



## From Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' to *Matilda*: Orthodox believers, critique, and religious freedom in Russia

Dmitry Uzlaner & Kristina Stoeckl

To cite this article: Dmitry Uzlaner & Kristina Stoeckl (2019) From Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' to *Matilda*: Orthodox believers, critique, and religious freedom in Russia, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 34:3, 427-445, DOI: [10.1080/13537903.2019.1658432](https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2019.1658432)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2019.1658432>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 02 Oct 2019.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 2964



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)





Citing articles: 3 [View citing articles](#)



OPEN ACCESS



## From Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' to *Matilda*: Orthodox believers, critique, and religious freedom in Russia

Dmitry Uzlaner  and Kristina Stoeckl 

### ABSTRACT

This article analyses the configurations of belief, critique, and religious freedom in Russia since the performance of the Russian group Pussy Riot in 2012. The 'punk prayer' and its legal and political aftermath are interpreted as an incidence of the contestation of the boundary between the secular and the religious in the Russian legal and social sphere. The authors show that the outcome of this contestation has had a decisive impact on the way in which religion, critique, and the human right of religious freedom have been defined in the present Russian context. In response to Pussy Riot, the Russian legislator turned offending religious feelings into a crime. The article investigates two more recent cases where offended feelings of believers were involved, the opera "Tannhäuser" in Ekaterinburg in 2015 and the movie *Matilda* in 2017, and analyses how the initial power-conforming configuration that emerged as a reply to the 'punk prayer' has revealed a 'power-disturbing' potential as conservative Orthodox groups have started to challenge the authority of the State and the Church leadership. The article is based on primary sources from Russian debates surrounding Pussy Riot, *Matilda*, and "Tannhäuser" and on theoretical literature on the religious–secular boundary and human rights.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 May 2017

Accepted 2 March 2018

### KEYWORDS

Russia; Pussy Riot; the film *Matilda*; the Russian Orthodox Church; the postsecular; blasphemy; religious feelings; religious freedom

## Introduction

Any analysis of religious life in Russia today should begin with the Pussy Riot case as a turning point. The unruly artistic performance inside Moscow's main cathedral on the 21 February 2012 (Pank-moleben 2012) and the ensuing trial (for a detailed description of both the performance and the trial, see Uzlaner 2014) set the stage for further trends and developments in the political and religious situation in Russia, which we set out to analyse in this article.

The 'punk prayer' took place at an important moment in Russia's recent history: a period of mass political protests against alleged electoral falsifications during the parliamentary elections of 4 December 2011, which marked "a watershed in the political history of post-Soviet Russia"

**CONTACT** Dmitry Uzlaner  [uzlanerda@gmail.com](mailto:uzlanerda@gmail.com)

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

(Yablokov 2014, 622) and the beginning of a new electoral cycle that would end with Vladimir Putin being elected to become President of the Russian Federation for the third time on 4 March 2012. Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church since 2009, had made statements that were widely interpreted as supportive of Putin's return to the presidential post and as disapproving of anti-government civil protests. The 'punk prayer' was a reaction to this sequence of events, reflected in the following lyrics:

Patriarch Gundyaev [the civic second name of Patriarch Kirill] believes in Putin/  
Would be better, the bastard, if he believed in God!/The Virgin's belt won't replace  
political gatherings/The eternal Virgin Mary is with us in our protests! (Pank-  
moleben 2012, translation by authors)

The complete lyrics express a list of grievances connected to the post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: the dark Soviet past of the Church hierarchy, the limitations of basic liberal freedoms in the name of religious traditions, the persecution of homosexuals, discrimination against women, the luxurious life-style of some priests, the financial machinations of the Church, the penetration of religion into secular schools, and, of course, the Church's support of the ruling political regime. The 'punk prayer' contained a nearly exhaustive list of ongoing conflicts surrounding Orthodoxy.

When three band members were arrested and put on trial in summer 2012, their case created enormous international repercussions: Western rock musicians like Madonna, Paul McCartney, Yoko Ono, Sting, Peter Gabriel, and the band "Red Hot Chili Peppers" expressed their solidarity, Western politicians voiced concern about Russia's lack of respect for human rights standards, and a baffled Western audience learned about the reality of politically orchestrated court cases in the Russia of 2012 (on Western perceptions of the 'punk prayer', see Wiedlack 2015).

Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' was certainly not the first case in recent Russian history of artists challenging religious canons with the aim of criticising trends which they found troublesome. Precedents are the art exhibitions "Caution, Religion!" (2003) and "Forbidden Art" (2007) and the self-crucifixion of Oleg Mavromati during his performance "Do Not Believe Your Eyes!" (2000). However, Pussy Riot triggered a new configuration in the Russian social and cultural life. It became the reason for introducing, in 2013, harsher punishment for actions against "religious feelings" by adding new provisions to article 148 of the Russian Penal Code on "The violation of the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion". The new provisions foresee considerable fines or prison sentences for "public actions [...] with the intention to harm the

religious feelings of believers” (“Chto nuzhno znat’ o 148-i stat’e UK RF” 2017).

The performance, its consequences, and the artistic and political programme of the performers have since become the object of a wide range of scholarly studies. The members of Pussy Riot and their message have been interpreted in the context of cultural studies, with a focus on religion, music, gender, and politics (Wiedlack 2015; Rogatchevski and Steinholt 2016; Rourke and Wiget 2016; Amico 2016; Gessen 2014; Teivainen 2014; Vaissié 2014; Wiedlack and Neufeld 2014), as well as from the angle of feminism and media studies (Gapova 2015; Johnson 2014; Sperling 2014; Agaltsova 2014). Scholars have drawn out the legal and legal theoretical aspects of the event and the ensuing trial (Kananovich 2015; Storch 2013; Manderson 2013) and have analysed the media coverage and its effects on the public (Bashir and Fedorova 2015; Skorobogatov 2016; Yablokov 2014). Even the physical location of the contentious performance, Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, has come under scholarly scrutiny (Gan 2015). In a special issue dedicated entirely to the interpretation of the Pussy Riot event, Yngvar Steinholt and David-Emil Wickström look back at four years of academic research and note the extraordinary number of articles on the topic and the advanced theoretical frameworks of analysis that have been applied (Steinholt and Wickström 2016).

Among the impressive body of scholarship that has sprung up around the memorable performance, articles and books dealing with the event from a sociology of religion and theological perspective occupy a relatively small *niche* (cf. Denysenko 2013; Willems 2013; Willems 2014; Shevzov 2014; Tolstaya 2014). Scholars in the field of religious studies and theology have focused on the consequences of the Pussy Riot event for Church–State relations in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Orthodox believers. They have generally concluded that the event and its reception among the Orthodox public presented a much more multifaceted and contested Russian Orthodox Church than most mainstream analyses suggest. Our article contributes to this strand of interpretation and examines, with the distance of over half a decade, where the “sting of the Punk prayer [that] lingers for Orthodoxy and for the institutional Church” (Shevzov 2014, 138) has left the Russian Orthodox Church, Orthodox believers, and Church–State relations in Russia today.

We therefore want to look back, once more, at the case of the ‘punk prayer’ as an incidence of contestation of the boundary between the secular and the religious in the Russian legal and social sphere. A detailed consideration of the ‘punk prayer’ from this perspective has already been provided (Uzlaner 2014, 26–28). We plan to limit our analysis to a very concrete line of enquiry in this contestation: how to interpret the ‘punk

prayer' itself? Was it a religious or a secular act? We will consider the interpretation of the 'punk prayer' offered by Pussy Riot members and interpretations offered by Church authorities. Each interpretation was connected to a broader vision concerning Church–State relations and the place of religion in the Russian public sphere. The vision offered by Pussy Riot could be called power-challenging and the vision offered by Church authorities power-conforming. We want to show that the outcome of this contestation has had a decisive impact on the way in which belief, critique, and the human right of religious freedom have been defined in the present Russian context. The article is based on primary sources of the Russian debate surrounding Pussy Riot's trial in 2012, on theoretical literature on the religious–secular boundary and human rights, and on analysis of recent events and debates about offending religious feelings in Russia. Particularly, we look at two recent cases where offended feelings of believers were involved, the opera "Tannhäuser" in Ekaterinburg in 2015 and the movie *Matilda* in 2017.

### **Contesting the boundary: the 'punk prayer—a religious or a secular act?**

Pussy Riot's 'punk prayer' meant different things to different people: a scandal, a provocation, a sacrilege, a heroic act of resistance, a drastic attempt to gain publicity. In our view, from the perspective of sociology of religion and political theory, it was a phenomenon of postsecularity which has become one of the key issues in today's discussions about the place of religion in modern society (Habermas 2006). Despite some disagreement (e.g. Beckford 2012), many scholars concur that postsecular society is characterised by the coexistence of secular and religious worldviews and practices, the de-privatisation of religions, religious pluralism, and new forms of self-reflective interaction between the religious and the secular sphere (Rosati and Stoeckl 2012; Taylor 2015; Molendijk 2015; Parmaksız 2016; Fordahl 2017). The Russian postsecular situation is characterised by a religious revival after Soviet secularism—a revival, however, that has led not merely to the reproduction of traditional forms of religiosity, but has also generated genuinely new phenomena which cannot be easily defined as either religious or secular. Such phenomena could be called "post-secular hybrids" (Uzlaner 2014, 44–46). The shifting boundaries between the religious and the secular space and the perpetual contestations of the relationship between the two are important manifestations of a postsecular society. What counts as religious and what counts as secular is no longer a predetermined given. In many cases, there is no unequivocal answer to the question where the religious finishes and the secular starts and vice versa—where the secular finishes and the religious starts; definitions and boundaries are blurred. These blurred boundaries and definitions are at the

centre of conflicts of interpretation between different actors, each set interested in imposing their preferred interpretation of the way the religious–secular divide should be configured.

We consider Pussy Riot’s ‘punk prayer’ as an illustration of this very process. It is a peculiar case where the religious and the secular are blended together and it is a good example for a postsecular hybrid. This hybrid is open to numerous interpretations and closely connected to much broader questions of Church–State relations and the place of religion in the public sphere.

It is important to recognize that, initially, there was no consensus among the Russian religious and secular public on the ‘correct’ interpretation of Pussy Riot’s ‘punk prayer’. The controversy has now become widely perceived as a conflict between a basically non- or even anti-religious, secular, progressive, and liberal artistic event and religious sensibilities, but in the beginning this interpretation was not the only one possible.

The name of the action itself—‘punk *prayer*’—could be taken as an indicator that the artists intended this to be a *religious* act—directed against the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the very beginning, members of Pussy Riot offered an explicit religious interpretation of the ‘punk prayer’, as demonstrated by the statement published on Pussy Riot’s blog on 4 March 2012 (practically at the moment of their arrest). In this statement, members of Pussy Riot claimed that the punk prayer

was truly a prayer—a radical prayer directed to the Mother of God with a request to prevail upon the earthly authorities and the ecclesiastical authorities who take their cue from them (Pussy Riot 2012, translation by the authors).

This statement has since disappeared, for reasons unknown, from public access and is no longer available on the official blog site of the group. The fact that the group appears to have changed its strategy of justification and removed this statement supports the argument that we make in this article.

The emphasis on the religious aspect of the ‘punk prayer’ aimed at maximising the radical message of the performance (Manderson 2013, 23). When the action is recognized as a *prayer* and not an artistic-political performance,

it turns out to be a courageous claim to Christian content and values, their reorientation into a different course from the one set by those who speak officially on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church (Uzlaner 2014, 29).

The ‘punk prayer’ as *prayer* returns to Christianity its radical, even revolutionary character, as opposed to habitual Russian perceptions of this religion as a conservative factor and as a pillar of the current socio-political *status quo*.

No wonder that the official representatives of the Church regarded the ‘punk prayer’ as a radical challenge. From the very beginning, they categorically refused to see in it any kind of connection to a meaningful religious activity. Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin (2012), at the time chair of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Synodal Department for the Cooperation of Church and Society, and Vladimir Legoida (2012), then chair of the Synodal Information Department, called the performance “a blasphemous and loathsome act”. In this interpretation,

Pussy Riot’s ‘punk prayer’ was an unmistakably secular action; the unsanctioned invasion of the profane—art, politics, and ideology—into a sacred space that is alien to it; and the perpetration of blasphemous and disorderly acts in that space (Uzlaner 2014, 30).

Insisting upon the secular character of the ‘punk prayer’, official representatives of the Church demanded that it should be handled exclusively by secular authorities. Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church

refused to analyze the situation in theological language, to translate it to the level of religious significance, or to see in it echoes of any problems that might exist in contemporary Orthodoxy (ibid).

As they interpreted the ‘punk prayer’ as an act of ‘militant atheism’, Church authorities

have sought to maintain for themselves the monopolistic right to delimit the religious and the secular and to sanction or forbid any non-traditional religious forms that arise inside the controlled space of Russian Orthodoxy. If the “Punk Prayer” were actually a prayer, it would be an unsanctioned attempt to redraw the boundaries that separate the religious and the secular. For this reason, under no circumstances can the Church grant it the status of a prayer. To them, it is nothing but blasphemy and hooliganism. (ibid)

The members of the punk group demonstrated an awareness of this point throughout the entire affair. Yet, over time, the religious argument yielded more and more to an alternative interpretation of the ‘punk prayer’ as an artistic-political performance. We believe that the gradual marginalisation of the religious interpretation was in part a consequence of the international campaign in support of the punk activists. The secular-vs.-religious-forces interpretation prevailed in the Western perception of the event (for a very good analysis, see Wiedlack 2015). The iconography of colourfully dressed young women opposing old men in black cloaks proved irresistible. As has been shown in detail elsewhere (Uzlaner 2014), in the course of the trial, the possible religious reading of the event gradually receded into the background. Pussy Riot became, and went on trial as, a conflict between secular progressive artists and religious believers. It may sound paradoxical, but the framing of the

Pussy Riot case in terms of a conflict over human rights—Western artists and civil society calling for freedom of expression for the artists and the Church calling for the protection of the religious feelings of its believers—furthered the power-conforming interpretation of the event. It made it easier for the Church leadership and the government to frame the conflict in terms of ‘them’ (progressive artists, secular liberal human rights activists, Western commentators) against ‘us’ (Orthodox believers, Russian patriots).

Thus, the ‘punk prayer’ found itself at the intersection of various interpretations. What was contested was not just the question whether the women should be punished and it was not just the question whether the freedom of artistic self-expression should allow one to dance inside a cathedral. The questions that were behind the various interpretations were much more fundamental and pressing and pointed to the very configuration of the religious–secular or even sacred–profane divide. Where was true religion, the true sacred, in today’s Russia? Was it in cathedrals or could it be that what looks like a cathedral was in reality nothing more than a ‘business centre’, the ‘office’ of a big corporation (which is what members of Pussy Riot claimed, see Uzlaner 2014, 33–34)? Were members of Pussy Riot just a group of immoral hooligans who came to a sacred place to make fun of pious parishioners and their strange beliefs? Or were they a group of young believers who came to the profaned cathedral to pronounce a radical prayer in order to claim back the Christian legacy from those who had usurped it? Was the ‘punk-prayer’ a radical theological statement that made visible a conflict among different groups of believers?

Behind each answer and interpretation stood a preferred version of the ‘correct’ position of the religious–secular boundary and a particular normative vision of the place of Orthodoxy in postsecular Russian society and politics. One could be called power-conforming (as it was defended by the Church and State authorities) and the other power-challenging (as it was defended by members of Pussy Riot and some opposition activists).

### **Closed definitions: the believer, critique, and religious freedom**

The outcome of the clash of interpretations had a decisive impact on the way in which the religious believer, critique, and the human right of religious freedom have been defined in the present Russian context. We will look at each of these points—the believer, protest, and religious freedom—one by one.

#### ***The believer***

Who can be recognized as a rightful representative of the social group of ‘Orthodox believers’? Whose religious feelings were (or were not) insulted



and against whom did (or did not) Pussy Riot direct intentional hatred? If one relies on court records (see the more detailed analysis in Uzlaner 2014, 34–37, 41–44), one finds that the social group of ‘Orthodox believers’ “was formulated as the trial unfolded, based upon a person’s attitude towards the ‘punk prayer’” (Uzlaner 2014, 42). The decisive criterion for a person to fall into the ‘believer’ group was whether s/he said s/he felt offended by the ‘punk prayer’. The group ‘Orthodox believers’ came into being in the process of the investigation and court trial precisely *through* a negative view of the ‘punk prayer’, it did not logically precede the ‘punk prayer’. The court constituted this social group “on the basis of feelings of humiliation and insult brought on by the ‘punk prayer’, and on the basis of a desire to punish the offenders” (ibid). In the court-proceedings, there is evidence that

only those who conformed to these criteria—those who were ready to admit that they were insulted, to consider themselves the object of hatred, and to demand punishment—were admitted as witnesses (ibid).

Many defence witnesses, who also identified themselves as ‘Orthodox believers’, were not recognized as representatives of the requisite social group and were correspondingly deprived of the possibility to testify in court. For example, Aleksei Navalny, a politician and Orthodox Christian, was not accepted as a witness for the defence (“Sud nad Pussy Riot” 2012). Many Orthodox believers were quite unhappy about the way the trial unfolded and did not support the hard line of the Patriarchate (Bremer 2013, 8).

With hindsight, it can safely be stated that, for the Church, the outcome of the Pussy Riot trial has been highly ambivalent. It has strengthened the power-conforming, patriotic, and conservative camp inside the Church and has side-lined liberal or simply a-political believers, revealing the undiminished existence of an ideological rift inside the Russian Orthodox Church (cf. Papkova 2011; Stoeckl 2014). Our analysis echoes that by Elena Gapova who has argued that “the division that emerged over Pussy Riot was not one between believers and non-believers; rather, it was between different types of believers and non-believers” (Gapova 2015, 22).

### **Critique**

The second outcome of the identification of the ‘punk prayer’ as an exclusively secular act of hostility against religious believers was that ‘critique’—criticism and protest against the Church hierarchs, against the government, and against the close alliance between Patriarchate and government—was branded as anti-religious, liberal, and Western. This also affected ordinary Russian citizens and Orthodox believers who, irrespective of what they thought about the ‘punk prayer’, were critical of

the government. For them, the exclusively secular reading of the event meant a preclusion of potential repertoires of critique.

The ‘punk prayer’ re-appropriated a space for protest inside the religious sphere. The accused Pussy Riot members and their supporters presented the ‘punk prayer’ as a form of critique that had a legitimate place in the tradition of Russian Orthodox culture. This was made most explicit by one of the accused, Ekaterina Samutsevich, a member of the ‘Pussy Riot’ group and performer of the ‘punkprayer’ (Kostiuchenko 2012a; see also Denysenko 2013), who tried to explain the meaning of the performance by making allusions to the tradition of travelling minstrels in Russian history (Zguta 1978). In her final statement to the court she wrote:

In our presentation, we dared, without a patriarchal blessing, to combine the visual image of Orthodox culture with the culture of protest, leading intelligent people to the thought that Orthodox culture belongs not only to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch, and Putin, but it can also be on the side of civil insurrection and the oppositional mood within Russia. (Kostiuchenko 2012b, translation by the authors)

Indeed, all the actors and observers who favoured the religious interpretation of the ‘punk prayer’ did so because it allowed them to give a clear indication that Christianity and Orthodoxy did not only belong to the authorities and that Christianity in Russia was in reality a multifaceted phenomenon.

The official Orthodox Church did not accept this position. Patriarch Kirill compared the ‘punk prayer’ with the religious persecution under the Bolsheviks and urged believers to stay vigilant of “militant atheism” (“Patriarkh Kirill sravnivaet nyneshnie napadki” 2012). The pro-establishment journalist Maxim Shevchenko justified his indignation about Pussy Riot by rehashing Samuel Huntington’s idea of the ‘clash of civilizations’. Shevchenko (2012) called the ‘punk prayer’ “an invasion of the front-line squadrons of liberal Western civilization into the personal life of millions of Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Georgians and Armenians”. Protest, such was the sub-text of these statements, was the business of un-religious and un-patriotic souls.

There is evidence that the Western interpretations of the ‘punk prayer’ had a share in furthering this dynamic. We already pointed out that Western media transported almost exclusively the image of a struggle of freedom of opinion and artistic expression versus religious conservatism and political autocracy. Why were Western media—and the Western public—so overtly receptive to this way of telling the story, whereas the other way—the religious interpretation—passed virtually unnoticed? We attempt to give an answer by drawing on an instructive debate that has taken place between authorities in the field of religious and political

thought under the heading *Is Critique Secular?* (Asad et al. 2009). The exchange is instructive, because it revolves around the question of the extent to which academic and public debates in the West operate with the preconception that only secular reasons can be valid reasons in political argument (Mahmood 2008). We find it useful to pick out the article by Talal Asad who identified a kind of ‘heroism’ in those forms of critical attitude that equate critique with secular rationality (Asad 2008). His ironic observation is instructive in our context: did Western media, a part of the Russian public, and, after a certain point, maybe even the protagonists themselves not identify Pussy Riot as heroines of secular rationality engaged in a struggle against religious backwardness? Yet, the ‘punk prayer’ contained elements of an alternative notion of criticism that differs from the secular conception of critique. This alternative form of critique was extremely unsettling for the Russian political and ecclesiastical authorities, who therefore did everything to frame the protest in the habitual friend–enemy categories of ‘Russian’ (i.e. ‘Orthodox’) versus ‘militant secularists’ and ‘front-line squadrons of Western liberal civilization’. It was also unsettling for secular and liberal observers who preferred to interpret the event in the habitual categories of ‘repressive government’ vs. ‘liberal (anarchical) protest group’. It was, finally, unsettling for Orthodox believers themselves, because, as Joachim Willems has pointed out in his book-length study of Pussy Riot’s ‘punk prayer’ (2013), it takes a considerable degree of self-reflexivity and readiness to enter into a theological, historical, and ethnographic observer mode vis-à-vis one’s own religious tradition in order to appreciate the novelty of the form of non-secular critique spelled out by the ‘punk prayer’.

### **Religious freedom**

The fact that the ‘punk prayer’ eventually came to be seen as an exclusively secular act of hostility against religious believers also had a decisive impact on the way in which the human right of religious freedom has been defined in the present Russian context. The legal debate during the trial set two competing rights claims against each other: the right of freedom of artistic expression and the ‘right’ of believers not to have their religious sensibilities offended. We put the second right in inverted commas because, strictly speaking, no such right exists in international human rights documents (for a discussion of positive religious freedom in the human rights framework, see Bielefeldt 2010); however, it is important to be aware of how and why religious actors in Russia invoked it. Religious commentators in Russia called the action by the punk musicians ‘a sacrilege’ (*koshchunstvo*) and ‘blasphemy’ (*bogokhul’stvo*) (ROC 2012;

Radio Ekho Moskvyy 2012). What the new law codifies as offence, however, is something different, namely ‘moral harm’. Saba Mahmood has pointed out that the sense of moral harm or offence experienced by the believer who finds his/her religion caricatured is

quite distinct from [what] the notion of blasphemy encodes. The notion of moral injury [...] entails a sense of violation, but this violation emanates not from the judgment that the ‘law’ has been transgressed but from the perception that one’s being, grounded as it is in a relationship [with the divine], has been shaken. (Mahmood 2009, 72)

The legal codification of ‘moral harm’ complicates established ways of balancing the principles of free speech and freedom of religion. In the international human rights documents, this balance is usually spelled out in an individualist-collectivist key. The so-called limitation clauses (Comma 2 of Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights and Article 29 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) express the principle that individual rights may be subject to restrictions for reasons of collectivity (public safety, order, health or morals). What should not be threatened by the exercise of an individual right is ‘society’ as a whole. The Constitution of the Russian Federation contains a similar paragraph, according to which fundamental rights can be limited “to protect the foundations of the constitutional system, morality and the health, rights and legal interests of other individuals, or of ensuring the country’s defence and the state’s security” (Article 55-3). Such legal arrangements have historically led to the accommodation of majority religious traditions.

However, in today’s conflicts over offensive speech and moral harm, we no longer have a conflict of individual free speech against a collective sense of morality. What we get instead is two individual rights brought into confrontation with another: the right of free speech and the ‘right’ of freedom from moral harm. In passing a new law about the defence of the religious feelings of the citizens of the Russian Federation, the Russian legislator introduced a precarious and ambivalent category of the right-holding citizen—the citizen, who, as Mahmood puts it, finds that his/her ‘being, grounded as it is in a relationship [with the divine], has been shaken’ by some action judged to be offensive. As a consequence, the balance between the right to freedom of expression and the ‘right’ not to have one’s beliefs offended was no longer treated as a question of a right and its limitations, but as a battle between opposing and irreconcilable rights claims.

For religious communities themselves, the clash of individual rights has problematic consequences. As Kenan Malik has stressed in a comment with regard to Muslims and Sikhs, which is equally relevant to Russia,

The struggle to define certain beliefs or thoughts as offensive or blasphemous is a struggle to establish power within a community and to establish one voice as representative or authentic of that community. What is called offence to a community is in reality usually a debate within a community—but in viewing that debate as a matter of offence or of blasphemy, one side gets instantly silenced. (Malik 2012)

As conservative religious actors begin to frame their claims in the language of individual rights (the positive right of religious freedom), moderate or liberal groups inside these communities are side-lined. Religious communities are turned “into homogenous, distinct, authentic groups, composed of people all speaking with a single voice, all driven by a single understanding of their faith” (ibid). As Malik (2012) points out: “Once authenticity is so defined, then only the most conservative, reactionary figures come to be seen as the true voices of those communities.” The Pussy Riot case clearly took on such a dynamic.

### **After Pussy Riot: from power-conforming to power-disturbing configuration**

As a result of the Pussy Riot trial, the category of the religious believer has been narrowed down to the group of the ‘offended’, protest has been side-lined as ‘secular’ (liberal, Western), and the human right of religious freedom has been defined in a way that stands in stark contrast with international human rights debates on individual religious freedom. In that sense one can say that the moment of instability caused by the ‘punk prayer’ was quickly resolved into a power-conforming configuration where the Russian State and the Russian Orthodox Church stood together in defence of believers who were ‘threatened’ by ‘immoral secular liberal activists supported by the West’. In that regard one can agree with Rachel Schroeder and Vyacheslav Karpov that “the punk band and its act have been extremely helpful in providing a unique opportunity for affirming the emerging norm of desecularising Russia. Paraphrasing Voltaire, *if Pussy Riot did not exist, they would need to be invented.*” (Schroeder and Vyacheslav Karpov 2013, 305, emphasis in original)

Since the ‘punk-prayer’, the feelings of believers have become a topical issue. In the context of this article, two cases are of particular relevance, because, just like Pussy Riot, they involved the performing arts, although in their more traditional forms. These two cases were, first, the stage performance of “Tannhäuser” in Novosibirsk in 2015 and, second, the movie *Matilda* (director Alexei Uchitel) in 2017. These cases entailed the very same dynamics that had crystallised around Pussy Riot’s ‘punk prayer’.

In 2015, the Novosibirsk State Theatre scheduled a modern production of Richard Wagner’s opera “Tannhäuser”. In this version of the opera, the hero Tannhäuser is presented as a film director with a project about the

unknown years of the life of Jesus Christ. The fictitious film included an on-stage display of ‘temptations of love and pleasure’ and a striking poster depicting a crucifix between a naked woman’s legs. The scenes were quickly branded as being blasphemous and offensive by local Orthodox authorities. Official charges were filed against the play’s director Timofei Kuliabin and the theatre manager Boris Mezdrich and they were both removed from their posts.

The charges of offending religious feelings brought against the opera production of “Tannhäuser” by the Metropolitan of Novosibirsk and Berdsk followed the well-known scheme of branding critique or disrespect of the Church as foreign, as insulting to “the feelings of all conscientious citizens of Russia” and as aimed at destroying “norms of traditional Russian morality” (“Dokument dnia” 2015). As in the Pussy Riot case, the charges were put forward in the name of believers who again appeared as a monolithic group united by the feeling of being offended. These believers appealed—through the Church (the Metropolitan)—to the State, which was supposed to defend them.

In 2017, protest erupted over the movie *Matilda*, a romanticised biopic of the love affair of the future Tsar Nicholas II with the ballet dancer Matilda Kschessinka. The film’s drama covers the time span of 1890–1896 and does not touch Nicholas II’s rule or death, when, along with his family, he was killed by Bolsheviks in 1918. The whole family was canonised by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1981 and by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000. Even before reaching Russian cinemas, the film about the last Tsar’s pre-marital affair stirred heated controversies. Conservative Orthodox believers called the film ‘blasphemous’ because the pre-release trailer showed the Russian ruler and future saint in sex scenes and emotional turmoil over his romantic love for the ballet dancer (for both cases, see the brief description in Verkhovsky 2017).

The *Matilda* case introduced a new dynamic into the configuration that we described in relation to the ‘punk prayer’ and “Tannhäuser”. The offended believers, who in the previous cases had huddled under the protective wing of the Russian State prosecutor, started to act on their own—to the point of an open confrontation with State and Church authorities. Natalia Poklonskaia, Duma deputy and self-proclaimed leader of the anti-*Matilda* protests, threatened that those who watched the film would be banned from taking holy communion (“Poklonskaia zaiavila” 2017). In August 2017, an obscure extremist group called “Christian State—Holy Rus” sent letters to film distributors threatening to set on fire movie theatres that showed *Matilda* (Ufimtseva 2017). On 4 September 2017, a man actually tried to set a large movie theatre in Ekaterinburg on fire by ramming the entrance with a car full of gas balloons and exploding his vehicle. The media called the man simply “a *Matilda* opponent” (“Protivnik ‘Matil’dy’” 2017).

In the *Matilda* case, the offended believers stopped being the ‘silent majority’ under the supervision and protection of the State. They became a ‘shouting minority’ which turned into a headache for both secular and Church authorities. Church authorities started to distance themselves from the “too-much-offended believers”, insisting that they were not true believers but “pseudo-religious radicals” (“Legoida” 2017). Secular authorities arrested the violent protesters under terrorism charges and guaranteed safe viewing of the film in Russian cinemas. Only five years after Pussy Riot, the power-conforming configuration of the Orthodox believer had revealed its power-disturbing potential. When Church and State authorities had to defend *Matilda* against ‘too-much-offended believers’, they themselves became agents of immorality—in the eyes of most conservative believers—according to the very logic that had so aptly been crafted during the Pussy Riot case.

## Conclusion

What has become clear from our analysis is that the outcome of the Pussy Riot conflict in 2012 has had a decisive impact on the way in which religion, critique, and human rights have been defined in the present Russian context. The trial of the Pussy Riot members led to an overall closure of the religious and political debate: it narrowed down the category of the ‘truly Orthodox’ religious believer; it limited the repertoire of critique and branded protest as secular, liberal, and Western-influenced; it introduced a problematic definition of the religious rights-holding citizen which jeopardized legal even-handedness in cases of competing rights claims. This general pattern has been re-enacted and indeed amplified in further cases of Orthodox protests against the opera “Tannhäuser” and against the movie *Matilda*. The last case shows the unexpected development of this configuration, as it gradually turned into a factor not of stabilisation but of destabilisation.

The *Matilda* scandal suggests—and future controversies about Article 148 may eventually confirm—that the stress on the inviolability of religious feelings turns religious communities into the always offended ‘Other’ whom it is better to avoid rather than to engage in public discussions and interactions. A policy of inclusion and recognition, like the protection of religious feelings, has led to opposite results: a further radicalisation and exclusion of religious groups which have transformed themselves into dangerous Others by silencing moderate and reasonable voices among them. This is dangerous not only for artistic self-expression, but also for the state and social order itself.

The Russian and the global discussion of the Pussy Riot case, of “Tannhäuser”, and of *Matilda* show, in our opinion, that the modern reflex

to turn everything into a case of a transparent and taken-for-granted religious–secular divide (see Alcoff and Caputo 2011, 2) blocks us from seeing that, in the contemporary postsecular situation, this very divide becomes an issue of permanent contestations. What is religious and what is secular? Where are the boundaries between them and how to draw them accurately? Who is a believer? The answers to these questions are not fixed, but open to numerous interpretations. What is considered as a clear religious–secular divide could turn out to be an important line of struggle that runs *between* different forms of beliefs or different groups of believers. Inability to see this could act in favour of the most conservative and anti-liberal/anti-democratic forces. It helps them to silence their opponents and keep their hegemonic positions inside their communities: voices from inside religious communities turn into alien voices from outside of them. It conceals the internal pluralism of both the secular and the religious arenas.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Funding

The authors acknowledge receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: this work was initially supported by the Austrian Science Fund (grant number Y919-G22). From May 2016, this publication has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (POSEC, grant agreement no. ERC-STG-2015-676804).

### Notes on contributors

*Dmitry Uzlaner* holds a PhD in philosophy and religious studies from M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University. He is a Research Fellow at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES) and at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA). He is editor-in-chief of the journal *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov v Rossii i za rubezhom*. Since 2016, he has been part of the five-year international research project on “Postsecular Conflicts” (ERC-STG-2015-676804) at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. He has published numerous articles on theoretical aspects of secularisation and postsecularity in both Russian and global contexts.

*Kristina Stoeckl* is Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, and Principal Investigator of the research project “POSEC” (ERC-STG-2015-676804). Her research focuses on religion, secularisation, and politics in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church, and normative political theory. She has published *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (2014) and is the editor, with Ingeborg Gabriel and Aristotle Papanikolaou, of *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity* (2017).



## ORCID

Dmitry Uzlaner  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4377-3252>

Kristina Stoeckl  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5043-2977>

## References

- Alcoff, Linda Martín, and John D. Caputo, eds. 2011. *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Asad, Talal. 2008. "Historical Notes on the Idea of Secular Criticism." *The Immanent Frame*, 15 January 2008. Accessed 13 April 2018. <https://tif.ssrc.org/2008/01/25/historical-notes-on-the-idea-of-secular-criticism>
- Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood, eds. 2009. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*. Berkeley, CA: Townsend Center for the Humanities.
- Agaltsova, Anna. 2014. "Collective Female Identities in Discussions about Pussy Riot's Performance." *Religion and Gender* 4 (2): 184–201.
- Amico, Stephen. 2016. "Digital Voices, Other Rooms: Pussy Riot's Recalcitrant (In)Corporeality." *Popular Music and Society* 39 (4): 423–447.
- Bashir, Manaf, and Maria Fedorova. 2015. "Framing the Pussy Riot between the USA and Russia." *The Journal of International Communication* 21 (1): 132–152.
- Beckford, James. 2012. "SSSR Presidential Address: Public Religions and the Postsecular—Critical Reflections." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51 (1): 1–19.
- Bielefeldt, Heiner. 2010. "Religionsfreiheit—ein 'sperriges' Menschenrecht." In *Religionen und Religionsfreiheit: Menschenrechtliche Perspektiven im Spannungsfeld*, edited by Marianne Heimbach-Steins and Heiner Bielefeldt, 19–35. Würzburg: Ergon.
- Bremer, Thomas. 2013. "The Pussy Riot Trial and the Russian Orthodox Church." *Russian Analytical Digest* 122 (4): 6–8.
- Chaplin, Protoierej Vsevolod. 2012. "Koshchunstvo u Tsarskikh vrat (Blasphemy at the Royal Gates)." *Live Journal of Vsevolod Chaplin*, 22 February 2012. Accessed 30 March 2013. <http://www.pravoslavpol.livejournal.com/8714.html>
- "Chto nuzhno znat' o 148-i stat'e UK RF (What One Should Know about Article 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation)." 2017. *Kommersant*, 11 May 2017. Accessed 13 April 2018. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3294094>
- Denysenko, Nicholas. 2013. "An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot's Punk Performance in Moscow." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (4): 1061–1092.
- "Dokument dnia: Tserkov' protiv iskusstva: chem novosibirskaja opera 'Tangeizer' oskorbila veruiushchikh (Document of the Day: The Church vs. Art. How the 'Tannhäuser' Opera in Novosibirsk Offended Believers)." *Lenta.ru*, 26 February 2015. Accessed 13 April 2018. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/02/26/tangezerdoc>
- Fordahl, Clayton. 2017. "The Post-secular: Paradigm Shift or Provocation?" *European Journal of Social Theory* 20 (4): 550–568.
- Gan, Gregory. 2015. "Soaring to Dizzying Heights: Christ the Saviour Cathedral as a Historical Arena for the Persecution of Pussy Riot." *Critique of Anthropology* 35 (2): 166–186.
- Gapova, Elena. 2015. "Becoming Visible in the Digital Age." *Feminist Media Studies* 15 (1): 18–35.

- Gessen, Masha. 2014. *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 2006. "Religion in the Public Sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy* 14 (1): 1–25.
- Johnson, Janet Elise. 2014. "Pussy Riot as a Feminist Project: Russia's Gendered Informal Politics." *Nationalities Papers* 42 (4): 583–590.
- Kananovich, Volha. 2015. "'Execute Not Pardon': The Pussy Riot Case, Political Speech, and Blasphemy in Russian Law." *Communication Law and Policy* 20 (4): 343–422.
- Kostiuchenko, Elena. 2012a. "Chetvertyi den' slushaniia dela Pussy Riot v Khamovnicheskom Sude stolitsy: Naval'nogo i Ulitskuiu doprashivat' ne stanut (The Fourth Day of the Hearing of the Pussy Riot Case at the Khamovnicheskii Court in Moscow: Naval'nyi and Ulitskaia Will Not Be Questioned)." *Novaia Gazeta*, 2 August 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/58736.html>
- Kostiuchenko, Elena. 2012b. "Tak nazyvaemyi protsess: poslednee slovo Nadezhdy Tolokonnikovoi, Marii Alekhinoi i Ekateriny Samutsevich (A So-called Trial: The Final Statements to the Court by Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Mariia Alekhina, and Ekaterina Samutsevich)." *Novaia Gazeta*, 10 August 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/53903.html>
- "Legoida." 2017. "Legoida: sviazannye s fil'mom 'Matil'da' akty nasiliia ne mogut iskhodit' ot veruiushchikh (Legoida: Acts of Violence around *Matilda* could not be Connected to Believers)." *Tass: Information Agency*, 11 September 2017. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://tass.ru/obschestvo/4553987>
- Legoida, Vladimir. 2012. "Reaktsiia na vykhodku 'Pussy Riot': eto test na zrelost' grazhdanskogo obshchestva (The Reaction to Pussy Riot's Prank is a Test of the Maturity of Civil Society)." *Pravoslavie i mir*, 7 March 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://www.pravmir.ru/vladimir-legojda-reakciya-na-vyxodku-pussy-riot-eto-test-na-zrelost-grazhdanskogo-obshchestva>
- Mahmood, Saba. 2008. "Is Critique Secular?" *The Immanent Frame*, 30 March 2008. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/03/30/is-critique-secular-2>
- Mahmood, Saba. 2009. "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide? Is Critique Secular?" In *Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, edited by Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood, 64–100. Berkeley, CA: Townsend Center for the Humanities.
- Malik, Kenan. 2012. "Beyond the Sacred." *Blog of Kenan Malik*. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://kenanmalik.wordpress.com/2012/01/29/beyond-the-sacred/#more-4777>
- Manderson, Desmond. 2013. "Making a Point and Making a Noise: A Punk Prayer." *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 12 (1): 17–28.
- Molendijk, Arien. 2015. "In Pursuit of the Postsecular." *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 76 (2): 100–115.
- Pank-moleben. 2012. "'Bogoroditsa, Putina progoni' Pussy Riot v Khrame (Khristos Spasitelia) (The 'Punk Prayer', 'Mother of God, Banish Putin': Pussy Riot in the Church [of Christ the Saviour])." *YouTube*, 21 February 2012. Accessed 5 February 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCasuaAczKY>
- Papkova, Irina. 2011. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. New York/ Washington, DC: Oxford University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Parmaksız, Umut. 2016. "Making Sense of the Postsecular." *European Journal of Social Theory* 21 (1): 98–116.
- "Patriarkh Kirill sravnivaet nyneshnie napadki." 2012. "Patriarkh Kirill sravnivaet nyneshnie napadki na Tserkov's predrevolyutsionnymi, obyasnayet ikh rostom vliyaniya pravoslaviya (Patriarch Kirill Compares Attacks on the Church with Attacks

- that Preceded the Russian Revolution and Explains them by Increasing the Influence of Orthodoxy.” *Interfax Religion*, 5 December 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/print.php?act=news&id=49146>
- “Poklonskaia zaiavila.” 2017. “Poklonaksia zaiavila ob otluchenii prikhozhan ot prichastia za ‘Matil’du’ (Poklonskaia Declared that Parishioners would be Banned from Taking the Eucharist for [Watching the Film] *Matilda*.)” *RBK*, 21 June 2017. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://www.rbc.ru/society/21/06/2017/594a43609a794777237c25d7>
- “Protivnik ‘Matil’dy.” 2017. “Protivnik ‘Matil’dy’ popytalsia vzorvat’ ekaterinburgskii kinoteatr (A *Matilda* Opponent Tried to Set a Movie Theatre on Fire in Ekaterinburg.)” *RIA56.ru*, 4 September 2017. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://ria56.ru/posts/5424584582458245.htm>
- Pussy Riot. 2012. “Krik Pussy Riot o spasenii plenennykh zhenshchin (Pussy Riot’s Cry to Save the Jailed Women).” *Live Journal of Pussy Riot*, 4 March 2012. Accessed 11 March 2012. <http://pussy-riot.livejournal.com/15189.html>
- Radio Ekho Moskvyy. 2012. “V krughe sveta.” (Transmission transcript) *Radio Ekho Moskvyy*, 4 April 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/sorokina/874996-echo/>
- ROC. 2012. “Zayavlenie Soveta pravoslavnykh obshchestvennykh obyedinenii po povodu koshchunstenvennoi aktsii v Khrame Khrista Spasitelya (Declaration of the Council of Orthodox Social Associations on the Blasphemous Performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour).” *Official Web Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 16 March 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2084470.html>
- Rogatchevski, Andrei, and Yngvar B. Steinholt. 2016. “Pussy Riot’s Musical Precursors? The National Bolshevik Party Bands, 1994–2007.” *Popular Music and Society* 39 (4): 448–464.
- Rosati, Massimo, and Kristina Stoeckl, eds. 2012. *Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate.
- Rourke, Brian, and Andrew Wiget. 2016. “Pussy Riot, Putin and the Politics of Embodiment.” *Cultural Studies* 30 (2): 234–260.
- Schroeder, Rachel L., and Vyacheslav Karpov. 2013. “The Crimes and Punishments of the ‘Enemies of the Church’ and the Nature of Russia’s Desecularising Regime.” *Religion, State & Society* 41 (3): 284–311.
- Shevchenko, Maksim. 2012. “Voina bliadei (The War of the Whores).” *Live Journal of Maxim Shevchenko*, 21 February 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://shevchenko-ml.livejournal.com/5544.html>
- Shezvov, Vera. 2014. “Women on the Fault Lines of Faith: Pussy Riot and the Insider/ Outsider Challenge to Post-Soviet Orthodoxy.” *Religion and Gender* 4 (2): 121–144.
- Skorobogatov, Alexander S. 2016. “A Provocative Event, Media, and Religious Choice in Post-Soviet Russia.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32 (6): 512–541.
- Sperling, Valerie. 2014. “Russian Feminist Perspectives on Pussy Riot.” *Nationalities Papers* 42 (4): 591–603.
- Steinholt, Yngvar B., and David-Emil Wickström. 2016. “The Pussy Riot Complex: Entering a New Stage of Academic Research into a Viral Russian Controversy.” *Popular Music and Society* 39 (4): 393–395.
- Stoeckl, Kristina. 2014. *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*. London: Routledge.
- Storch, Leonid. 2013. “The Pussy Riot Case.” *Russian Politics & Law* 51 (6): 8–44.
- “Sud nad Pussy Riot.” 2012. “Sud nad Pussy Riot: svidetelei zashchity ne puskauiut v zdanie, u politseiskogo epilepticheskii pripadok (The Pussy Riot Trial: Witnesses for the Defence Not Allowed into the Building—Epileptic Seizure at the Police Station).”

- Gazeta.ru*, 3 August 2012. Accessed 13 April 2018. [http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2012/08/03/n\\_2467017.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2012/08/03/n_2467017.shtml)
- Taylor, Charles. 2015. "What Does Secularism Mean?" *Gosudarstvo, religia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 33 (1): 218–253.
- Teivainen, Teivo. 2014. "Girls by the Church: Construction of a Pussy Riot Event in Finland as a Threat to Russian Gender Roles and Sexual Norms." *Religion and Gender* 4 (2): 209–214.
- Tolstaya, Katya. 2014. "Stained Glasses and Coloured Lenses: The Pussy Riot Case as a Critical Issue for Multidisciplinary Scholarly Investigations." *Religion and Gender* 4 (2): 100–120.
- Ufimtseva, Ksenia. 2017. "Pravoslavnye aktivisty vnov' ugrozhaiut podzhech' kinoteatry iz-za prokata 'Matil'dy' (Orthodox Activists Once Again Threaten to set Film Theatres on Fire for Showing *Matilda*)." *Internet-gazeta ZNAK*, 26 August 2017. Accessed 13 April 2018. [https://www.znak.com/2017-08-26/pravoslavnye\\_aktivisty\\_vnov\\_ugroz\\_hayut\\_podzhech\\_kinoteatry\\_iz\\_za\\_prokata\\_matildy](https://www.znak.com/2017-08-26/pravoslavnye_aktivisty_vnov_ugroz_hayut_podzhech_kinoteatry_iz_za_prokata_matildy)
- Uzlaner, Dmitry. 2014. "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Postsecularism." *State, Religion and Church* 1 (1): 23–58.
- Vaissié, Cécile. 2014. "Black Robe, Golden Epaulettes: From the Russian Dissidents to Pussy Riot." *Religion and Gender* 4 (2): 166–183.
- Verkhovsky, Alexander, ed. 2017. *Freedom of Conscience in Russia: Restrictions and Challenges in 2016*. Moscow: SOVA Center for Information and Analysis. Accessed 13 April 2018. <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/2017/05/d36996>
- Wiedlack, Katharina. 2015. "Pussy Riot and the Western Gaze: Punk Music, Solidarity and the Production of Similarity and Difference." *Popular Music and Society* 39 (4): 410–422.
- Wiedlack, Katharina, and Nasha Neufeld. 2014. "Lost in Translation? Pussy Riot Solidary Activism and the Danger of Perpetuating North/Western Hegemonies." *Religion and Gender* 4 (2): 145–165.
- Willems, Joachim. 2013. *Pussy Riot und ihr Punk-Gebet: Religion, Recht und Politik in Russland*. Berlin: Berlin Verlag.
- Willems, Joachim. 2014. "Why 'Punk'? Religion, Anarchism and Feminism in Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer." *Religion, State & Society* 42 (4): 403–419.
- Yablokov, Ilya. 2014. "Pussy Riot as Agent Provocateur: Conspiracy Theories and the Media Construction of Nation in Putin's Russia." *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 42 (4): 622–636.
- Zguta, Russell. 1978. *Russian Minstrels: A History of Skomorokhi*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.