientation. In addition, their faces might have become familiar from the media and even on the streets. Working as a volunteer and participating in most of the events organized by NGOs and peer-to-peer groups rose their awareness and sharpened their opinions and broadened their knowledge of human rights, including the rights of gender and sexual minorities. Most of them were slightly more anarchist in their activism and wished to bring more of a social revolution and recognition of LGBTQI people than accepting to be silently accepted and holding thus only partly the same rights as LGBTQI people.

Below is an excerpt from my field diary written on May 17, 2015, when I went to take photos in the “Day of the Rainbow” (International day against homophobia) event that was held in March de Champ in St Petersburg:

I’m standing with my Finnish friends in cold wind and watch a group of people standing together behind the iron fences. No one seems to pay that much attention to them. It looks even a bit sad how they are just there with their colorful balloons, somehow forgotten. I still notice that there are several new activists that I have not seen before. Overall, there are a lot more people than in the previous demonstration. The presence of Police and OMON gathers interest in passers-by. Some stop and try to take a peek on what is happening. Amongst the police, there are also counter-protesters, two old ladies standing side by side, singing religious songs with their shivery voices. After 50 meters stands a group of rather young men with their dark clothes, holding placards arguing that gays are against Russia and harm the state sovereignty. They use exactly the same rhetorics as in the anti-gay bills. Despite that we are near the demonstration, we can’t hear quite anything from their speeches of LGBTQI rights demonstrators. Everything is so calm that it feels rather ridiculous for not having the guts to go inside the fences. From the previous demonstrations in 2013 and 2014, I have learned that everyone has to register before entering the scene and a foreigner could get into a serious trouble if something happens during it. In the worst case we could even be prohibited to enter the country. Now, however, police stands and explains the by-passers about the on-going event. Everything goes really well but I must admit that this isn’t really raising awareness since the people participating are shut in a double-iron fence so that no one can’t even

hear them. Only the rainbow flags and colorful balloons can give a hint of the theme for the by-passers.

It is difficult to say whether the demonstration helped them in their target: raising awareness and through that, gaining recognized role as a part of the society. Nevertheless, just being out there, in a group, and protected by the police is already a huge improvement and gives important message for those who happen to see them. However, as usually, no media except the photos and updates on their own web sites and social media groups shared information about this event. Thus, quite no one outside the movement could have known about it neither beforehand, nor afterwards. In addition, the NGOs cannot advertise the events openly or make the event open for everyone because of the possible violent attacks by the extremists. In a following chapter I will focus more in detail on how the LGBTQI movement in Russia has mobilized over the recent years and what seems to be the direction.

5.1. We do exist: Mobilization of the LGBTQI movement

“If we analyze the LGBT movement among different countries, the common path is that once the discussion has started, people are in panic and think that this is the end of the world. Then they will get used to it. Only after this starts the more civilized discussion. This goes with more or less within all democratic countries. However here we don’t know if we will be finished by tomorrow or if you might be dragged to a court. The biggest difference is that in other countries they have democratic institutions like courts. Here those who want something bad [for us and LGBT organizations] are not held responsible for their actions.” (Elvira 12th September 2014)

“I like the words of Gandhi a lot: First hate us, then talk about us and then we will be included (сначала нас ненавидят, потом о нас говорят, потом нас принимают). Story is slightly different from Russia, so I can not say for sure [if this will happen].” (Ekaterina 29th August 2014)

Elvira’s and Ekaterina’s comments summarize the thoughts of many of my interviewees on the current situation in Russia. All of them hold the government and public discussion responsible for the aggression and suppression against local LGBTQI people. In addition, most of my interviewees did not see the democratization and liberalization in Russia to happen linearly, nor evolutionarily. They considered these thoughts to be too naïve and positive. Some even considered this method of thinking to be neglecting the certain aspects of Russian history and local context. In this chapter I will introduce how the Russian LGBTQI movement has grown since the late 1990s. Similarly I will try to find out the reasons why the mobilization of the movement and the professionalization of the LGBTQI NGOs has happened exactly now.

My interviewees argued that in Russia the problem was that LGBTQI people were not mobilized until 2008. No one could really do anything to raise their voices as they were not grouped and mobilized. In the early 2000s, things were still quiet. Not many people participated or were even aware of the actions made by

LGBTQI people. Furthermore, citizens did not talk about the issue. When demonstrations were held, they gathered only little attention. Interestingly this also enabled rather free behavior and expression of own sexual and/or gender orientation. According to my interviewees, no one seemed to care too much. Both Elvira and Valery have been active in the movement for about 6 years. That is considered rather long in St Petersburg LGBTQI movement. They recalled how at first no one knew almost nothing about activism.

Elvira: In the beginning basically just three people [who are still active characters in LGBTQI movement in St. Petersburg] organized a “Week against homophobia” (held annually in May). Only few people arrived. The problem was that they didn’t know how to do PR. Then they came up with the idea of making a Day of LGBT Youth. To their surprise, many young people came, around 50 or so. This amount of people in a same place could be already called some sort of activism. After this event, they decided to organize the annual Day of Silence.

Elvira: By that time (in 2007), there were no restrictions; you were allowed to do whatever. However, the problem was that there was no community. In this situation, how we could have held meetings for homosexuals? There were just gay clubs. Even worse than this was before when there were just private parties. When people themselves are not willing to do any other activities, in this situation we also thought that there was no sense for us to do any other activities either. Life was underground. There was also some sort of homophobia within the LGBT people.

Pauliina: When did you start being active in Side-by-Side?

Valery: It was in 2008. There was information on their Web site that they are organizing a film festival and I was very enthusiastic about it. At that time I couldn’t even imagine that this was possible – that there would be some other place [for gays] apart from clubs and parties etc. It was great that there was finally a place where LGBT people could meet and it had something special like movies and so on. I was so waiting for that event, oh my God! (Laughs bubbling.) Couple of years after I learned about Coming Out. I don’t know what was the reason or the event but I just read on their Website about how you can come and take part. There were several things what one could do, like translate and design something but I didn’t actually know how I could help because I... well, I didn’t have any special skills. Then I decided that I could help anyway. After that spring there was a Rainbow picnic organized by Coming Out for which one didn’t have to do anything special. You could just simply come and have a good time. I decided to go because it was so easy.

Elvira wistfully points out that being public creates the sense of us that most often is highly empowering feeling. Private parties are known only among few and do not help in mobilization. Also for Valery it was important that there were activities in which the participation was relatively easy. Valery is not the only one who found the year 2008 to be important for the LGBTQI movement. During the same year the LGBTQI NGOs Coming Out and Side-by-Side were founded. Simultaneously with the rise of the movement, from May 2006 to June 2013 the first anti-gay law was introduced, aiming at “prohibition of non-traditional sexual relations among minors”. This law was adopted in ten out of eighty-five Russian regions (see for example Bakhmetjev & Soboleva 2015, 276). Newly funded NGOs responded to these threats and helped people to mobilize and formed common strategies for combatting these threats. Despite the fact that both Valery and Elvira highlighted the cultural events and social networking, they both underlined how the

movement was mobilized because of the restrictive drafts of Federal laws. Those who had already long been active within the movement, such as Valery, Elvira, Ekaterina and Valentina, expressed that they organized weekly pickets against the hearings for the possible “Homopropaganda law” and “Foreign agent law”. They were taking to the streets for the first time in Russian (and Soviet) history. Everything was new and they had to come up on the spot with what their methods would be.

The movement did not only want to respond the restrictive laws but also call after an emancipation of LGBTQI people in Russia. If movement activists interpret political space in ways that emphasize opportunity rather than constrain it, they may stimulate actions that change opportunity, making their opportunity frames a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Benford & Snow 2000, 631.) This point of view was expressed in almost all of the interviews. People were not ready to give up but instead saw that there were possibilities, even many of them, on how to try to influence the surrounding society. The biggest problem however were the vague laws that made the impacts and effects of the activism unpredictable. Interestingly both sides, regime and the LGBTQI movement activated simultaneously.

The photo below shows the demonstration “Day of Silence” held annually in May. The photo is from the year 2015 and shows how movement has grown since the early 2000s. The mobilization of LGBTQI individuals is striking. It becomes more and more difficult for the citizens of Russia not to be aware of this minority group. Therefore, the role of the public actions have grown and planning of the actions has become more important. In order to raise awareness of the fellow-citizens in a desired way, the method has to be well prepared.



Picture 5: 1st of May (Вместе. Коалиция за гражданское равноправие) march in St. Petersburg in 2015. The 1st of May has traditionally been the day when everybody has the right to march, and the local LGBT movement has participated already in these marches already for several years. However, the amount of people has never been as much as this year: Around 600 people from the LGBT movement joined it. With red tape covering their mouths, LGBT protesters wanted to express their role as the silenced group in the society. (Photo published in Vkontakte event page “День Молчания в Санкт-Петербурге” on 26th April 2015).

What distinguishes contemporary 'movements' from political actors and formal organizations is their assumption of the form of solidarity networks that are entrusted with potential cultural meanings. (Plummer 2014, 244). For example, street actions in Russia may generate negative images of sexual and gender minorities when they turn violent. For passersby, it may be difficult to know who has been the violator. In this situation, many may conclude that lesbians and gays should just keep their private lives private and everything would run smoother. The attitudes towards street actions and demonstrations differed. Generally the opinions of actions organized by registered LGBTQI NGOs were positive: St. Petersburg NGOs got support from the police and ombudsman and the actions were well-planned with security staff. Thus, it was not seen as harming the movement.

Irina: The Pride (in St Petersburg in June 2013) was a terrible massacre. I was not there, I got scared and decided not to go. But this year's Day of Rainbow (17 May, 2014) and Pride (June 2014) were just perfect. No beatings, no flying eggs! I decided to go to Pride this year (2014) and thought that I would be killed there. And so I called to xx (one of the leading persons within the St Petersburg) LGBT movement from Alliance (Heterosexuals for the LGBT). She said, come, we have fun, we are going but just listen, be cautious when you pass the church (Church of the Saviour on Blood), there are provocateurs throwing eggs. I only wonder: Can finally all of these events and activities can be carried out safely. Evgeniya: I have to choose: either I stay in activism or I will have my personal life. Yet again, I do not believe in hidden LGBT, and I do not think we should live hidden. I believe that we have to live as open as possible. I myself live openly. This could be dangerous for a child. Because children ... Teach them to lie - this is not an option. A child who is out there in the garden will tell that he has two mothers, for example - it can be dangerous for the child as well. Even if not legally but in practice, you know? Because now this (topic of LGBTQI) is so loaded (Потому что сейчас там все это нагнетается).

Dmitry: It is difficult to answer what is the most important [for the LGBTQI community]. In fact, "Vykhod" and its activities have a very important role - I think this is already a very significant for [LGBTQI] society. The popular events [within the LGBTQI movement] such as Queerfest and May 17 "Day of Rainbow", are significant because many people talk about them. At the same time, they become well-known, thanks to the media. This talk, of course, activates all sorts of people, such as Milonov⁹. But, at the same time, there is at least some attention. Ten or fifteen years ago, even ten years ago, the society in fact shrank with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now the situation is much better because of the work of the St. Petersburg LGBT organizations.

“When we are talking about street actions, it's firstly important as an opportunity for LGBT people who are not afraid, who don't want to hide and who wish to show that they exist and that they are just normal people and you can work with them and so on. It is

⁹ Vitaly Milonov, deputy of St Petersburg and the initiator of the “Homopropaganda law” in St Petersburg.

also an opportunity to come out and stand up for one's rights. I would also say that it's like a big platform where you can say who you are. It is also quite important for the other people who don't know about LGBT people nor the movement at all. They have the opportunity to see what we want, for example that being LGBT is not about having sex in public places and that sort of things." (Valery 3rd September 2014)

Irina, Dmitry and Valery all agree on the positive impact of large and official events organized by local NGOs. They gain the needed attention but do not gather negative image in fellow-citizens. Not only are they important as awareness raising but also for the movement itself. Attention has indeed eventually helped the LGBTQI movement to grow bigger and even enabled to form interdependency with local police in St Petersburg. However, the ways of participating and methods of doing activism were under constant discussion and were a source of several debates. In the following chapters, I will focus on this topic more in detail.

5.2. Getting involved in the LGBT movement: "It was important that I could do at least something"

I think that we need to start with ourselves, that is, to understand what interests us. Then combine it with the fact of how the things are ... And then to think: Can I do something. If I'm interested, I'll do it with a real passion, soul and heart. That is the most important for me. (Ekaterina, 3rd September 2014)

In order to be accepted and to become a part of the surrounding society, many of my interviewees, especially the volunteers, wished that LGBTQI activists could plan their strategy more carefully and proceed more subtly when expressing the topic of LGBTQI rights amongst crowds. Cushman (1995, 2) noted that individuals' identities, selves and actions "unfold in relation to structural conditions". Very often individuals indeed succeed in controlling over and against these existing conditions. Still, at the same time, these conditions limit and shape what the actors are capable of achieving. The structural conditions always limit and constrain them. Therefore, agency and structure are in constant dialogue, being at the core of human social existence. It is only the content and intensity of that struggle that changes across time and space. For Oleg and Nataliya, the structural conditions limited them from showing openly who they were. They could not live with such a big secret. Now they discuss being open with the surrounding society instead of having the dialogue with their colleagues and employers. Sexuality in Russia is indeed political, at least when it is not heterosexual.

Oleg: "I took part in a street demonstration for the first time in 2011: Against the first reading of Saint Petersburg's law amendment (so called Anti-gay Propaganda Law). The reason for my participation was two-folded: fear and a wish of freedom and equality. I didn't want to hide anything. And if someone didn't like it... I mean it's great when one can show it. In this way, if they would just say something, for example - don't you dare

ever go to demonstrations, or don't be gay, or don't show it, or pretend to be heterosexual - I would resign from the work immediately."

Nataliya: I was a teacher and active in the Internet. I didn't hide myself. There was an extremely homophobic man who got to know about my sexual orientation. He arranged baiting and the school board found out about my sexual orientation through him. There was even a scandal in the press. It happened in August 2013. At first the director said that he did not want me to resign. And so I went on a vacation, everything was fine. When I came back from the holiday it was quite a lot of pressure and I finally decided to quit.

For both of them, putting themselves into the LGBTQI movement meant simultaneously giving up on their previous lives. They lost their jobs. Becoming part of the LGBTQI movement meant to almost all my interviewees giving up some past networks, even family ties. The movement and its members became a new family and source of trust. Especially at first, it was important for many to make new friends and build broader networks. Throughout the interviews, it became clear to me that those who were new in the movement showed general interest in all of the activities organized by the organizations. Those who were new in the movement or those who did not want to violate the laws or involve too deeply their personal lives took part in officially organized, semi-public events. Those who were more committed to participate in more radical, direct actions called themselves activists or even radical activists. They were devoted to push the movement despite the fact that this would mean carrying out illegal actions and might even harm the movement. It seemed that there was an invisible line between these two groups. Of course, this division was not fixed. Instead, it often followed more the "life cycle" of activism. Darina is an activist and is willing to see more people participating in direct activism. She admits that differing opinions exist on participation but sees the benefit in these different ways of participation.

Pauliina: Do you work as a volunteer for any local LGBTQI NGO?

Darina: After all this [being fired from Side-by-Side film festival], it just happened that I stepped aside. In the autumn of last year, we went to Turku, and there was also a joint project. And there I met with XX (well-known person within the Russian LGBT movement), and we began to talk. We decided to meet in a bar to drink beer with other guys from St. Petersburg. We discussed about what was going on in real life. We continued meeting and learnt about each other. We made a nice knot. Now, it has proceeded to more serious issues. We went for example to the Film Festival run by Side by Side and there were all these attacks.

Darina: I know quite well all the actions around here. I am for bigger events and collective actions in order to make people aware. In addition, I try to do it through something positive. It is difficult to estimate its efficiency but if you are for example distributing candies, this can be good. We did that and even the police took some. It was very peaceful action. On the other hand, it (the action) may bring a minor shock and perhaps passers-by start to think. I would like there to be a large audience, maximum security, education and so on.

Interestingly, Darina wishes there to occur more public actions and calls after more creative methods. However, she wishes a structured activism and actions with security and education. However, volunteers criticized activists precisely for the lack of safety and planning. However, it seems that they both call for same; perhaps it is too challenging to realize these both. Activists prefer more public actions whereas volunteers consider well-planned but less frequent public actions. I will now move on to the interviewees' experiences as newbies in the movement.

Slowly I realized that the activist "careers" followed rather the same line. At first the internet had a big role in offering the space to escape the suppressing surrounding environment. Eight of 19 interviewees were brought up in small towns. Their hometowns formed a widely scattered area of Russia, covering several towns in the Asian side of Russia and in north, such as Murmansk. Their contacts to their hometowns and for many even to their families were often thin such as in Ekaterina's and Lyubov's cases:

Ekaterina: I am from a small town and I came to St Petersburg for my studies. In general, I studied to become an official but now I am completely different [person]. I have never worked for that profession other than the obligatory practices. I started to work for the organization (Coming Out) in 2010 and found it very interesting.

Lyubov: I arrived in St. Petersburg five years ago. I always wanted to become a part of the LGBT community and the movement, to do something useful for it. I'm not interested in who goes to nightclubs; I am just generally interested in the movement. I like the idea that we could try to change somehow the consciousness of the society through art. So, I became a volunteer for LGBT movie festival Bok-o-Bok.

Both Ekaterina and Lyubov moved from small towns. Move meant not only the change of physical environment but also psychological. After the move they felt being free and having a chance to express themselves openly. However, it was not finally so important where they came from. Despite their backgrounds, they all expressed problems with their families and surrounding. They had had feelings of disparity, loneliness and desperation. They had been in a serious need of finding a group of people with whom they could behave freely and feel important.

During the interviews I started to sketch the path of activism. Many interviewees expressed how they had found out about LGBTQI actions via the internet. After the internet came face-to-face participation. Usually this involved taking part in some bigger event. For many, everything at first seemed interesting and useful. Most of the interviewees expressed how they just wanted to be useful in any possible way. However, many felt that their skills and their courage to participate in different actions was somehow inadequate. Thus, the ones who were already part of the movement were looked up to. They often took part in "safe" events with security and a lot of people or smaller volunteers' gatherings on the premises of LGBTQI NGOs. Only after

this did criticism towards some forms of activism arise. Alexander is a novice in the movement and expresses his admiration of the activities of the movement. By the time of the interview, Alexander had been active within the movement for five months. Before that he had been only observing it.

Alexander: The first time I took part in LGBTQI activism was in April [2014] or so – Well, since that flash mob, where I was detained. I used to participate in all sorts of small flash-mobs, festivities and so on, but just as a spectator. In this flash mob, I participated actively, helped the organizers. We are very good friends with one of the girls. And then they told me that if I would really want, I could take part in the Rainbow Association. Now I go to different groups. Today we will have a meeting of the parent club. You can come - by the way!

This excerpt shows that for Alexander, just like for most of the interviewees, the first experiences of the LGBTQI movement offered highly empowering feelings. Many expressed that they were positive about everything involved in the movement. They were accepted and encouraged to express themselves openly. Naturally, the ones already within the movement want newcomers to become active members as fast as possible in order to grow bigger and stronger. Suppressive law amendments increased the need to find more volunteers and activists for the local NGOs.

For Valery, the NGO in question offered a new way of getting involved in civil society. He greeted this with excitement. His enthusiasm however was then turned into a period of seriously demanding work during which he felt exhausted at times.

Pauliina: When did you start being active in Side-by-Side?

Valery: It was in 2008. I heard about them through the internet. There was information on their Web site that they are organizing a film festival and I was very enthusiastic about it. At that time I couldn't even imagine that this was possible – that there would be some other place [for gays] apart from clubs and parties etc. It was great that there was finally a place where LGBTQI people could meet and it had something special like movies and so on. I was so waiting for that event, oh my God! (Laughs bubbling.) Couple of years after I learned about Coming Out. I don't know what was the reason or the event but I just read on their Website about how you can come and take part. There were several things what one could do, like translate and design something but I didn't actually know how I could help because I... well, I didn't have any special skills. Then I decided that I could help anyway. After that spring there was a Rainbow picnic organized by Coming Out for which one didn't have to do anything special. You could just simply come and have a good time. I decided to go because it was so easy.

Valery: For me, it was important that I could do at least something. In addition, it was important because I was just thinking of going to study and was thinking of taking a TOEFL exam and was choosing between universities... But then I met people from Coming Out and I understood that I can stay in Russia and I can do something for them. Therefore, I decided to stay and realized that there are so many nice people I hadn't met before. I had previously visited several gay clubs and it was pretty awful and depressive

because there were people who were only looking for partners and there was a lot of tension in the air.

For Valery, getting involved in a local LGBTQI NGO did not only mean a new career and social networks but also a reason to stay in Russia. However, now he is again seriously thinking about emigrating. Since the summer 2012 he has hardly participated in any public actions. Involvement within the local LGBT movement has meant sacrifices for all of the interviewees. Valery even had to learn a new profession almost from scratch. Still, he found this all to have been worth it and, overall, an empowering experience. Larisa has more controversial experiences of working for a local LGBT NGO.

Pauliina: How did you hear about it [the organization where she worked before]?

Larisa: I was then (in 2010) at an institute where I was somehow bored and even a bit sad. I thought to look for some organizations that would need volunteers, someone to meet, something to do. Just a few NGOs needed volunteers, and I came across with the Queer Festival. All the information was there in Vkontakte. By volunteering in this festival, I started my participation in the organization.

Larisa: When I think about what it was before, and what I was doing and why I was doing it, I realized that I wanted to be loved, so I was helpful. I'm not very fond of street protests, and yet, there I was, scared. But I still organized something, did something. And I think ... Well, I felt that then everyone had more forces to do things. However, I did not give myself the chance to say that this is not for me.

Both Valery and Larisa took part in activities while at a crossroads in their lives, feeling lonely and in a need of their own communities. The need to become a part of something bigger than themselves made them also forget their own needs. This happened to Larisa:

Larisa: The problem was that I did not know what I wanted to do. This is what I ask myself now, here, and until this moment I had no desires, I was not aware at all -- Well, maybe after some time, because I had the impression that I am not ready to participate and to organize something... Because, apparently, I'm so tired that I can't, well, feel comfortable in the office or with these people there.

When I interviewed informants who had just joined the movement, they were excited to share how seriously they wanted to help and participate in whatever activities local NGOs were organizing. Naturally, some succeeded in building a career in local NGOs, but in the cases of volunteers, people often seemed to either get tired or withdraw themselves into smaller units of activist groups after the “honeymoon” with the whole movement. By the time we met with Valery, he had already announced that he planned to finish his contract with the NGO in question. He wanted to have time for himself, to find out who he really was.

In April 2015, I asked Valery via Facebook how he was doing since he quit his job in St. Petersburg and decided to search a new way for his life. This is how he answered:

Valery: The time is going much slower now than half a year ago when we met last time and when I still worked. I lived in Cyprus for about a month in November, looking at the sea, waves and grains of sand, unique in their own ways. I got a new perspective on this world, natural perspective that I hadn't appreciated enough before. It was just on a background of my social life. Now I feel much more in a harmony with the nature. I still have a break from social activities and don't have any job now. I just walk, feed birds and squirrels, read and think about who I am and what I came to this world for, what is real and what just happens in my mind.

Valery is not the only one who has since finished their activities with local NGOs. Larisa is one as well. What is common among them is that they both think that while being highly active in trying to oppose the negative publicity, to justify the existence of the local LGBTQI community, and to bring the topic into a public discourse, they had forgotten themselves, who they are and why they do what they do. Interestingly, these were the same factors that pulled them to the movement in the first place. Next, I will turn my focus more to the varying opinions of effective activism, negotiations and even debates within the movement.

5.3. Different ways of participating in the LGBTQI movement

The summer of 2013 that I spent with the activists and their supporters enhanced my awareness of the everyday lives of my friends and informants, and of the ways of engaging in activism and volunteering for the rights of LGBTQI people. Based on my experience, activism in a challenging context; whether it is run by foreign actors or local ones, needs special planning so as not to violate the already vulnerable circumstances in which LGBTQI persons live in many countries. On the other hand, unpredictable laws make planning a constant negotiation without firm answers.

However, I agree with Melucci (1996, 1-2 & 4) and argue that movements are not only an outcome of the crisis but are also a sign; they are 'speaking before'. This means that they announce the commencement of change that is in fact already a presence. Following this idea, it would mean that the LGBTQI movement is already in process and even the laws cannot stop it. It represents the future, what is going to happen inevitably. I was thinking too pessimistically about emigration among the people in the LGBTQI movement. Valery explains how things should change and that emigration does not mean that the movement will die. I asked Valery how he felt about emigration of the people within the movement.

Valery: Actually I think it's a personal decision. It is connected to what is going on. If you feel that it's enough – this is the border – you can choose more comfort and safer place. That's ok, I think.

Pauliina: I understood that some are a bit like, "if you're active here, stay here because if you leave you will leave the job you did for the others to take care of". Those who stay, have to do more.

Valery: Aha, yes, I think it's a tricky thing because you know, they think that somebody moves to another country that there are no new activists but you know, new activists arrive and it circulates and that's ok. In addition, if some organization shuts down, new initiatives will come. I think it's totally normal.

This opinion was common among the interviewees who were not so active in the movement or who were withdrawing themselves from it. They wanted to believe that everything would continue in the same direction after they were no longer part of the movement. They may have been right, because all the activities have attracted more people than before. This might be an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The commonly shared goal among the people involved in the Russian LGBTQI movement is to oppose the indifference towards basic human rights in Russia. However, the motivation and ways of participating in the movement are different. Not all agree on methods, and disputes arise regarding the strategies involved in doing activism. Elvira however summarizes the thoughts in a positive way.

The most effective approach, I believe, begins when people start to respect themselves. When there is a sense of respect, for some its dignity and lack of fear – this is the most effective. Optimistically thinking, it makes the society less homophobic and even improves it more broadly. This is however a very long process and we need to work in many areas (to improve the situation). (Elvira, 12th September 2014)

The LGBTQI movement mainly consists of different activities organized by small groups of people. Gathering enough people for activities called for charisma and power on the part of the organizer. Usually it was a person who also considered himself or herself an activist. Through the interviews, it became clear that improvised, even anarchistic activism and wishes to emigrate often walked hand in hand. I believe that the participation of a more radical wing of the LGBTQI movement was motivated by collective needs.

Volunteers and newcomers often participated in events but did not organize them. By participating in the activities, the opportunities to become an activist increased. This involved activity and approval of the people within the movement. In addition, they had to have skills in arguing, good knowledge of the surrounding society, and interest in both local and global civil movements. For many, most of their friends belonged to the movement and thus it was important to be considered as one of them. One of my informants, Anna, expressed how her motives to participate followed exactly the above-mentioned form:

Pauliina: Do you consider yourself as an activist?

Anna: Yes, I am an activist, because... I do different forms of activism. I go to street actions, but not only LGBT. Last year I became interested in joining civil protections about

political prisoners so yes, and... I think that the first sign of an activist is that you want to make everybody active.

Anna's actions were motivated by collective reasons, i.e. making other people active, but, perhaps even more so, making herself part of an activist group. Her speech was perhaps typical for a person who is willing to do an improvised activism in order to make more noise and raise awareness among fellow-citizens. Participating only in semi-public events that were organized by the local NGOs was not enough for her. In addition, Anna was one of the activists who wished to move abroad. For her, most Russians seemed distant and the ones with whom she related the most were the ones who belonged to the countercultures, no matter from which circles these people came from.

Harrebye (2015, 129) argues that creative activism consists of a practice attempting to create a new political space which is aimed at revitalizing the political imagination. This can be fulfilled by several innovative tactics such as flash mobs, subvertisement, hacktivism, urban guerrilla gardening, forum theatre, prefigurative interventions etc. For many of the Russian LGBT activists, flash mobs and Pride demonstrations were only two of many ways of participating in activism. In addition, for some, an attempt to impact the society involved more than raising awareness of LGBTQI questions among fellow citizens. Nataliya highlights interestingly how the more traditional forms of street activism, such as demonstrations and pickets, are not the only form of advocacy. In addition, street activism can take different and new forms:

Nataliya: I would like to deal not only with street activism but something else. Now it is a coalition of civil equity "Together". We organized a rainbow column where we distributed ribbons to passers-by. The essence of it was for united action.

Creating a community - it is not yet here, it is just beginning to emerge. (Создание сообщества - его нет, оно только начинает появляться. Они здесь формируются очень медленно, очень тяжело.) There are still more of us out there who are not only activists. For now, there are many of those who live in the closet, yet support activists.

Within the movement, people also expressed how certain topics were not highlighted enough. One of them was bisexuality. Irina started up her own online group with the name Bilyubi. The group focuses on the issues of bisexuals, which she considers to be misunderstood and forgotten within the group.

Pauliina: Why did you decide to start up your own group? (Bilyubi)

Irina: We just met with Vasily then. I actually drew him to all this volunteering, activism and everything else. Just at one point he decided to find a group in VKontakte in order to communicate with bisexuals, you know. The result was that he could not find any real network or individuals there. After that, we decided that perhaps we should do something about it. And thus, he created it. I then took charge of the group by finding those materials and suddenly it turned out that there simply were no Russian material about bisexuality. Of any kind. (на русском материалов о бисексуальности просто

нет вообще. То есть, совсем нет. Ну как.) Of course, I would like to make it all somehow more serious, focused and so on. But, unfortunately, there are only few of us and we have only little time beside our work.

As a matter of fact, Queer Fest in 2013 organized an open discussion about bisexuality. The event was very successful and created a heated discussion that continued afterward as a web-based discussion. Irina and Vasily opened the webpages which Irina had translated and where she had downloaded texts about bisexuality and other alternative sexualities.



Picture 6. People have gathered for a discussion on a topic “What is biphobia?” during a Queerfest in 2013. After this meeting, an internet project about bisexuality called ‘Lyubi’ was organized. The lines on a floor represent the years when homosexuality was decriminalized in different countries.

Jagudina (2009, 39) points out that, in a democratic context, social movement activists have to compete with numerous frames present via mass media. In a restricting public space such as in Russia, the governing regime battles against alternative interpretative frames. In this sense, “the most challenging task for activists is to create a viable frame when their ideological message and its organizational diffusion are hindered by the opponents”. In addition, it becomes vital not only to focus on potential supporters, but to transform the dominant frame that the regime both supports and diffuses. In the case of LGBTQI activism in Russia, this would mean creating a frame capable of being included as a part of Russian society. To do

this in the current context is highly demanding. However, many of my informants had interesting methods and strategies to combat these problems.

Valery had also participated in different demonstrations that were not actually LGBTQI-themed demonstrations in the first place. One of them is the 'Day of Unity'. It dates back to the Soviet Union, building unity among Soviet nations. Valery and other activists wanted to show that this day should show also how LGBTQI people are part of this unity.

Valery: One or two times we took part in celebrating the Day of unity (День народного единства) on 4 November. Traditionally the nationalists consider that it's their celebration. That it's their day, proud of being Russian.

Pauliina: But you took part in it?

Valery: Yeah, we organized at the same time other action to show that nationalist march doesn't show the unity of, you know, different people in Russia. The unity means acceptance that people are different. It (their action) was also attacked by nationalists, unfortunately.

Valery's story of their action shows how creatively they can use the rich history of Soviet Union in their today's activism. Nevertheless, the reaction of the counterpart shows clearly how these traditional celebrations hold highly patriotic character that can impulse easily violence.

I consider Ekaterina as an individual anarchist within the anarchist wing of the LGBTQI movement. She follows her own path, dictated by her desire to do art instead of finding a circle of friends within the movement. Ekaterina also emphasized that she no longer goes to Coming Out's office. She puts her own projects first and only then helps in more official activities that are organized by local LGBT NGOs.

We met with Ekaterina on a rainy evening in September 2014 at a trendy bar in the center of St. Petersburg. Ekaterina specifically proposed this place to meet. Her determined character was also present in our discussion: She was self-assured and was prepared to argue her, at times, strong opinions on doing activism. She would not let me interrupt her speech and, if I managed to do so, she would even ignore my comments. Overall, it seemed to me that she considered it important to be heard and was eager to share her thoughts. I think that perhaps she was afraid that I would describe the St. Petersburg LGBTQI movement as too cohesive and unanimous in my research. Her individual thoughts become clear in the following excerpt:

Pauliina: Are you are an activist or a volunteer?

Ekaterina: [Pause] I am girl (Я девушка). Probably I am an activist, too. I am not dependent on organizations. Before I used to be constantly there [in Coming Out's office] but now I rarely take part in them [activities organized by Coming Out]. I have my own ideology and I am obeying that. I am not part of any organization but I am friends with everyone. I want to collaborate. When I come to any organization, I feel at home.



Picture 7. The volunteers of Queer Festival 2013 in St Petersburg, Russia. This picture was taken in front of an exhibition about the history of LGBTQI people in Russia. The exhibition was held in the suburbs of St Petersburg, in a top floor of a regular block of flats. Picture taken by Roman Mel'nik.

Ekaterina's answer about her role in the movement is interesting because she both avoids answering the question about activism directly but also describes how feeling at home in the organization helps her to proceed with her art projects. She is making a film of religious LGBTQI Russians. By feeling at home, she shows how she, despite her own individual projects, is still approved by the people more active in these organizations. It seems that she has already established a firm position and a good reputation within the movement. Now she is able to have the time for herself and her projects. The LGBTQI movement and her networks within it have made possible for her to express herself through art.

Often those who claim not to be loyal to any organization but to instead be driven by their own desires considered themselves activists. In order to establish a certain position and fulfill individual plans, one needs to make sacrifices first, volunteer, use special skills such as photographing like Ekaterina, or to have the needed social networks like Elvira. Volunteering allows a rather easy entrance and means of expanding one's network since volunteers are needed mainly in the bigger events. There, in the both festive and at times pressuring atmosphere, people rely on each other, ask for help and are heard. Volunteers need to be both brave and clever to be included and later on, respected as a part of the movement. Otherwise they will not build a career within the movement and stay in volunteering in bigger events. More creative and responsible roles were naturally looked up to within the movement.

Not surprisingly, I often heard admiring comments about those with strong, well-argued opinions who were seen as behaving in a rather individualistic way within the movement. The ability to come up with new, fresh and clever ideas for pickets, flash mobs and other activities, together with access to international networks, was highly regarded within the movement. Often these were the anarchist activists within the movement.

Lyubov admits, even somewhat embarrassed, that she does not yet consider herself an activist. She would like to be one. Her friends who are not active in the movement consider her an activist. However, she does not register their opinions. She thinks that she is not brave enough as a person to behave like a “proper activist” because she prioritizes her own safety. For her, sacrificing one’s own safety for the good of the movement is the key factor in becoming an activist.

“They do very important and serious things and they are very brave, but I, unfortunately... How could I say... I am worried for my safety. That's why I do not go to the street protests. I do not participate in such events, I think that – I'm sure it's a shame – but I understand that it's not safe. For me, participating in the festival, or this kind of project, they are my contribution.”

After this rather harsh description of herself, we continue discussing her life and her moving to St Petersburg. However, soon she returns to the topic again:

“I think I'm not a real activist, because when you think of activists, they are the people who are so great, who come out on the streets with flags in their hands and I'm not like that. And thus, I am not truly an activist, at least not so much.”

Lyubov underlines the importance of the activism and the braveness she sees in the activists’ actions. Lyubov is not the only one who considers publicity to be the highest criteria for an activist. Another interviewee, Darina, considers herself a “true activist”. It is easy for her to answer the question about whether she is an activist and she is also certain of her position in the movement’s radical side.

There are many different projects and I did some of these even myself. I am aware that there are some guys who can't support our participation for example to marches like Peace March on 21 September 2014 (March for the peace in Ukraine) but we support the participation of these actions for democracy and so on. In addition, we took part in a military action that was organized by the Democrats group on Field of Mars ("Hyde Park" of St. Petersburg) with the group of Rainbow Families. Thus, we take part in democratic actions as well.

The same criteria of activism is maintained by Anna. Again, she is not active in only one organization. However, she is more concerned with the issues in Russia. She claims that Russians are too apathetic and wishes that people would stand up in public to show their opinions, no matter what these are.

Pauliina: Do you think that you are here more active than you would be in some other countries? (Anna has visited Sweden, Netherlands and France during the year 2014)

Anna: Yes, because everything around us, made us, or me, understand that I have to be more active than if I was living in Netherlands. In Netherlands, they have a very active society in general but this is not the case here.

Pauliina: Do you work together with other organizations, like general human rights organizations? If they make some pickets, do you go there?

Anna: Personally I am not working in organizations. I don't want to associate with organizations. And what was the second part of the question?

Pauliina: It was like, if they have some pickets, do you go there, like flash mobs?

Anna: Oh, yes, yes I go. For me, it doesn't matter who organizes this action, even if it's somebody from nationalists, because I don't care about somebody else's views. I care about the Bolotnaya case. I think the freedom of speech should be respected and if I am not a nationalist, I shouldn't tell somebody from nationalists to stop, because it's not right. It is also an important view and he has the right to speak what he thinks.

Pauliina: So you are for civil society?

Anna: Yes, I can accept somebody with different views. I will never try to change their mind and I will never say that they don't have the opportunity to speak.

Anna wants to emphasize freedom of speech. She wishes that everybody would show themselves openly. She believes that the key to a democratic country comes through active citizenship. In Russian context, showing publicly ones opinions is rather new phenomena as before the public demonstrations were orchestrated by the regime. Therefore, Anna's opinion is radical and her approving of different, even radical, opinions becomes tangible. She looks for more open civil society in Russia. Next I will concentrate more in detail on the heterogeneous character of the movement and the groups within the movement.

5.4. Varying opinions of constructive LGBTQI activism

Forming groups meant also exclusions. When defining oneself as either an activist or a volunteer, one also defined who was the "other". However, the methods of activism constituted an actual and disputable division between participants for the LGBTQI movement. Naturally, the common "other" for them were the homophobic extreme-rightists. In addition to the homophobic counter-protesters, there was also another "other" that was a lot closer. These were the homophobic LGBTQI people. They were considered even more worrying than the extreme-nationalists or other opponent groups.

During the interviews I conducted in August-September 2014, I noticed that the reaction to my questions as to whether the interviewees considered themselves activists often caused discomfort. Many had friends who were activists and volunteers, but only the closest ones shared the same methods with them. Thus, I wanted to know what characterized an activist and what a volunteer.

Elvira is active mainly in organizing events and discussions. I rarely saw her in street demonstrations. However, she considers the challenges of organizing an event or demonstration as the criteria for activism. Valentina has been active within the movement for almost five years. She is now more focused on her family but is still calling for more openness and participation in certain actions.

Valentina: Volunteering and so on are mainly just focused on the community. I think I haven't got that much to do there. I have my other activities, my family and so on. Still, I know what to do, that is not to be afraid. I have successfully managed to pass the word [of LGBTQI rights] forward in my work etc. I am very happy of that. --- I do not participate in any social activity [by this she means closed supportive groups organized by LGBTQI organizations], I never have. But for the public actions, I always go to them. I feel it is like a civic duty (гражданский долг). Despite the fact that I haven't often liked how they have turned out.

Pauliina: Do you consider yourself an activist?

Elvira: Yes.

Pauliina: What does this stand for for you?

Elvira: Naturally, normal activities are not called activism. This is because I do certain actions in order to address social problems. Today, it all goes to rather extreme situations, into risky ones. Sometimes it is even more difficult to arrange the festival than to go to Champ de Mars ("Green Park" of St Petersburg, popular for demonstrations and other public events).

Both Elvira and Valentina represent the activist wing of the LGBTQI movement. For them, activism is above all awareness-raising and the opening up of the LGBTQI movement to their fellow citizens. Semi-public events within the movement are not seen by them as something useful in gaining further acceptance. For them, volunteering is only a starting point for participation in the movement.

During my field trips, I became aware that the volunteers were not always very committed to work or to attending the events organized on the premises of LGBTQI NGOs. I noticed that the volunteers came to the events only if they felt it was especially interesting for them and above all, if their friends or those whom they looked up to attended them. Some activities were only attended by the volunteers, others by other members, and only some by both these groups. Valery has been active in the movement for almost six years but is now withdrawing himself from the activities. He does not really see the point in street actions, especially if they are not well planned.

Valery: Usually I don't want to take part in their [small unofficial group called "Alliance – heterosexual for LGBTQI rights"] actions because they don't even think about their own safety and the activists' security, nor that of the group of people they invite. For me, this is not a good way of doing it because every time they organize something, they write to the people that it is your own responsibility; you may be beaten and so on and so forth. But actually, people who come, they haven't taken part in street actions before. They don't really know what it means that you can be beaten. That somebody can really come

or even shoot you. Therefore, the sentence “You can be beaten” is not enough. I think that they should really think about the security.

As many in the movement, also Valery calls for more responsibility on the part of the organizers. Some were active not only in the LGBTQI movement but volunteered or organized other events. Many hoped to try to open up the society and to make it more accepting of different lifestyles and ways of living. Some who are active in the LGBT movement organize an annual art festival “Kislorod” (Кислород, oxygen) focusing on environmental issues, veganism, yoga and meditation among other things. The issues of LGBTQI people were not present in this festival. However, by organizing it, they united people who share similar life visions. Furthermore, these activities helped them widen their social networks. Meeting people with different backgrounds enabled them to get to know each other and thus helped, at least indirectly, to grow the amount of acceptance and promotion for LGBTQI issues at the same time.



Photo 8. Annually organized St Petersburg art festival “Kislorod” offers several small workshops such as dance workshop of Salsa in 2014. Picture taken in August 2014.

Being selective about which activities to participate in was understandable, since quite often the public demonstrations ended with violence between protesters and counter-protesters. In addition, public activities often attracted negative attention and the violence would enhance it. Up to a certain point the attention is what the activists were searching for, but often it was impossible to control how much and what type of attention the activities would attract. It seemed that the possible threat of violence during these activities was one important aspect in the invisible line between the groups. Public actions included the

presence of police and at times even riot police from the OMON (Отряд мобильный особого назначения, Special Purpose Mobile Unit). At the same time the opposition groups, the extreme-rightists, made their own counter-actions aside LGBTQI rights demonstrations. Some of these actions were extremely violent and humiliating. Furthermore, these actions often ended up on YouTube, where the person being violated was even recognizable. Many of the activists articulated in the interviews how they were being followed or were faced with being the object of violence. If they themselves were not directly at risk, they shared what had happened to their friends.

Valentina: I have never been seriously frightened [in demonstrations]. That is, I saw counter-protesters in the park of Mars [St. Petersburg's Green Park where most of the Prides and bigger actions take place]. I was arrested and detained twice. I naturally felt the threat surrounding me. It was frightening, but, in general, no one has ever threatened me seriously. I do not want to be frightened in advance.

Pauliina: Aren't you afraid to take part in such actions?

Evgeniya: No, I am not afraid. Yet, every time I go there, I realize that I can be held by the police, I can end up in the hospital, I could be in the morgue. But on the other hand, every time I go there I am perfectly aware of all this, so I am not afraid. I think that people who do not understand that it can be dangerous, then it is better not to go there. I'm willing to risk it. I am ready. For me it is important that I am ready to take risks for the sake of it.

Both Valentina and Evgeniya express how they do not want to fear but highlight that it is all worth it. However, they are both aware of the possible threat lurking in their actions. They have to push the fear aside in order to do something that they think is vital for the movement.

Activists considered the attention as benefiting them anyway in the end, even if during the activities the harm may have been greater than the benefit. In a sense this might be true. However, people's attitudes towards more provocative and even improvised actions were met with distaste and even repulsion.

Pauliina: Are there such actions, which you would have to refuse because you do not like them?

Dmitry: I would refuse to hold public events, to hold certain posters for example. We have some friends in the movement who go with very provocative posters, and ... well, I think this is not good. This does not lead to any improvement. While on the other hand, it is their right - how to express their thoughts, how to think and to enter into some kind of ... But I do not share this attitude, I would prefer not to provoke. I do not think that this will lead to any improvement (Я не считаю, что это приведет к улучшению).

Pauliina: What do you think about the public events that there have been? For example, in early August, and there was a parade without the help of the organizations. I mean, it was arranged just like that. What do you think – are they good or?

Larisa: I do not think that there are good or bad [events]. I think there are just people who have different views. They have different motives to change something. How to...

Pauliina: Change the situation?

Larisa: Yes, but I think it's just a question about self-perception (мне кажется, это вопрос просто про самовосприятие.)

The problem is that coming out is already extremely hard for many, especially if one has a family and work. To joke about sodomy when talking about sexual minorities may elicit a similar reaction as the conflation of pedophilia with homosexuality that frequently occurs in Russian media. Homosexuality is depicted often as an illness and perversion in public media. However, the picture is not so black and white. In May 2015, I discussed this with the employees of Coming Out. They highlighted how they have managed to benefit from the repressive environment for the LGBTQI movement in Russia. Both LGBTQI people and extreme rightists have mobilized and the discussion has heated up. Police are now needed at all public events.

Unlike before, police and ombudsman are now willing to cooperate with the activities of local LGBTQI NGOs and are on their side in events and actions. They argued that this is because LGBTQI activists are easier to cooperate with and that they employ peaceful methods in their demonstrations unlike the homophobic counter-protestors. Arina, a long-time employee and one the leading characters of St Petersburg LGBTQI NGO shared how the ombudsman of St Petersburg would even call her during the weekend, telling her about violent attacks by extreme rightists against an LGBTQI person. According to Arina, this ombudsman is seriously trying to tackle homophobic discourse by giving his public approval for Coming Out's annually organized International Queer Fest in September and Side-by-Side's film festival in October-November.

Last time Evgeniya took part in public action was on 17 May, 2014, on the day of the Rainbow. He recalls it as follows:

Evgeniya: For the first time it was insanely easy. We had a lot of people, and the protection was well-organized. There were two rounds of riot police on the perimeter. Everything was organized and everything was perfect. When they want to protect, they make an excellent guard, and everything is fine.



Picture 9. The controversy of a calm flash mob: May 17th 2014 in St Petersburg, International Day against Homophobia, organized by Coming Out, was calm and quiet for both the activists and within the media. This way it may not accomplish the task of the NGO in question, as one of its main tasks is to raise awareness through public actions. However, peaceful demonstrations organized by a local organization have also resulted in more positive PR.

Above there is a photo of the “International Day Against Homophobia” demonstration on 17 May, 2014.

This is how I wrote about it in my field diary:

I arrived today in St. Petersburg. I came directly from the train station to the park when the activists had already held most of the speeches and were ready to fly their balloons. It was funny to see wedding couples taking their photos almost in front of the demonstration without even realizing what was going on. Police seemed quite bored and were mainly just hanging around and smoking cigarettes. It was difficult to see how peaceful everything had turned from my first year within this movement in 2013. However, I am not sure whether this event managed to raise so much attention among passersby. Sadly, no one seems to know really what is going on and I bet none of these people have come here to watch it and show their support. To be honest, I feel a bit lonely, not being with them but also not relating myself to the others surrounding me.

While watching the demonstration, I realized that in Russia it is still very rare to show support to the movement without being part of it. However, I am happy to notice that, in a way, the St. Petersburg police are acting as a leading example in approving the movement – no matter if they do it because they are forced to secure the safety of all citizens. Whether they want it or not as individuals, for passersby the police seem to act in favor of the movement when securing the safety in public events dedicated to the rights of LGBTQI people. Yet the change of attitudes among local officials is rather new. During my internship and field trips

in 2013 and 2014, the situation was still more vulnerable for both LGBTQI NGOs and people. Many activists and volunteers sustained injuries during public events and rather often police took some of them under custody for between a few hours to a few days. This happened both in events organized by independent anarchist movements and even during the official ones organized by NGOs. These events were followed by court hearings, which lasted for many weeks.

These negative consequences were traumatic experiences for some of the volunteers and activists, rendering some incapable of further participation in NGO activities and even unable to perform daily tasks. Many expressed how they could not work anymore. Nevertheless, the negative experiences made activists closer to each other and helped to form close and reliable circles of friends within the movement. Furthermore, these activists were not only active in LGBTQI demonstrations. They also mobilized groups around more general human rights issues. Many were active in the pro-Ukraine movement and against the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine and the invasion of Crimea.

Now that the situation is rather restrictive and participation inevitably demands value-based decision-making, the opinions also differ sharply. I met Dariya, a 20 year-old St Petersburg girl in the train in the summer of 2014. We started chatting and finally ended up having a coffee. During that summer, we became good friends. She is lesbian but she describes herself as being in a “transparent” closet. Almost all of her colleagues, friends and relatives know about her sexual orientation yet they do not talk about it and some even ask when Dariya would get married. Dariya told me often how she wishes that people would not go into the streets to yell about the rights of LGBTQI people. She argues that Russian society is not ready for this and the only result will be negative counter-reaction to this kind of advocacy.

Following Dariya’s description, she seems to consider that through public actions, LGBTQI movement may end up being something opposite to regime, a counter-culture. Yinger (1984, 6–7) defines counterculture as a set of norms and values sharply contradicting the dominant norms and values of the surrounding society. Not only do countercultures challenge dominant values, they often challenge the existing laws. In fact, by introducing these anti-gay laws, the government repressed the LGBTQI movement, pushing it into becoming a counterculture. However, most of the people involved in the LGBTQI movement would not agree with being described as a counterculture. Instead, they considered as desiring for the rather same things as majority: They wished to have a nuclear family and raise their children in Russia, and to be law-abiding citizens. Some even described themselves as patriots. However, counter-culture may give special freedom to behave outside the status quo and thus perhaps even change the structures in a long run.

Naturally not all involved in the LGBTQI movement are against violating the laws, despite the fact that everyone within the movement criticized and disagreed with such laws. Essig (1999, 63–64) separates activists into two parties: to the ones who are radical and to the ones who are compromise-oriented. In the next chapter, I will introduce these observations within the movement more in detail.

5.5. Balancing between legal and illegal actions

Pauliina: What do you think about the future?

Elvira: [Laughs] It's a very difficult question. In principle, all the evidence suggests that our future is not very bright.

Pauliina: Do you really think so?

Elvira: All the indications speak for it. But sometimes something happens unexpectedly. I hope that Russia will not be completely isolated. What is the middle path, I hope it won't be such an escalation, the radicalization of nationalism, which is of course possible. In principle, we are going there. I hope so much that it will stop somewhere. I hope that the insanity will stop at some point.

Despite the fact of participating in several actions, volunteers and activists choose their actions carefully. They do not take part in all actions, but follow their own interests and values. They are active in helping to organize festivals, events and meetings. Those who combine their professional skills with the NGO in question work voluntarily as lawyers, psychologists, translators or in communication. They are the volunteers who focus more on the actions organized by NGOs in cooperation with different actors such as security firms, local companies, police and even ombudsman. The NGOs inform the international audience about the events and the officials of several embassies are invited to take part in them. Everything is planned according to the laws. The other group consists of the activists who are often not active only in NGOs. They form their own groups that make improvised street actions. They expressed their will to do something more 'colorful' or 'fierce'. Darina argues that the movement and NGOs employ rather limited ways of engaging in activism:

Darina: We have very different type of organizations [in Russia]. I myself am an activist, a radical activist. The organizations, they are separated and they have their own tasks. I can see the benefit in them, they are official, and they are these "old-type" organizations. They can ask for the money, get security and support. Some of their work, well, I do not always understand what they are doing. Actually I don't care.

It is understandable that the registered NGOs try to follow the laws as well as they can. The frustration regarding the limited forms of activism is also understandable. The legality and illegality of activism is in addition one dividing characteristic that splits the LGBTQI movement. Some have also found street activism to be a tool for emigration. Nataliya expressed how one person has used the violence for his benefit to

emigrate and gain refugee status. However, she also highlighted how her friend's street activism caused distress and even depression that finally led to emigration.

Nataliya: I know one person, who does activism so as to leave. He said, I'll try and then I leave. But I know that she [Nataliya's friend] did not do it so as to leave. Once he left, she really felt it was hard, she lost hope for real. That is scary. I have not yet lost it. I do not know what will happen. In fact, during this year I have been doing activism, and it has been a difficult period for me. I have been in attacks but I survived more or less. I have come back to normal. Now I work with the community, but not with activism.

In addition to being noticed by passersby, taking part in the actions enhances the sense of belonging. Through an active collaborative process, one creates and sustains the sense of self and others (see for example Collins 1981). I claim this emancipating feeling to have been a major reason to take part in the demonstrations despite being scared. According to Melucci (1996, 4 & 9), through exchanges, negotiations, decisions and conflicts among actors, one creates a collective identity which then allows one to become an actor. In a matter of conflicts, definition of the self in its biological, affective, symbolic dimensions, in its relation with time, space and 'the other' are involved. Lyubov expresses the difficulty of engaging in carefully planned, and thus safer street activism:

Pauliina: What do you think, what would the best that could happen in Russia?

Lyubov: I'm now partly joking but I think the best would be the zombie population.

(laughs) Just take the brains of the people, clean it and then they would become tolerant. Tolerant vegetables! (laughs) But seriously, I hope we could someday have the same-sex marriage, this would be ideal.

Pauliina: But for the moment it is not possible.

Lyubov: I just don't know the good methods. Of course, Side-by-Side, Queerfest and those are good because they are not aggressive. We do things through art, through the beautiful thing but this is not enough. Of course, each year there are more and more people attending. I don't even know if it would be good if the same-sex marriage would come, let's say today. Our population is very homophobic, and other people would just go on a strike.

Lyubov's talk reveals the challenge of raising tolerance among her fellow-citizens; something must happen, but when and how is indefinite. New laws hinder the inevitable development. The situation is not specific to Russia, since several European countries' governments have laws including discriminative aspects towards sexual and gender minorities, as in Lithuania, Hungary and Slovenia (ILGA Europe 2014). Therefore, in these cases especially, LGBTQI organizations are constantly faced with sudden situations where they are forced to work in an ad hoc manner, improvising their response to threats and challenges as fast and efficiently as they can, under repressive laws. These situations require both financial support and flexibility among the employees and the volunteers, not to mention the psychological and at times even physical injuries the hostile situations might cause for the participants. Anastasia, Dmitry and Larisa brought up this problematic side of street actions in the interviews. I asked Larisa what strategy would be the best to employ

in advocacy work concerning the rights of LGBTQI people in Russia. Not surprisingly, to answer to this question is a difficult task.

Larisa: People have the capability to go out, tell about themselves, express themselves and so on ... I mean, to say that "we exist". This is also changing people's minds. Still it doesn't work very well because in the end, it appears on TV in a completely different form or out of its context. I have no precise answer on how to act. It seems to me that there --- are a lot of different strategies, which ultimately still lead to something. Anyway, it's good that people are generally willing to do something.

Larisa is not alone with her thoughts. Many of my interviewees expressed that it is important that people go to the streets, no matter what the message. To be out there, showing openly who they are, garners the needed attention and space. Indeed, new social movements describe political action within civil society as "their" space. What differentiates them from their predecessors is their manifestation as a form of middle-class protest. They are "both culturally oriented and involved in structural conflicts" (Burawoy 1991, 37–38). By listening to most of my interviewees demanding that LGBTQI people become more active, I understood that they considered publicity and openness as important in showing that the LGBTQI movement consists of diverse people who engage in similar daily tasks just like any of their fellow citizens. Giving the stage only for the counter-protesters would mean that LGBTQI people do not fight against stereotypes and let xenophobia rule the public discussion. In a next chapter I study the global side of the local LGBTQI movement. As I highlighted in the very beginning of my thesis, LGBTQI movement has gained global attention after the introduction of the repressive laws, aiming at restricting civil society, namely the activities LGBTQI NGOs.

6. GLOBAL AND LOCAL RUSSIAN LGBTQI MOVEMENT

"When you go to another Pride march, like in Stockholm, you know that they have earned their Pride, their freedom. But I just come there, not with pride, and I want to have my own pride. Maybe we will have our own Pride march in 50 years, but at least we have achieved it. We will be stronger. (А ты просто приехал. Нету вот этой гордости. Но она другая. Хочется, конечно, своей гордости. Мы с друзьями представляли, что мы идем через много лет, может быть, через 50 лет в своей стране, что мы добились. Будем сильнее)." (Ekaterina 20th August 2014)

For my informants, the Pride march was not only a symbol of the Western liberal LGBTQI movement, but also a symbol of acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQI people in Russia. My informants expressed how they wanted to make Pride marches their own proud celebration of the victory of LGBTQI people as active and participatory citizens. However, still today the "Pride" in St Petersburg is held inside a small barred area surrounded by police; being public is a political statement for having at least some space in the society to speak out for LGBTQI rights. Although LGBTQI NGOs and people in the movement argued that they are not

involved in politics, it still does not mean that they would not be political in their activities. Having this space is the first sign of recognition as a social group within Russian society.

Pride marches date back to the Stonewall riots in 1969. During one June night, the American LGBT community spontaneously and violently demonstrated against police raids in Greenwich Village, New York. Despite the success achieved by the LGBTQI movement, the riot was followed by multiple inner tensions within the movement, connected to gender, ethnic background and class. The first Pride march was held in New York in 1970 for commemorating this riot. Ever since, Pride marches have been held annually around the world. I argue that they stand as a sign of a liberal and approving society (more information on the Stonewall riots and the Pride march, see for example Carter 2004).

The history of Pride marches, and I would argue that of the LGBTQI movement altogether, represents Western ideas of civil society. However, this conclusion could be disputed because alongside Christianity, colonialism has for example brought homophobia into many countries. African and Asian countries today are among the most homophobic in the world. Before colonialism these countries had more varied vision of gender and sexuality. This is not the case in Russia, however. In chapters 2 and 3 I introduced shortly the history of the Russian LGBTQI movement and more generally the attitudes towards sexuality from Tsarist times until today. Throughout its history, sexuality has been hidden from the public. It has not been discussed openly. Furthermore, homosexuality was seen as a political act during the Soviet times. (see for example Kon' 1995.)

The latest law amendments politicize sexuality even today. Homosexuality is also stigmatized by mixing it with pedophilia in many official publications. However, despite the fact that spreading information about “non-traditional” sexual relationships among minors is prohibited across the whole country, and several human rights NGOs have been prosecuted as “Foreign Agents”, there are significant regional differences. Irina, Dmitry and Alexander highlighted how St. Petersburg is an exception among other cities in Russia. Next, I will focus on the controversial role of Pride marches for the St Petersburg LGBTQI movement.

6.1. Pride March as symbol of freedom and hierarchy

I claim that in Russia, Pride marches are highly important for the LGBTQI movement and the people who participate in them because they stand as public and open recognition of the existence and the rights of LGBTQI people. Their role is however limited, partly because of the restricted possibilities of organizing them and partly because the activists have come up with other ways of mobilizing the movement and trying to raise awareness. In addition, as I have discussed earlier, there are several other demonstrations in St

Petersburg and elsewhere in Russia calling for the rights of LGBTQI people. These include “Day of the Rainbow” and the “Day of Silence”. Interestingly, the first of May, as a traditional demonstration dating from Soviet times, has also become a popular day for demonstrations held by LGBTQI people. Actually, many interviewees argued that then everyone has the right to demonstrate and thus it has more inclusive character than for example in Pride march. Collins (1981, 329) argues that through activities which often hold a ritual character there arises the sense of identity and belonging. An active and collaborative process, in which individuals participate with others, creates and sustains the sense of self and others. Participating in common celebrations, members of the LGBTQI movement underline their belonging to Russian society. Then the sense of being Russian with a shared Soviet history actualizes and therefore can strengthen the sense of belonging and searching for common good. Demonstrations may have been more of a habit and even a demand in Soviet times (see for example Yurchak 2004). However, this commodity is something that local LGBTQI people cling to and through which they show their solidarity to a common past, as well as include their own agenda into it.

I argue that Pride marches hold a ritual character as well: They have a globally shared form and structure. Therefore it is easy to compare them with each other. When Pride marches in Russia are compared to those held in Western European cities, the difference is conspicuous. Through comparisons, it can be concluded that the LGBTQI movement in Russia is only developing and that the people are neither mobilized nor active. I argue that such comparisons inevitably suggest an evolutionist vision of the LGBTQI movement. This may have harmful effects on the movement and can obscure the peculiarities of the local movement and its capabilities to act within the society, within its local frames.

As demonstrations are difficult to organize in Russia, and, furthermore, out of a desire to experience demonstrations as something more celebratory than negative, many of my interviewees strongly expressed the will to experience the openness of such events abroad. However, many of my interviewees also argued that while being abroad, they became more proud of being Russian and could also see the positive characteristics of their own LGBTQI movement. Naturally some also wanted to experience Pride festivities, maybe while flirting and having fun with foreign LGBTQI people. Therefore, those who were able to have international passports¹⁰, travelled abroad and participated in Pride marches and other LGBTQI events. Often international organs like the EU or the UN funded these trips through Russian LGBTQI NGOs. Local LGBTQI and human rights NGOs delivered the information and helped with planning and organizing the

¹⁰ In Russia, there are two passports, internal and international. Internal passports denote the Soviet times. Everyone was able to travel around the Soviet Union with this passport. The person's ethnic background was written in the internal passport. Person could travel abroad only with international passport. Not surprisingly, it is more difficult to get and demands funds among other requirements. Some of my interviewees told that they were not able to have international passports because they had not attended in the army. Thus, to travel abroad was a privilege.

trips. I was curious to know how my informants and their friends felt during their trips abroad and if these trips met their expectations. Lyubov was among the ones who had thought about moving abroad, at least for some time. She went to Helsinki Pride in 2014, recalling it as follows:

Lyubov: When I arrived in Helsinki (Helsinki Pride 2014), I had a Russian consciousness. I went to the place where the Pride march begins, and I saw a girl with a bag «Have a Gay day». Subconsciously I thought that this must be dangerous, and then we got closer and saw more people with a rainbow details, even a rainbow suit. I was thinking in my mind “Wow, this is just unreal”. Really, it was just a spectacle and I really liked that. It was so good to see all of us there, and it was very, very cool.



Photo 10. Group of Russian activists and volunteers participating in Helsinki Pride 29th June 2014. I am standing second from the left, holding a rainbow flag. I felt a bit awkward being the only foreigner in their group.

Lyubov expresses importantly how in Europe the Pride march is less about being confronted with the reasons for such demonstrations than about just having fun with costumes. According to her, the participants of Pride marches should remember the fights for the rights of all LGBTQI people, and less about mere celebrations of freedom.

Pauliina: What were the feelings when you came back to Russia (Lyubov participated in 4 different European Pride marches in summer 2014)?

Lyubov: I was a slightly sad of course because, damn it, this is our Russia. But on the other hand, I became more aware of things. I have now other lenses to see this country. I am proud of who I am, just like the idea of these parades. For me, Pride resembles the memory of the victims of homophobia. But now it has turned more into a carnival. I do

not know if it's good or bad. On the one hand, yes, it is a bright, beautiful, and interesting thing that people can express themselves through the costumes, appearance. On the other hand, they do forget what it (Pride) actually means.

The same came up during the discussions with Nataliya in August 2014. I did not have a recorder with me when we met but below are my notes of our discussion.

“Nataliya has travelled around Europe such as Germany, Netherlands and Finland during the summer 2014. I tell her that I would like to talk with her about her trips abroad. What surprises me is her critical view of Pride marches abroad. She argues that so many of the Russian activists and volunteers have pink glasses when being abroad. Sasha tells how in Berlin there were three Prides and that they were all rather good. She herself took part in one organized in Kreuzberg because it was the most queer and thus most political of them all. At the same time she points out that the political prides are decreasing in numbers because of becoming more and more commercial. She considered the pride in Cologne to be the most boring: They together with Oleg were brought in front of the audience to be looked and discussed as these “brave yet suffering Russian activists”. Nataliya underlines that this feeling of pity has not so much benefit. At the same time, she points out that this is indeed better than nothing. Drawing attention to politicians, they raise awareness and thus in a long run may have some benefit in local aspects.”

I argue that in Russia, Pride marches do not describe the movement itself. In a case where public performances are challenging and even harmful for the movement, people have created other semi-private activities. In fact, some activists questioned some aspects of Western LGBTQI movements by arguing that they were commercialized and held too predigested a form and structure for achieving their stated goal. In addition, it should not be neglected that the internet offers a virtual space and forum for lively discussion within the Russian LGBTQI movement. Not all actions are public, at least in a traditional sense, and the multiple activities and varied LGBTQI NGOs show the liveliness of the Russian LGBTQI movement. Sarajeva (2011, 14-15) highlights how in Western Europe and North America, publicly visible and, above all, political activities are poorly compatible with the cultural and political context of post-Soviet Russia. In fact, Sarajeva claims that they are present at the same time, creating a fluid mix of these traditions. The lesbian subculture in Moscow is “the creation of an everyday life, balancing between Western ideas of a subculture and post-Soviet idealism”. I agree with Sarajeva’s notion. This is expressed also in Valentina’s speech:

I was so surprised in Helsinki Pride [in June 2014]. People were there on a picnic, sitting on rainbow flags. For us, this flag is a battle flag.

Valentina has been active in the LGBTQI movement in St Petersburg for the last five years. The above phrase is descriptive of the differences between the Russian LGBTQI movement and Western LGBTQI movements. It shows how important it is for people in the Russian LGBTQI movement to be able to show their existence to the wider society and to be recognized. They wish to be taken seriously because for them, for now, any

publicity is a battle against the majority. Pride marches are not festivities but instead a fight for recognition. The rainbow flag represents a symbol for freedom and pride and thus holds even a sacred role for LGBTQI Russians. Valentina continues explaining how she felt when she travelled to participate in a Pride march for the first time in her life.

Valentina: In the West, they have the opportunity to conduct the workshops and other activities (семинары и прочие мероприятия) which may be difficult to organize here. The biggest difference is that they can do it without some idiots distracting these activities. This summer (2014) I went to Helsinki Pride to see what it looks like without the idiots, morons and intruders. - - As we drove to the center, there was a guy standing in the tram stop with a rainbow flag in his hand. And he just stood there! No idiot was intruding upon him.

Pauliina: And how did you feel there, in Helsinki?

Valentina: I was happy. It had really festive atmosphere, such an unbelievable atmosphere from the start 'til the end without any specific organization. I was happy to watch my Russian friends, who at home are forced to hide feelings, holding hands and kissing each other.

Not only Valentina, but also other informants who had travelled to take part in Pride marches expressed the sense of empowerment after participating in them. They not only built new transnational social ties but also found certainty for their sexual and/or gender identity. In addition, seeing people openly sharing their lives gave hope for a better future. Nevertheless, for some it also showed how far Russia still is from accepting LGBTQI people as part of the society.

In addition, as I pointed out in earlier chapters, globalization has brought international aid for local NGOs. However, the movement has not been only from Russia to abroad but also the other way around. Recent attention from abroad has enhanced the globalization of the Russian LGBTQI movement. Several foreign volunteers take part in local NGOs' actions, just like I did; NGOs gain both financial and material support from abroad and the local activists have the opportunity to travel abroad at the expense of several multinational organs. I argue that it also helps to see how things could get better and above all, that it can be possible.



Picture 11. The volunteer-coalition from 'Coming Out' visited Hamburg Pride in July 2014. the trip was funded by ILGA Europe. For many of my interviewees, trips abroad did not only mean spreading the word about the situation in Russia but also relaxation and experiencing the local festivities. For many it was an eye-opening and empowering experience.

Because of the previously mentioned restrictive characters of the surroundings in Russia, the methods for demonstrations, such as Pride marches, in Western Europe and the U.S. are employed and modified by the LGBTQI movement into a Russian context. In the next chapter I will focus more in detail on the consequences the recent law amendments have had on local LGBTQI activists.

6.2. Not only the Western style: modifying ways of doing activism

Many of the interviewees expected responsibility from the people who are active in the movement. However, and rather naturally, the irresponsible ones were always “the others” within the movement. Those who considered themselves as volunteers called for responsibility, in the sense that activists should not go on the streets but instead do more constructed, official and peaceful advocacy. Not surprisingly, the ones who were more activist thought they were in fact taking all the responsibility by putting themselves in danger, in order to draw attention to LGBTQI people and to truly raise awareness. In short, they considered LGBTQI activism to be an aggressive game: one should aggressively step out and confront one’s fellow-citizens with uncomfortable realities in order to make a difference.

Elvira: I think that it is very important that the people themselves take responsibility. I can help by doing fundraising; I believe that it is also my duty to help this organization (Side-by-Side). Finally, this organization got through it (the verdicts of “Foreign agent”) and it's simply great! It also shows that the situation has changed dramatically compared to 2008. For example in the beginning, the ticket to Side-by-Side's film festival cost something like 200 rubles (about 5 euros). People were not ready to pay this. Some said,

"I'm a poor lesbian, I do not have possibility to pay". In order to keep the movement alive, people should get more involved. They should invest and try to help. Naturally this doesn't mean big amounts or other sacrifices. I believe that it is important for the community. This way the community consists of the friends who are ready to help.

I am not sure if Elvira is talking here with the mouth of a local LGBTQI NGO or as herself. However, it is true that their organization was in a real trouble two years ago when they were charged as a "foreign agent". They changed their organization to a commercial one and thus avoided the periodic check-ups and other bureaucratic tasks compulsory for the "foreign agents". Nowadays, the film festival organized by Side-by-Side gathers large crowd and people do pay their tickets happily. Despite the fact that it has influences from the Western NGOs and Western sponsors, they have managed to make it a local event, showing both Russian and foreign movies and having Russian and foreign visitors. Volunteers travel even from Moscow to take help organizing it. Most of my interviewees agreed that NGOs help mobilizing especially new people to the movement through events. However, some did not see the point in their actions and called after more radical methods and grass-roots activism. In fact, some expressed that local LGBTQI NGOs work for the foreign funders more than for the local people. Interestingly this connotes to the argumentation by the government upon describing what "foreign agent" stands for. Almost all of the people who had been active in a local LGBTQI movement for years only took part in some bigger events organized by LGBTQI NGOs, and usually as guests, not as organizers or volunteers.

Unlike organizations, activists have built social networks where people help each other by favors; one cooks and another cuts his hair in return, as my interviewee Darina described it. When, for example, a person is ill, the others collect money for the medicine. Darina expressed how mutual helping is very common amongst them. She argued that they did not need that much money because people helped each other with favors. Funnily, this social networking resonates with the Perestroika era in the 1980-1990s¹¹. In addition, many who are active and key figures within the movement share flats with each other. This depicts the commitment to the movement and its people but additionally also shows how many are being excluded from the society. In unofficial talks and just by going through the Coming Out's volunteers' e-mail lists, there are many who have problems of finding a flat and/or dealing with the landlords. These challenges enhance the mutual dependency and strengthen ties among LGBTQI people from the same circles. Sadly, this also stands as a tangible sign of exclusion from Russian society.

¹¹ People were dependent on each other because there were quite nothing available in stores at that time. In the 1990s imported goods arrived in bigger volume in Russia. However, during that time the financial crisis dropped the incomes of the people and salaries arrived late. (See for example Alexey Yurchak 2005 & Nancy Ries 2002.)

During the time of the interview with Darina in September 2014, she was soon to travel to Kiev with her friends. This would have initially been rather difficult for Russians because of the ongoing war in the eastern Ukraine. In addition, there was the general lack of safety for lay people in Kiev. The trip to Ukraine is thus dangerous and Darina was perfectly aware of it. I argue that it was also important for her that people within the movement would be aware of how dangerous her trip will be. This would enhance her reputation in the movement as a brave and clever activist. She would stand out as an example for the rest of the activists. During and after the trip to Ukraine, Darina and her activist friend posted photos of their trip on their Facebook and V Kontakte accounts. Another thing that interested me in Darina's activism was her attitude towards the paid work. She worked in a regular office work and underlined that the work is not inspiring and that she works only to finance her activism and the trips involved in it. As a rule, radical activists despised regular paid-work as brain numbing activity that only took time from other, more important and challenging activities.

Darina: We want to try to carry out some actions that are associated with the actions connected to the partisan slogans stating for example "revolution begins from streets" but with a triangle on top as a special symbol.

Pauliina: But aren't you afraid of your own safety?

Darina: No, I'm not afraid, but still it's difficult because it requires resources. And precisely because of that, I took a job and now I don't have enough time [for activism]. I have to go to work, I come back roughly around 11 pm, then we get together, sit and chat and I go to sleep around 4 am and then it starts again: I get up in the morning and so on – You know how it goes... But I just quitted [the work] because we will soon go to Kiev. I'll take a look at my situation again only after that. Last January we went to Ukraine, to show some support. We wanted to do an anti-war action. --- The last time I was there it was April [2014] and we brought 6 kilos of candies. They were Soviet candies

representing a peaceful union [Soviet Union]. We handed them out on the streets. In addition to that, we did postcards.



Photo 12: революция начинается с улицы (Revolution starts from the street). Street art in Fontanka street 43, St. Petersburg. Photo taken from Instagram. A group Street_Art_Spb published it in 4 October 2014. Notice the triangle above the text.

In addition to balancing between activism and work, I found it interesting how Darina and her friends used the Soviet Union's friendship of the nations as the point of reference and mark of peace. It can be argued at length that the union between the nations was not in fact that peaceful, harmonious and equal¹². Nevertheless, Darina and her friends wish to underline these aspects through their actions. However, as I pointed out earlier, the Soviet Union and the remembrance of it is actually uniting LGBTQI activists with officials and other lay people.

Indeed it is important to note that the LGBTQI movement in Russia is not about imitating the methods employed in the West, as Darina's story shows. It is about mixing the ideas and symbols from the west with local and cultural topics. Cushman's (1995, 49-54) research on rock music counterculture in early '90s Russia depicts how the early history of rock music in St. Petersburg was highly imitative. However, the

¹² See for example Richard Sakwa, 2008.

russification (russifikatsiia) of Western music made it possible for actors to form close enough communicative bonds to develop a subculture within Russian society. Usually the term russification describes the Soviet state's policy of political, economic and cultural imperialism, particularly in the peripheral, national and ethnic regions of the Soviet Union. According to Cushmann (1995, 49), the russification of rock music was an important step in the development of Russian rock as a meaningful medium for communication of information in the Soviet context. The empowering of the counterculture allowed its members to challenge the official sphere at the most fundamental level of subjectivity. By growing in numbers and mixing both Western and local nuances in their music, local people started to take it as their own music.

In many ways, the history of Russian rock music has similarities with the history of LGBTQI movement in Russia. The methods of making activism were at first copied from the West. It did not respond too well for the needs of local people. However, it gained more acceptance among the lay citizens after it was better contextualized within Russian culture and history, such as Soviet history. When a demonstration copied too much the ideas from the West, it would simply meet with rejection, not only from lay people but also within the movement. This is seen for example in Evgeniya's comments.

Pauliina: And there was also St. Petersburg Pride this year, in August, were you there?

Evgeniya: I was not because I was in Hungary. I do not even know how it went.

Pauliina: Ok. If you could ...

Evgeniya: It was the first of May ... I certainly would have been.

Pauliina: Yeah.

Evgeniya: Actually no, I lie! I would not [have participated in St. Petersburg Pride]. And why, well because this action was organized by other people, and they do not plan their slogans well. (Я бы не была. Почему не была, потому что эту акцию организуют другие люди, и они не фильтруют плакаты). People come out with provocative posters. I do not want to stand ... I was last year at some events, where there had no filtered posters, and ... well, I do not want to take part in something like that. Why to provoke? I really don't know.

Pauliina: What could be an example of such a poster?

Evgeniya: Well, this year there was a poster "Sodomy is sweeter than honey." I think it's not right. When everything is already good, you can have fun and joke about this topic. Another thing is when people are killed, people leave [from Russia], can be fired from their jobs, and basically [because of these actions] you can lose everything. I think that this is crazy PR, unnecessary and above all ugly. Last year there was even a banner "There is sodomy in every home". I don't appreciate this at all.

Evgeniya refers to the West when speaking of "everything is already good". For now in Russia, the LGBTQI movement's activities are highly politicized and thus do not provide space for sarcasm. Evgenia has seen already many twists and turns by the government, aiming at repressing the movement. In addition to this, she has seen how some improvised actions have caused inner tensions within the movement. For the same reasons it was highly interesting to compare the opinions of those who have only recently become part of

the movement with those who have long been part of it. Ekaterina advocates more peaceful actions after being active within the movement for several years.

Ekaterina: I'm not afraid to take part in the events at all. I just do not see the point in some of them. When they tried to (and finally did) pass certain laws, we were not asleep. We solved the challenges around the clock. Much has happened since. I think it is no longer necessary to act so much, why should we? I do not support going to Gay Pride events in Russia. But I have many activist friends who will not agree with me. I have gone out of this party. Today, many just come there screaming and act impudent. I do not see the point in this. But I was the same once.

Pauliina: Do you think that these activities don't help?

Ekaterina: No. I just say that I'm interested in another topic, I'm interested to be with people who understand [the characteristics of the movement]. Still, I think that everything helps. It's just that one needs to find what is the closest thing for her/himself. Someone makes a movie, someone goes out on the streets, someone does music. I prefer a movie. It's simply closest to me. Everybody makes his or her own decisions (Просто это ближе мне, я никого не осуждаю. У всех свое).

It is interesting to note that the perceptions of what helps the most and how to raise awareness of LGBTQI people to a wider demographic differ so strongly. It seems that many agree on avoiding too much provocation. However, the ways of participating differ widely. I felt that the provocation was always somewhere else, not among the interviewees' closest group. Provocation was often connected to weakly planned slogans and acts, something that was considered stupid and childish, sometimes even harming the security of LGBTQI people and thus violating the goals of the movement. Those who were blamed for being too provocative were often the ones who were planning to emigrate or had high hopes of it. They wished for a social revolution in Russia – Otherwise they would end up in compromises that would not meet the needs and rights of LGBTQI people. Some however could not stand the idea of being publicly active and thus perhaps putting themselves in danger, nor putting up with the discriminatory attitudes for being LGBTQI people. In these cases emigration began to emerge as the only option.

6.3. Plans of emigration within the LGBTQI movement

One of the most discussed topics among my interlocutors was emigration. The opinions about emigration varied but what was commonly shared was the acceptance of everyone's personal limit for bullying. Emigration was seen as the last chance, when person's chances for having a normal life were precluded in one way or another. However, emigration was experienced strongly as a backlash, probably even more so since those who emigrated were often the ones who had been active and visible characters within the movement.

Nataliya: I understand that people have lives and that they cannot risk their health when trying to fight against the windmills. Still, whenever someone leaves I am just shocked.

Mainly I'm shocked to realize that they don't believe in the change anymore. These (those who have already emigrated) were the people I thought would fight forever.

Emigration however, did not mean that the movement would shrink or that its impact would diminish after many of the leading characters had emigrated. This was presented earlier also in Valery's comments. In fact, after the passage of the new laws, the LGBTQI movement has grown, received more international cooperation and support from locals. Despite most of them being prosecuted as "foreign agents", their actions are far from being dissolved. In addition, as the events they organize are more peaceful than before thanks to the support by the officials, the number of people participating in them has grown.

In general, emigration does not mean that this person would not have any impact on the ones who stay. They are perhaps even more listened to than before because they can travel more freely, journalists have better access to interview them and they can openly and more frequently take part in public demonstrations. They can speak of the situation in Russia more freely. However, their actions may have a controversial impact on the local Russian LGBTQI movement. Dmitry is a very active newbie in the movement. Despite the fact that he has been active in the movement for a very short time, he has opinions on emigration. It seemed that he has really given thought to the whole emigration movement within the Russian LGBTQI movement.

Dmitry: Our society (LGBTQI) is split in half: To those who support the emigrating ones and those who condemn them. I am not inclined to condemn people who are leaving. And what's more - I consider myself to be drawn to such a possibility (emigrating) in certain circumstances. The only thing is - I do not think this is the solution to all problems. That's not it.

Dmitry: We have many activists who leave and start to throw mud at us who stay here in Russia. Especially during the last months there have been several such incidents. I can imagine why this happens: They have triggered some kind of psychological defense which must somehow justify their behavior. Our education comes from the Soviet Union. It brought up the spirit that one can't be a coward, can't be afraid and that you need to fight bravely, on the barricades and so on. While in fact, I know it's abnormal for human behavior.

Evgeniya: So I do not know. I do not blame any of those who remain, nor those who leave. I myself would probably like to stay, but I realize that maybe I will have to leave. Here I sit and remain silent -and I think it is wrong. Yet again, it all depends of your situation. I think we need to talk about ourselves.

Emigration was considered to be highly connected to public activism. I often heard of someone having emigrated because he/she was "too" public and active. In practice this meant that the face of a person became too familiar to opposing groups. I saw two people emigrating during the time I stayed in St. Petersburg. Both of them were active in pickets and demonstrations. In this light it was not surprising that

they were also the leading characters for the more radical wing of activists. I wondered if emigration was more the consequence or the reason for their participating in LGBTQI street activism. Nevertheless, I think it is justified both ways. People nearly always emigrated alone unless they were a couple. It is an individual project and demands a lot from the person. It is highly risky as naturally no one knows what lies ahead of him/her abroad and if he/she can even get a refugee status.

For all of the interviewees, emigration was an intriguing alternative but perhaps not a real option, at least for the moment. The reasons to stay were mostly financial ones: work, family, devotion and even patriarchy. Thus, it is no wonder that the topic was so loaded. Valentina has been active in human rights and civil society movements for the last 20 years. She is part of an opposition political party. Through her speech, I sensed that she considered herself as having a particularly high level of responsibility to her home country.

Pauliina: Despite your contacts and relatives abroad, you have decided to stay here, in Russia?

Valentina: Well, first of all, I have an interesting job here but it's not only that. I was born and raised here. This country is mine. If I leave this country, I would have a constant feeling of defeat, that some bastard was able to squeeze me out of here. Secondly, in Israel I realized that I had not gone anywhere because – even there [abroad] Russia is everywhere, we watch the news, you know many interesting blogs and TV shows by Russians are shown abroad, yet they are prohibited here in Russia. In addition, it is my country. I am responsible for what happens to it.

For Anna, emigration was mixed with dreams of becoming cosmopolitan and famous. Ahmed and Fortier's (2003) idea of otherness and being conscious outsider of the main society becomes tangible in Anna's comments.

Pauliina: And what do you think you will do in, let's say five years? Do you see yourself living here [in Russia]?

Anna: No! I hope not. Well, only if St. Petersburg will be in a different state, not in Russia. If it's not a part of Russia, maybe I could stay here, but this is not easy for me. I would love to travel. What I would like to do now, it would be to travel from country to country, for example in the U.S. Frankly here in Russia we have only Moscow and St Petersburg and all the other cities are just, oh my God (laughs). I have never been to Kazan. Maybe one day when I become famous I will visit Kazan, I would be on a tour, and also Ufa and Vladivostok.

Alexander also wished to move. However, he seemed to be in the crossroads of making up his mind about moving. On the one hand he wanted to move and leave it all behind. He had even thought of the perfect place for it. On the other hand he had just created new social networks, new friends within the movement and perhaps most importantly, becoming part of the movement was for him an emancipating experience. He expressed several times how he had become talented in arguing against police.

Alexander: I, along with my mom want to leave. On the other hand, I am a little sorry to leave this country because I was born, raised and educated here. However, in another country I have relatives, I mean in Canada. I want to live there, because the living conditions are much higher and there is no pressure on LGBT. They even have the opportunity to get married. But, I would also like to fight here [in Russia] because this struggle has become part of my life. In the short time, I have become very attached to all these people.

Pauliina: Now that many are leaving Russia what happens to young people, for example students, who realize that "I am a lesbian", when there are not so many people who could support them?

Alexander: Yeah, it starts with this problematic thinking: "Russia is rotten, Russia is not correct, to leave - it is the only possible decision." Lena Klimova, the organizer of "Children 404" replied very correctly that "I will not leave and I will continue to fight". Your country - it's still your country, and I would also curse Russia for the problems that we have. I do not blame the people, I do not blame me being a lesbian and that we have problems with the law, roughly speaking. Also, I do not blame my friend, nor my neighbor. I blame this system, which we have formed. And we have to fix it, we have to fight for it, we need to support each other and it is the only way we can survive.

Lyubov: Now in Russia, things are not clear and occasionally I think if I could leave and how I would do it. Sometimes I am ashamed of these thoughts, because this is our country, we should struggle. But on the other hand at times I think, is there really something to fight for, is there a good end. And then I start to consider leaving. Now I have decided to give myself a year or two. I'm comfortable here in St. Petersburg, I like the work and my projects. I understand that abroad I will not be able to realize myself, to realize my own personality, its potentials. Thus, I will stay here and will see. I think where to go, what I can do, what languages to learn further. That is, I do think over the plans for the future. I also want a family, but it is far in the future.

Alexander's and Lyubov's thoughts represent the rather typical circle of thinking when talking about emigration: It seems an intriguing alternative but the guilt for leaving it all behind might finally weight more. For them, emigrating would be the easy solution. It is about giving up and leaving the others in trouble. Alexander, Ekaterina, Valery, Evgeniya and Larisa have already seen the capabilities and restrictions of the movement. Above all, they have seen how the environment has changed. They have been active since the first hearings of the "Foreign agent" law. They fought then and have fought since by organizing and being part of the movement. However, they all thought that their work for the movement was mainly done, at least as an activist. All of them still participate in semi-public events such as movie and music festivals, discussion and so on. Nevertheless, they participated only if the event would produce something new to think about that meets their individual expectations. They all had their own individual projects that came first. They believed that today the movement continues strong even without them.

Pauliina: What do you think about leaving Russia?

Ekaterina: I've wanted to go to Stockholm. I also wanted to go to Prague, because I met there with [name of the organization] and worked with them. But now, I do not want to. Now I want to be here and do something here. I won't migrate. I do not want to escape. -

-- I do not understand, If I leave what will be there? Many leave and do not even think what really happens then. Some of his words changed my way of thinking.

Pauliina: And what do you think about people emigrating from Russia - is it good or bad?

Larisa: I think it's everybody's own choice. Well, in general, in principle, because we have the boundaries and we have a state - well, someone just once decided that this is so, and that in order to go somewhere, we must have some special capabilities, we need to do something, and we can live wherever we want. And in this respect, it seems to me that it is an absolutely normal situation. --- I just know that this discussion is going on right now, and many people write a lot posts such as, "how (to emigrate)?", "Should I stay here." It seems to me that this is, well, I do not know, every person has his own life ... --- I do not like when they try to put pressure on morality and say, like, "We need to stay here." If, well, if people are ready to help – that's very cool of course.

Evgeniya: Many think about it [emigrating]. Many people think that it is wrong to leave, [that] we must fight – there's all that. I, at one time I also thought that I would never in my life leave from St. Petersburg, because I was born in Leningrad, and I have lived all my life here. And I always said that this city - it is a wonderful city, it's not some kind of small town (городочек) in Siberia, you know. Thus, how could I leave?

Evgeniya: But now, already after this time and all these nervousness, these twists and turns on what happened to us here, and an attack in La sky [local NGO for combatting HIV]. I was also in distress: the courts and all that. In short, it's pretty hard. It's thug. Slowly I began to realize that ... I began to think about it [emigrating], too. I do not plan anything, but for myself, I have an option that maybe, the time will come when I have to leave, too. I might be in danger. I want to have a family, have children and that plan brings challenges and insecurity. It is not compatible with activism.

During my field trip in August-September 2014, another wave of emigration was underway following the introduction of the “homopropaganda law”. The first such wave I claim to have occurred right after it was introduced, in the summer 2013. During the summer and fall of 2013, 10 people of the closest circle of my informants emigrated from Russia as refugee seekers. Those who emigrated and those who expressed their wish to emigrate were mostly activists who were more involved in street actions than in other activities. They respected more the forms of activism aimed at directly influencing the public than semi-public events. In addition, they often took part in public and anarchistic actions, which focused more generally on human rights issues. Often they represented an oppositional group versus Russian politics and local nationalist groups. They wished Russia to become generally more tolerant towards its different minorities, LGBTQI people among them. However, among those who emigrated were some who had experienced severe violence such as Misha, who had lost vision of his left eye during an intervention in a private meeting in a local NGO.

I did not interview those who had already emigrated since most of them fled as refugee seekers and could not visit Russia for the moment. Additionally, I preferred to keep my focus on those who were physically in Russia and active in the movement in a way or another. I tried to agree on a time to meet with the two persons who finally emigrated during my stay in St Petersburg in August-September 2014. Interestingly,

almost no one knew about their serious plans on emigrating. They both did it very discreetly. Nevertheless, I followed their lives after the emigration through social media. They were still very active spokespeople for the Russian LGBTQI movement and some of them even managed some events in Russia from distance. Naturally this was not the same as before, especially for those who had taken part in the movement shortly before these key-characters emigrated. For these newcomers, they had been examples of the braveness they wished to gain. Nataliya expresses how strongly she reacted when she heard about the emigration of a woman who was a head of group for LGBTQI rights. She felt even rejected.

Nataliya: It was hard, I thought that she would cope. But she burned out - it was visible. I thought that she would be stronger, could handle it. I could not believe that all of a sudden she above all the people wouldn't believe in the change. It was very hard for me to realize this. When I found out that she had left, I became hysterical. I was scared. For the first time I really thought: Do I take a ticket for the plane and go home (to her hometown). For the first time I was seriously thinking the reasons why I came here (in St Petersburg). She had convinced me that all is not lost. And all of a sudden she was gone.

Nataliya's comments show tangibly how the LGBTQI movement is strongly about solidarity, the will to do something for the common good. One's individual project, such as emigration, is greeted with surprise and even shock. Emigration was considered among the newbies as a neglect. I argue that for them, emigration enhanced the dichotomist idea of a modern, developed "European" societies and backwards and primitive "non-European" cultures (see for example Butterfield, 2015, 16). Because of the surrounding reality in Russia, where homosexuality is seen as infectious, the idea of community holds strong the role. Thus, many limit their communication to tolerant people and try to choose gay-friendly companies to work for, thus practicing a certain form of social escapism. (Soboleva 2015, 287.) However, many believe that this is the key for the brighter future:

People look for solidarity. Therefore I think that the main task is the community. Everything is still in the beginning but that's alright because we already have the form. I really want to continue from this. (Nataliya, 13 September 2014)

7. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined the negotiations within the local LGBTQI movement on private lives and public activism. People are united in the movement by their will to show their support and fight for the rights of LGBTQI people in Russia, and to do at least something that could make Russian LGBTQI people visible instead of a hidden group with limited rights and restricted lives. However, the most important unifying factor was the common belief in a brighter future; No matter if this would demand time, twists and turns before its realization. Both the optimistic vision of the future and restrictive surroundings kept my informants active. Nevertheless, being active did not mean commonly shared methods of participation. Some preferred legal and semi-public actions, such as events organized by local LGBTQI NGOs, whereas others preferred more grass-roots public activism that would involve street actions such as demonstrations and one-man pickets. The recent law amendments created an even deeper cleavage between the two groups, volunteers and activists. Thus, I describe St Petersburg LGBTQI movement as bound membership.

Recent law amendments underlined the commonly shared idea of hidden lives of LGBTQI people: Visibility was problematic for the anti-gay protesters; not so much the LGBTQI people in general. According to the recent neo-conservative law amendments, homosexuality is depicted as being caused by influences from the West. As a matter of fact, the rather sudden appearance of LGBTQI people in the early 2000s gave the impression of homosexuals not becoming visible but as coming altogether into being in Russia. This is due to the previously mentioned idea of homosexuality being influenced but also due to the fact that sexuality was not discussed in the Soviet era.

As a matter of fact, these laws were not only repressive but productive as well. They produced self-speaking subjects. Only by naming the group as “propagandists” and “people of non-traditional orientation”, did this legislation generate discussion and spur uprisings within the movement. This created the paradoxical situation of the legal system as a producer of homosexual identity. The laws, old and new, cultivated queer identities as well as queer fears. The birth of the LGBTQI NGOs and their subjects lay the groundwork for a lively sub-culture and the discussions it provokes.

The recent law amendments have also had positive side-effects: Not only has the LGBTQI movement grown in Russia, it has also become more global and its activities have become more transnational. As the NGOs have been threatened by fines for allegedly being “foreign agents”, they have been forced to seek support and funding from abroad. International interest in the Russian LGBTQI movement has increased the number

of articles, documentaries and visits to Russia by international media and researchers, focusing on the fight of Russian LGBTQI movement for equal rights.

People who were involved in the movement employed several tactics in their activism; some took part in official events and through this made their contributions to the movement. Some were more cautious of the possible consequences of public activism and preferred semi-public events. The activist-wing of the LGBTQI movement considered this as not being a sufficient form of participation.

Those who represented themselves more as activists often identified themselves with opposition and rejected the idea of only participating in the LGBTQI community. They participated in street actions aiming at human rights and rights of expression in Russia. LGBTQI rights were considered universal rights instead of special rights. Improvised and new methods such as distributing ribbons or candies, organizing a well-being festival that included LGBTQI questions were among others. The biggest aim for the LGBTQI movement was to create a visible movement that would finally conclude in social revolution and the strengthening of a civil society.

Activists referred in their demonstrations to a common Soviet past, drawing attention to inclusion of the Soviet Union and thus aiming at the social inclusion of LGBTQI people. Participating only in LGBTQI rights demonstrations was criticized as distracting the society from the real problems of the LGBTQI community. In short, the fight only for LGBTQI rights was considered to separate them from the others. Pride marches were just one option among many forms of public street actions. Overall, they preferred to create their own methods of demonstrations instead of copying them from abroad.

Interestingly, volunteers considered activists to be employing too radical methods, such as using provocative posters and pursuing for individual motives instead of the common good. They criticized activists for taking the cause of LGBTQI rights too lightly and joking about the situation. Some even considered activists to do more harm than good for the movement. Not surprisingly, most of the volunteers had families and jobs to look after and protect. For these reasons they preferred only semi-public or private events.

Unlike activists, volunteers did not search for social revolution but more for recognition as citizens. However, they were aware that this was still far from a reality in Russia. Still, they thought this would be possible only through a loyal and big enough community with local LGBTQI NGOs. Volunteers counted and expected a bigger role and thus responsibility from the local LGBTQI NGOs. For them, the role of the NGOs was to organize legal and peaceful demonstrations that would guarantee the safety of their participants.

This way volunteers could also “step out from the closet” for the rest of the Russia. This is a natural consequence since the vaguely laid law amendments made it difficult to know when the action would be legal. Activists consider NGOs playing only a restrictive role for the emancipation of the local LGBTQI community. According to them, the role of these NGOs was only important for the newcomers aiming at finding new social networks. Thus, they did not use too many of their services other than participating in bigger events in Russia and abroad.

A unifying factor was not only the optimism but also the pressure and fatigue of the constant fight for the rights of LGBTQI people. Both groups expressed having feelings of giving up on everything. At times all the effort did not seem to bear any fruit as no improvements were in sight. Some decided or seriously planned to emigrate from Russia and some withdrew themselves from the movement altogether. Both of these solutions were radical since most of the interviewees had been part of the movement since they were young. Thus, for many, withdrawing from the movement, whether through emigration or giving up on participation, meant also creating a new identity and reconsidering what they wished for in life.

Those who had previously been active within the movement expressed how they were tired and felt that the activism had distanced them from knowing who they really were. For them, turning their back to the LGBTI activism was a conscious identity project. Now, after several years, they felt they needed the time for themselves. Most of those who had emigrated were trendsetters for the Russian LGBTQI movement. They were looked up to and often admired. However, emigration often changed totally their role as active citizens. This holds especially true in the cases where they emigrated as refugee seekers. It would be extremely interesting to study their roles today in a new country. In addition, their role in Russian LGBTQI movement has not finished after their emigration. It would be intriguing to study what impact do they have today for the movement and what motivates them to participate in it still today.

This thesis manages to depict only a certain period of the LGBTQI movement and in order to give more perspective on what the movement holds, longitudinal research should be made. Through this, it could be possible to foresee in which direction the movement will develop and, furthermore, how the regime will respond to it. I found it difficult to fully answer the question as to what methods, other than those copied or modified, the LGBTQI movement employs. In order to do so, I would need to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the past of the LGBTQI movement and get better involved with the activist wing of LGBTQI movement in Russia.

I am fully aware that my data manages to depict only certain sides of the participation. I did not manage to create such a profound relationship with the participants so as to hear their self-critical speech about their

own participation. With a more thorough, longer-lasting field study it could be possible to understand better the nuances and character of the LGBTQI movement in Russia.

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