

This article appeared in:

Kondakov, A. (2019). Rethinking the sexual citizenship from queer and post-Soviet perspectives: Queer urban spaces and the right to the socialist city. *Sexualities*, 22(3), 401–417.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717737770>

Rethinking the sexual citizenship from queer and post-Soviet perspectives: Queer urban spaces and the right to the socialist city

Alexander Kondakov

Abstract

In this article, I use the analysis of citizenship regimes and their revolutionary changes as a point of departure to offer an improvement of the notion of grassroots politics. The focus of the article is on queer citizenship as it evolved in alternative modernity that the USSR conditioned. Immediately after the October Revolution, the new government deliberately proclaimed a new sexual freedom and rearranged the material conditions of living in urban areas of the country. This resulted in unexpected changes of practice, one of which is the multiplication of public space. Contrary to conventional forms of politics, Soviet queer politics was reallocated to parallel urban spaces. This analysis allows one to address the particular relations between one's sexuality and political participation, citizenship and materiality, market economy and revolutions.

Keywords Citizenship, politics, queer, Russia, urban spaces

This article is based on a theoretical assumption that Soviet modernity represented a different kind of sociality that produced its own social institutions and that influenced life experiences in the USSR and current Russia. I argue that one of these particular institutions is grassroots politics, which has been differently organized in comparison to conventional political participation of citizens in the 'West'. [401] One possible way of showing this particularity is to analyse how queer politics is performed in today's Russia. As I have argued before (Kondakov, 2013: 410–411), Russian LGBT activism has been quite successful in breaking the silence that has surrounded the issues of sexuality in the country: in the 2000s, its second wave of activities greatly contributed to the reinterpretation of homosexuality in terms of human rights and citizenship.¹ However, no evidence exists so far that these efforts meet positive response from the queer people on the ground, neither are they supported by state bureaucracy whose opposition is articulated in homophobic laws such as the ban of 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations'. As I will show further, queer people's response is rather hostile to institutionalized LGBT activists. The

central question is then: What theoretical insights can the views of queer Russians offer in order to improve our understanding of politics and to conceptually queer citizenship?

In May 2006, two contrasting events related to homosexuality took place in Russia. One was that the parliament of the Ryazan region adopted the first law against 'gay propaganda' in Russia. The other was that a new politically and human-rights oriented LGBT movement emerged as the first gay pride parade was held in Moscow.² Attempts to legalize discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation had occurred throughout the post-Soviet period, as well as sporadic and, at times, sustained instances of solidarity in struggles for gay and lesbian rights. However, 2006 proved crucial in terms of both currents: the notorious 'gay propaganda' ban has been federal law since the summer of 2013 (see, Muravyeva, 2014; Wilkinson, 2014), while gay pride events are held every year. They are violently oppressed by the police, but at the same time are gaining more and more support from LGBT organizations in various cities throughout Russia. What is most striking about this situation is that few Russian queers are visibly involved in either process. The laws against 'gay propaganda' are enforced against a handful of gay activists or media and seem to be irrelevant to the everyday lives of queer people in general. Gay pride events draw no more than a few participants and seem to elicit no positive feedback from the Russian queers.

In 2013, the New York-based Russian artist Yevgeniy Fiks published a book entitled *Moscow*. The book is a collection of photographs of public spaces in the Russian capital: cafes, parks, squares, railway stations and public toilets. Readers are not allowed to see anything happening in these public spaces, any passers-by or habitués. However, some people did once frequent these spaces, even though we do not see them on the images. They were the invisible citizens of the Soviet Union: the queers. All these squares and parks were places of a thematic urban lesbian and gay subculture in the USSR. Under each photograph in the book, there is a short caption with the name and dates of the use of the place as a significant space of belonging to the subculture. The dates start from the 1920s and end in the 1980s. This collection supplies an alternative image of the oppressive Soviet regime by depicting the sites of a subculture deemed to have had no space in the Soviet Union and – eventually – in post-Soviet Russia (cf. Nartova, 2008; Stella, 2015). In my article, I propose to relate these urban subcultural spaces to political activism of a [402] special sort: I argue that the study of these spaces enriches the nuanced understanding of politics produced by the Soviet alternative modernity. Moreover, the legacy of this politics can be found in current situations, even though the conditions have significantly changed and the spaces transformed.

To put it another way, this article offers a contribution to enhancement of the theory of sexual citizenship from the post-Soviet and queer perspectives, which could be relevant not only to

analysis of the former USSR contexts, but in other social spaces as well. I take material landscape of post-Soviet cities as a point of departure for rethinking citizenship, informed by historically conditioned circumstances of precarity, mutual dependence and oppression. The material spaces become sites of resistance, as well as sources of transformation in the situation of alternative modernity that evolved after the Great October Revolution in Russia. I propose to look at evolution of material spaces in order to see how these become grounds of politicization and enactment of the grassroots politics. I argue that this resulted in the production of a specific queer political subject, who is represented through the analysed narratives of people in this article.

I offer this theoretical argument, informed by interviews, in three parts. First, I outline the framework of reading citizenship as a political process related to the material urban spaces we all inhabit. I want to show how material conditions and individual practices of resistance may be regarded as mutually constituting for one another and eventually expressed in the idea of citizenship as practice of grassroots politics. I argue for certain points of improvement of this theory from the post-Soviet and queer perspectives. In the second section, I offer an analysis of secondary sources on experiences of marginalized sexualities in the Soviet Union in order to identify possible paths for interpretations of the empirical material from today's Russia as those historical circumstances condition the Soviet legacy in the current situation. The Soviet alternative modernity provides a perspective with which to look at social relations differently and imagine new ways of understanding the situation of today. The last section is based on analysis of my own empirical qualitative study of the everyday lives of queers that illustrates the work of the proposed theoretical idea. The article deals with the practices of the urban sexualized subcultures and does not offer answers to other related problems. Nevertheless, I consider the issue crucial to an explanation of the relation between the intimate, on the one hand, and political, on the other.

The interviews that I will use to advance my theoretical argument were conducted by me in 2011–2014. I am also inspired by three interviews that were taken by the students of the European University at St Petersburg where I taught a course on 'Queer Theory', though I am not directly using these interviews in the analysis. My interviews included group discussions and biographical narratives. Overall, 48 interviewees were involved. The informants were contacted through Russian dating websites, and then they were invited for a talk. The criterion of eligibility for the interview was that the person had to have searched for a same-sex partner on the websites used for recruitment. All the interviews lasted more than one hour. A deeper discourse analysis of this material was published in other articles (Kondakov, 2012, 2014b). Here [403] I address these interviews as a source of intellectual inspiration and valuable accounts from the queer Russians. I also contextualize my own life experience as a gay person in Russia with these other stories which

all sound intimate and comprehensive to me, yet sometimes controversial or resulting in rejection from myself having a different vision of the situation from my own perspective.

Citizenship and the right to the city

A brief outline of the idea of citizenship will help to position this notion as a process of negotiation of citizenship regimes³ by various forces (state apparatus, citizens, the market and other contributors). In this article, a central example of this process is the struggle for subcultural spaces in the common urban environment that queer citizens claim for themselves (Hubbard, 2001). I suggest regarding it as political performative acts, accomplished by those excluded from the (hetero)sexualized regime of citizenship (Richardson, 1998) in the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia, the marginalized queer sexualities. This process produces spaces that locate queer subjects (Essig, 1999: 83–84) and politics in today's Russia. Hence, the central idea of the article is citizenship as it is manifested by access to, use and politicization of public spaces. Apart from queer theorizing such an approach is developed in Crip Theory (McRuer, 2006) and other critical thinking ideas related to material space.

Citizenship theory makes important connection between individual political subjects and the discursive arrangements of state ideologies and power relations. In this sense, the process of citizenship negotiations appears as exchange of power relations and resistance that involves collective protest and political participation, but also (re)production of docile citizens such as those who were theorized by Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai regarding queer sexualities, race and homonormative discursive regimes (2002). The state bureaucracy controls institutions that govern different dimensions of the expression of citizenship (Turner, 2001). However, other forces (such as the market or activists) also contribute to the creation of a particular configuration of a citizenship regime, however monopolistic a state intended to be. In any of its readings, citizenship turns out to be a disciplinary discourse that offers subjection to a prearranged set of norms and ideologies. Yet, like any disciplinary regime, it is resistible (Foucault, 1983: 245).

The Acts of resistance are usually viewed as being in the liberal tradition of claiming for rights and inclusion into 'full' citizenship (Turner, 1990: 206–207). Engin Isin argues that 'acts of citizenship', which are represented by resistance to its a priori existing configuration, are creative acts that produce new forms and new political subjects of struggles (Isin, 2008: 38–39). Hence, the usual representation of an activist citizen would take on such acts as street rallies, group public protest movements or introducing demands to public (state) institutions. For example, having in mind the 'western' idea of politics, the authors of the 'acts of citizenship' depicted active citizens as street-protesters or activists organized in particular forms [404] of groups (Isin, 2008). This

notion of politics seems to be inadequate for the situation in the USSR, where claiming rights publicly was not the sort of politics Soviet sexual citizens could practice unproblematically owing to safety reasons or other concerns (Essig, 1999: 81; Stella, 2015: 97). Moreover, Occupy Wall Street in the USA puzzled observers in the very same direction as Judith Butler pointed out in her commentary (Butler, 2015: 10).

The discussion of the forms of politics that people practise may enrich the idea of citizenship, and the Soviet past relates to this issue very well. Urban experience productive of political subjects may be seen as being crucial in this regard. Resistance is associated with a local dimension of social struggles, which David Harvey relates to the organization of the life of the city itself (2012: 117). Cities provide spaces for resistance and grounds for deprivation, as they become the sites of a specific urban experience, including both oppression and collective responses to it. Harvey labels practices of resistance as anti-capitalist rebellious expressions of discontent, though I think the right to the city is relevant in the context of the socialist urban environment, too, as its substantial ground relates rather to uneven redistribution of power, than uneven redistribution of economic power – or capitalism – per se.

The right to the city includes conscious recognition of one's dissatisfaction from restriction of access to citizenship rights, expressed in limits to the everyday urban life, and subsequent active involvement in creating an alternative urban experience and alternative urban material spaces, where the right to the city is performed without obstacles from the part of the powerful (Harvey, 2012: x). In this regard, citizenship 'is the right to access and use specific kinds of space' (Hubbard, 2001: 54), which is sometimes denied to the unwanted subjects, including queers. Urban spaces become sites of resistance to such a configuration of restricted citizenship, resistance practised through occupation and gaining the 'right to spaces for subcultural life' (Stychin, 2003: 17). Such spaces are locations of queerness produced by queer political subjects and they represent new modes of subcultural affiliation that goes beyond normalized forms of the use of public space (Halberstam, 2005: 154). It is precisely these spaces that were described in relation to Soviet and early post-Soviet urban environment by Laurie Essig:

Queers gather secretly in public places – secret because their queerness is unacknowledged. Sometimes queerness is seen. Queerness can speak loud enough to get the public's attention ... Queer subjectivities constitute that space of the human collectivity in which sexual otherness is represented by self-speaking subjects and dreamed and even desired by those who do not or cannot speak as queers. (Essig, 1999: 83–84)

I regard such urban spaces in the USSR as sites of peculiar political Acts of resistance, where grassroots politics was queered and where struggles for reconfiguration of citizenship were performed. These acts of queer citizenship were not conscious in a full sense as they were queer enough to disengage from standard ideas of [405] purposeful and goal-oriented protest, constituting instead a set of performative political acts by the very practice of queerness. Soviet queer spaces, then, are those urban locations that produced a particular grassroots politics by occupying a space with queer bodies.

Now I want to illustrate the theoretical ideas with an archaeological analysis of Soviet citizenship regimes in relation to the use of urban space. I believe that the experience of state socialism in the Soviet Union may be useful in updating citizenship theory as some of the events are relevant for liberal democracies today, though they are less evident outside this comparison.

Citizenship regimes in alternative modernity

In 1917, Russian monarchy rule was interrupted by the Great Socialist October Revolution that began an alternative project of modernity in Russia (Krylova, 2014). This novel path featured a number of differently organized (in comparison to capitalism) social processes and institutions, including citizenship, politics and sexuality. In this article, I focus on the process of production of queer spaces as acts of grassroots politics without paying attention to a variety of other topics related to this (legal or institutional changes, for example). I will show how the process of making these spaces political evolved in three steps:⁴ (1) making of all material spaces public (1917–1934), (2) enacting monopole political control over public expressions (1934–mid-1950s), and (3) division of public space into two parts (mid-1950s–1991).

As John D’Emilio (1993) argues, homosexual identity is related to the development of capitalism. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the urban homosexual subculture was commercialized in tsarist Russia which was developing its version of capitalism: bathhouses with voluntary or paid male homosexual sex-services and other forms of commercial sex were those capitalistic possibilities that withered away after the Revolution. Thus, public bathhouses and bars were reassigned to state supervision (Healey, 2002: 426), and sex in exchange for money was considered alien to socialists and condemned by the Soviet courts as early as in 1922 despite male homosexuality being decriminalized in 1917 (Healey, 2008: 163). For the homosexual urban spaces, this situation entailed emergence of grounds of politicization: gathering on city squares and in parks for casual acquaintance could (first, in principle, then on practice) bring the possibility of an accusation of anti-socialist behaviour. In this sense, the Soviet government conditioned

reasons of resistance while re-signifying subcultural spaces from sites of sexual exchange to places of politics.

Moreover, material conditions of cohabitation in the Soviet cities dramatically changed with the new policy of housing that introduced communal apartments as a popular accommodation. The state bureaucracy took control over private houses in order to lodge other people into – from then on – common apartment spaces. In terms of sexuality, this change brought about ‘a romance with the collective, [406] unfaithful to both communitarian mythologies and traditional family values’ (Boym, 1994: 123). Sexual relations were possible there, but an always-present eye of an observer and impossibility of privacy structured these relations. Homosexuality became observable as an actual practice. The communal apartments can be considered as signs of elimination of the private: there is only public left, and so the private was forced to the political. Scholars relate this practice of living together to a specific form of social control undertaken by the Soviet authority and society (Boym, 1994: 125; Kharkhordin, 1999: 297; Utekhin, 2004: 116), as well as to a sort of negotiation of space that communal living entailed (Yurchak, 2005: 148). What is important in terms of transformation of material space under socialism is that communal apartments (together with reassignment of all organizations and land to the bureaucratic administration) marked the beginning of dominance of public space as expressed in the material urban experiences in the USSR. This was the first step in providing conditions to politicization of queer urban spaces: all material space became public space.

Because of the statist approach to a definition of citizenship that is characterized by hostility to diversity of opinions, it was considerably easy for the state authorities to impose significant constraints on the 1920s’ revolutionary sexual freedoms when they decided to do so (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2003: 28). In 1934, voluntary male homosexual intercourse was re-criminalized, many other constraints related to sexuality and gender were laid by the Party enacting a discursive regime of ‘sexual anorexia’ (Naiman, 1997: 224). Eric Naiman analyses the mechanism of Soviet governance via the silencing of particular sexualities and concludes that this was an integral part of Soviet ideology: ‘Excess fat became all fat; promiscuity became any sexual behavior; excessive pleasure became any pleasure – all in the name of exerting “inward” control’ (Naiman, 1997: 224). In the 1930s, there were mass arrests of queer Soviets, who were accused of counter-revolutionary conspiracy (Healey, 2008: 223) and who then added to the numbers enlarging Gulag prisons (Kozlovsky, 1986: 155).

Definition of material spaces as solely public was already dominating Soviet social relations through reconfiguration of living conditions and urban landscapes, whereas legal and political

innovations of 1930s aimed at redefinition of public expressions. The government's objectives can be understood as attempts to take control over the processes of thinking and speaking, to define what is allowed and what is prohibited to express by criminalizing and marginalizing certain actions and ideas. This monopolization of power by a single actor turned everything into politics. So long as the Communist Party took responsibility for ideology, sexual behaviour, industry, science and so on, any disagreement with how these spheres were managed or any criticism were considered political dissent doomed to persecution (Fehervary, 2009: 430–431). I offer to regard this process as the second step in the course of conditioning queer political spaces of resistance. [407]

Finally, the third step came about from the part of the oppressed as they produced alternative urban queer spaces on their own. The continuous survival of urban public spaces as sites of sexual encounter under the pressure of criminal law and psychiatric medicine is a remarkable example of how the intimate and personal becomes political. Despite the criminalization of male homosexuality and medicalization of female homosexuality, Soviet queer cruising spaces in cities were not abandoned: Dan Healey collected information about parks and boulevards favoured by queers in Moscow (2008: 259–260). Moreover, such spaces – for male and female ‘thematic’ use – show continuous survival throughout the late Soviet period⁵ as awareness of them spread among the Soviet queers via social networking. This suggests that the law and medical persecution against male and female homosexual relations were – at least to some extent – resisted. These queer spaces represent an effect of monopolization of material public space – its totalitarian definition (Floyd, 2009: 4) – as they suggest emergence of alternative spaces that are free from total control, despite attempts to monopolize space overall. As Viktor Voronkov and Elena Chikadze put it, ‘parallel with the official-public sphere there came into being another public sphere’ in the USSR (2003: 243).

In the official-public space, citizens were expected to express exaggerated demonstrations of loyalty and commitment (marches in support of the Communist Party); they were supposed to appear as docile patriots. In opposition to this space, there emerged alternative materiality of urban environment inhabited by the invisible citizens pictured in the images of Yevgeniy Fiks' *Moscow* (2013): queer subjects appeared there without embodying their appearance. In this parallel public space, many alternative ways of life were acceptable and normalized as I will show later. Moreover, it was the space for civil disobedience – a political act of resistance to the promoted modes of conduct. This situation is crucial for understanding Soviet citizens' seemingly conformist conduct as a grassroots politics. It is due to the citizens' creative

use of urban space that the alternative materiality was produced while they reclaimed public spaces for their own use.

I offer to understand the alternative public space as a location of political movement in the USSR. Underneath the official surface, there were silent political struggles and revolutions going on without appearing visible or intelligible. Thus, researchers argue that one's queer intimate life could be organized there and contribute to the silent sexual revolution (Rotkirch, 2002: 453; Stella, 2015). Kozlovsky's (1986) interviews give a rich ground for arguing for a very well-established urban queer subculture in the USSR of the 1960s–1970s. Soviet big cities had a varied infrastructure of queer spaces: some people could be met only in squares and parks, others preferred to engage in commercial sex and worked close to international hotels, and there were those who never appeared in the outdoors, but frequented ballet and opera shows. A fuller picture of the Soviet homosexual subculture should also involve the relations in other semi-private spaces, such as communal apartments. It seemed that Soviet citizens managed to negotiate their own relations of living side by side with strangers and loved ones, tending not to engage state officials in the process of this negotiation. One of my informants [408] recalled his continuous same-sex relationship in a communal apartment inhabited by his partner's mother and other occasional residents:

His mother came and started to make me go, but he said no. She said that she would call the police and so forth, well, but he said, "No, he'll stay with us." "He'll stay with us", so I stayed. I stayed there for a long time. (Born 1942)

In this story, the threat to call the police was ignored, perhaps because during this period state officials followed the rules of the alternative public space along with other citizens, when enforcing the law. This meant the elaboration of personal norms and standards, networking and neglecting to obey official legal prescriptions. In relation to queer sexuality, this is well illustrated by the interaction of state officials and members of the queer subculture in the urban public spaces: basing his information on his interviews, Kozlovsky claims that state officials and KGB agents knew about these spaces, but did not intervene (1986: 156, 213). This situation resulted in a seemingly strange opinion voiced by one of my informants, who believed that in the Soviet Union homosexuality was legal:⁶

There was no, there was no, no such a statute [in the Penal Code], guys. Look closer at it: sodomy wasn't there. Only if something was committed in public, so to speak, if it was in your room, then it's your fortress. If it doesn't go outside, if it doesn't offend, and so on ... There was no such a clause; nobody was jailed for this, if it was peaceful and quiet. (Born 1942)

This person differentiated public from private by claiming that what did not ‘offend’ public opinion was not considered public, even if it took place in materially public spaces, such as city parks. Thus, the sites of the urban queer subculture represented occupied city spaces that could be defined and redefined at the moment of their use, becoming public or private contextually. They were political in the sense of the politics produced by the Soviet alternative modernity: paradoxically, they were spaces where politics was denied along with the state’s monopoly over politics. The people who gathered on the squares to disobey the law against homosexual intercourse were rearranging city spaces without making actual demands to the government, not only because these demands would not be heard, but because they opted for disobedience and indifference to the state’s power over their lives.

This silent sexual revolution resulted in a vocal sexual revolution during the second half of the 1980s, when sexualities were articulated in the official discussions owing to a decrease in censorship and control (Gessen, 1994: 33; Kon, 1997: 118, 368–372). Finally, the state collapsed, an event I regard as the third revolution and an evident result of those acts of citizenship that Soviet people massively performed in the alternative public space. This is the crucial effect of Soviet grassroots politics. Citizens willingly accepted the breakdown of their state, because they had already experienced it before in their everyday practice of disobedience. The public spaces of the urban homosexual subculture represent only one example of many others: cafes [409] for alternative subcultures, ‘kitchen talks’ and *tusovkas*⁷ (Stella, 2015: 114; Voronkov and Zdravomyslova, 2002; Yurchak, 2005). In those spaces, the state had collapsed decades before its official crash due to citizens’ shared mistrust of the Party’s ‘monolithic’ power.

The post-Soviet continuities

I offered to explain Soviet queer politics as conditioned through three steps: erasure of private material space, totalitarian definition of public space and discourse, and emergence of alternative material locations where queer politics was performed (by the citizens in general, rather than queer citizens only, though I show this process by engaging with queer experience only). Grassroots politics concentrated in invisible material space without ‘coming out’ to the surface, but also without dark and creepy disillusionment of the closet. This legacy may be traced in the new circumstances of post-Soviet Russia, where homosexuality has remained unintelligible to Russian lawmakers and politicians (Kondakov, 2013).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, state monopoly over every area of life decreased as the market acquired its force in Russia and offered different points of view on sexuality, making the queer subculture in Russian cities visible through its commodification: ‘Queer subjectivities bubble to

the surface of the Russian public sphere in the form of discos, publishing houses, cruising strips, theaters, and even restaurants' (Essig, 1999: 82). The break between Soviet and post-Soviet societies reveals a process of commodification and commercialization taking place in Russia through offering comfortable spaces to enjoy, have fun, explore homosexuality and spend money. Thus, queer spaces were slowly stopping to be involved in politics, limiting its encouragement to commodified desires.

The emergent market only appeared to offer the benefits, concealing heteronormativity and homonormativity under the glamorous covers of tabloids and the colourful entrances to gay clubs. Even those commercial magazines that promoted sexual diversity based their publications on the conservative assumption that heterosexuality was the only legitimate sexuality (Omelchenko, 1999: 87), whereas commercial gay disco-bars excluded lesbians in general (Sarajeva, 2011: 62; Stella, 2015: 113) and those gay men who could not pay to stay there or did not meet the standards of homonormative appearance. As one of my informants put it, speaking about gay subculture:

Surfing Google or Yandex, I've seen all those colourful pictures. It was great, but I couldn't see myself there: there were muscular men, all of them looked macho, yes. In short, I didn't see, didn't perceive myself as such, being a short guy in spectacles ... This was not me out there. (Born 1992)

A political message from the part of the queers cannot be formulated in these new market circumstances, as all the demands seem to be satisfied or are able to be satisfied with the use of financial capital. On the other hand, the market has [410] penetrated post-Soviet Russia, but it has failed to monopolize it as it readily serves the political authority. State and the market represent a conjuncture of exploitative machinery in current Russia. While the state bureaucracy has been appropriating the country by the familiar Soviet ways of administration (engineering the official-public space through repressive censorship and interventions into the intimate spaces), the market could offer means of managing secret desires without turning 'personal' into political. Contrary to the spontaneous urban homosexual spaces of the Soviet cities, market mechanisms would hardly introduce any options for resistance. If homosexual identities are not properly sold on the market, the commercial solution will be that of selling proper mechanisms for hiding one's homosexuality. Thus, the political circumstances result in subjection of the market to the regime of the current sexual anorexia, which is being enacted through the ban on 'non-traditional sexual relations' and the like.

Monopolization of the official public space also complicates the work of Russian LGBT organizations. Despite the fact that their strategies and objectives are varied, contemporary LGBT

activists have become associated with gay pride parades (Soboleva and Bakhmetjev, 2014). In my interviews, some informants were sceptical about this sort of political action and even opposed it:

These parades are for idiots, while good citizens just live their lives and perhaps bring up children, build their careers, construct a dacha [country house], plant flowers and have fun. They don't need all this: Milonov [a homophobic member of Parliament] – they don't care about Milonov, and they don't care about pride parades. This is it! (Born 1984)

This sentiment – formulated in this categorical or more subtle ways in other interviews – was an expression of the loss of alternative grassroots politics rather than opposition to the pride events as such. As they inform me in the interviews, open street conflict reminds post-Soviet queers about USSR-style of politics, where public demands were openly articulated in a form of support for the government. LGBT organizations are rejected on the basis of being involved in public activism that is paradoxically criticized for engaging in official politics as the form of street protest suggests. I think this situation can be explained by the feature of Soviet activist citizenship characterized by a specific structure of public space. Citizens' political intentions belong to the parallel public space, while the new LGBT organizations have broken this important convention.

It would then be possible to suppose that queer urban spaces would host this alternative sort of politics once again, but as queer urban subculture was commoditized by the market, with the appearance of commercial gay spaces these old urban spaces were transformed. New capitalism conditions coupled with continuities of the Soviet-style rulership proved significant transformations on the possibilities of citizenship negotiations on the part of urban queers. The city is still a ground for activist struggles, but this time they are conventional 'western' activists who articulate claims within the discourse of human rights and because of this are [411] labelled 'foreign' by the state apparatus. Moreover, as shown earlier, these actions lack support from the citizens, even the Russian queer community, which reinforces the 'foreignness' of the conventional activists.

This trouble seems to be resolved by virtualization of spaces. My informants find a response to the current situation in the use of the internet, where queer political resistance may be now located. People reported that they were performing 'coming-out' in social networks, keeping their sexuality in secret in off-line communication with the same people they have as their net-friends. A political conflict is much easier taking place on-line for some of the interviewees, than in actual interaction. The following respondent opposes gay-pride parades, but violently confronts his 'friends' in vk.com (a Russian social network) when arguing about homosexuality:

These orthodox people ... I had to shoot them all out from my friends. Well, they first started, because I was not doing anything, I was just reposting legal initiatives of our government in social networks on my page. And I immediately had their angry comments. (Born 1974)

There are instances of Soviet legacy that prove to have survived: the tendency to accumulate and monopolize political power in the state institutions, reappearance of sexual anorexia in the official policy, and importance of parallel public activism for the sexual citizens themselves. However, the market introduced new forms of commercialized gay spaces that reconfigured queer subcultural urban spaces. Moreover, political activists have started to occupy those city public spaces with the ways of claiming rights that are conventional for capitalist countries. These processes constitute a vivid and complex landscape of a Russian urban homosexual subculture today and produce new forms of politics that coexist with the others, while the Soviet queer politics may transcend materiality and go virtual.

Conclusion

In this article, I showed what forms grassroots politics takes, conditioned by particular historical, social and material circumstances. I have taken the Soviet period as a point of departure to explain why activist citizenship in contemporary Russia is characterized by monopolization of public debates by official authority, low participation of people in street protests, and importance of alternative spaces for political performance on the part of the queer citizens. It was shown that political action may sometimes differ from conventional types of politics, such as street rallies or public actions, but constitutes underground revolutions that are invisible on the surface. Queer citizenship produces a particular political subject who may pass as having a non-meaningful identity to a distant observer. The Soviet alternative modernity conditioned appearance of such subjects in the USSR and its continuous survival in today's Russia. [412]

The Soviet state claimed egalitarian citizenship and elimination of class distinctions, but in doing so, it thrust forth its own authority over every detail of citizens' everyday life. Everything became a matter of the state's concern and, henceforth, any dissent became a political issue. It produced an unexpected result, namely the multiplication of public space. Queer urban public spaces located political resistance because state law and ideology were ignored there. The desire to locate grassroots politics in such alternative spaces continues to inform the logic of thinking about political participation of the Russian queers. They oppose street rallies, but they are eager to engage in political conflicts in the alternative public spaces like the internet.

I offered this story to show that the proposed understanding of politics may enrich citizenship theory. While scholars look for politics in conventional venues, there might be other marginalized spaces that already embrace new forms of political participation leading to unexpected revolutions. What if we look at the margins, to the spaces where no one expects to find political resistance? Perhaps, just like queer urban parallel public spaces in the USSR, there are locations of resistance that are now inspiring revolution elsewhere.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Evgeny Shtorn for great ideas and insights generated during our discussions. I am also thankful to the students of the European University at St Petersburg and participants of numerous academic events at Columbia, Ann Arbor, and Uppsala who have heard earlier versions of this article. Besides, I am grateful to the peer-reviewers and Thomas Campbell who were first readers of the text and gave helpful suggestions. I really appreciate all those who participated in telling their life stories to me, even though they cannot be mentioned by name.

Notes

¹ There are certain difficulties in categorizing homosexual subjects in Russia. ‘Gay’ and ‘lesbian’ identities encounter considerable rejection on the part of the grassroots (Barchunova and Parfenova, 2010: 153–155; Essig, 1999: 81–82), though they are used in many different settings anyway. It is especially true for LGBT activism whose participants are actively involved in producing universal lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* identities. There are local terms that circulate among sexualized subjects in Russia, including ‘goluboy’ and ‘tema’ (Sarajeva, 2011: 57). The word ‘tema’ is one of the most frequently employed: people say ‘she is a thematic person’ to mean that she is queer. ‘Tema’ or the ‘theme’ is a good equivalent to some interpretations of ‘queer’ so that it refers to sexual experience of marginalized or oppressed kind, but sounds broader than falsely universalized and narrow definitions of a ‘lesbian’ or a ‘gay man.’ The ‘theme’ is fluid, contextual and open to interpretations, though in comparison to ‘queer’ it is not performatively subversive, but rather safe in use (it helps to cover actual meanings of a sentence from those who have no knowledge in subcultural vocabulary). Medical terms (such as a homosexual) to some extent are not perceived as offensive in Russia: they are rather considered to be neutral. While institutionalized NGOs use the international abbreviation ‘LGBT’ and promote its use in the ‘community,’ some [413] alternative grassroots groups propose the term ‘queer’, which has already been appropriated by a male gay tabloid (Kvir). The very term ‘kvir’ does not have any linguistic root in the Russian language – it is just a literal transliteration of the English word and so it does not bear any historical or social meanings, henceforth, it lacks the subversive potential. Another term ‘sexual minority’ is one of the favourite terms in the Russian media, while ‘non-traditional sexual relations’ is frequently used in official contexts especially courts and

laws. However, the proper name simply does not exist, since neither of these categories can adequately capture Russian homosexuality and in certain settings might be inappropriate or uncomfortable to use (Kondakov, 2014a: xii–xvi). In this text, I will stick to ‘queers’ to name the subject of the study without intention to classify or categorize a class of people. This term will potentially include a variety of sexualized subjects, but at the same time the empirical material was mostly organized around experiences of same-sex sexualities and did not include transgender experiences.

² A variety of LGBT events had been held before this one, but the event organized in Moscow on 27 May 2006, was actually labelled a ‘Gay Pride Parade’ and was the launching point of the Russian gay pride movement.

³ It generates inclusion and exclusion, as Davina Cooper (2007) suggests, or constant negotiations (Butler, 2012: 35). In Foucauldian terms, I regard citizenship as power relations between a variety of forces that engage in interaction with one another (see, Deleuze, 2006: 70; Kondakov, 2014b).

⁴ For similar accounts of Russian gendered citizenship see Zdravomyslova (2004) and sexual citizenship see Kondakov (2014b).

⁵ For example, the ‘*Katka*’ in Leningrad or the ‘*Shlyapka*’ in Moscow (Kozlovsky, 1986: 49, 73; see, also Stella, 2015: 168).

⁶ See similar accounts in Sarajeva (2011: 42).

⁷ ‘*Tusovka*’ is a Soviet cultural phenomena that refers to a social network of people loosely united by partly shared interests in arts, political ideologies, lifestyle or all these at once. It is a fluid and non-hierarchical structure of relations that permits circulation of alternative to official knowledge (so it is not exactly underground or oppositional to dominant systems of knowledge, but it does offer a different view on hegemonic power). For example, it is through *tusovka* that people in the USSR learnt about western feminism, music by the Beatles, and non-conformist lifestyle dress-codes.

References

Barchunova, T, Parfenova, O (2010) Internet-faktor, massmedia i intimnoe povedenie molodyh sibiryachek (The internet, mass media, and female-to-female intimate relations in Krasnoyarsk and Novosibirsk). *Laboratorium* 2(3): 153–155.

Boym, S (1994) *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Butler, J (2012) *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism (New Directions in Critical Theory)*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Butler, J (2015) *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, New Haven: Harvard University Press.

Cooper, D (2007) Speaking beyond thinking: Citizenship, governance and lesbian and gay politics. In: Murno, V, Stychin, CF (eds) *Sexuality and the Law: Feminist Engagements*, New York: Routledge, pp. 171–200. [414]

Deleuze, G (2006) *Foucault*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

D'Emilio, J (1993) Capitalism and gay identity. In: Abelove, H, Barale, MA, Halperin, DM (eds) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge, pp. 467–476.

Essig, L (1999) *Queer in Russia. A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other*, London: Duke University Press.

Fehervary, K (2009) Goods and states: The political logic of state-socialist material culture. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51(2): 426–459.

Fiks, Y (2013) *Moscow*, New York: Ugly Duckling Press.

Floyd, K (2009) *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Foucault, M (1983) On the genealogy of ethics. In: Dreyfus, HL, Rabinow, P (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (2nd edn). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 229–252.

Gessen, M (1994) *The Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men in the Russian Federation: An International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Report*, San Francisco, CA: The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

Halberstam, JJ (2005) *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York: New York University Press.

Harvey, D (2012) *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, New York: Verso.

Healey, D (2002) Ischeznovenie russkoy 'tyotki,' ili Kak rodilas sovetskaya gomofobiya (Disappearance of the Russian 'Tyotka' or how Soviet homophobia was born). In: Oushakine, S (ed.) *O Muzhe(n)stvennosti (About Masculinity)*, Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, pp. 414–431.

Healey, D (2008) *Gomoseksualoye vlecheniye v revolyutsionnoy Rossii. Regulirovanie seksualno-gendernogo dissidentstva (Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender*

Dissent), Moscow: Ladomir.

Hubbard, P (2001) Sex zones: Intimacy, citizenship and public space. *Sexualities* 4(1): 51–71.

Isin, EF (2008) Theorizing acts of citizenship. In: Isin, EF, Nielsen, GM (eds) *Acts of Citizenship*, London: Zed Books, pp. 15–43.

Kharkhordin, O (1999) *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kon, I (1997) *Seksualnaya kultura v Rossii: klubnichka na beryozke (Sexual Culture in Russia: Strawberry on a Birch Tree)*, Moscow: OGI.

Kondakov, A (2012) Pravovye rany: znachenie prav cheloveka dlja geev i lesbijanok v Rossii (Legal wounds: The meaning of human rights for lesbians and gay men in Russia). *Laboratorium* 4(3): 84–104.

Kondakov, A (2013) Resisting the silence: The use of tolerance and equality arguments by gay and lesbian activist groups in Russia. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 28(3): 403–424.

Kondakov, A (2014a) The silenced citizens of Russia: Exclusion of non-heterosexual subjects from rights-based citizenship. *Social & Legal Studies* 23(2): 151–174.

Kondakov, A (2014b) Formirovanie kvir-arkhiva issledovaniy seksualnostey (Shaping Queer Archive of Sexualities Studies). In: Kondakov, A (ed.) *Na pereputye: metodologia, teoria i praktika LGBT i kvir-issledovaniy: sbornik statey (On the Crossroads: Methodology, theory and practice of LGBT and Queer Studies: Collected Volume)*, St Petersburg: Centre for Independent Social Research, pp. xi–xxii. [415]

Kozlovsky, V (1986) *Argo russkoy gomoseksualnoy kultury: materialy k izucheniyu (The Agrot of the Russian Gay Subculture: Research Materials)*, Benson, VT: Chalidze Publications.

Krylova, A (2014) Soviet modernity: Stephen Kotkin and the Bolshevik predicament. *Contemporary European History* 23(2): 167–192.

McRuer, R (2006) *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, New York: New York University Press.

Muravyeva, M (2014) Traditional values and modern families: Legal understanding of tradition and modernity in contemporary Russia. *The Journal of Social Policy Studies* 12(4): 625–638.

Naiman, E (1997) *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Nartova, N (2008) Gendernyi kontrakt sovremennogo rossiyskogo obshchestva i nekontsyonal'nye identichnostu (Gender Contract of the Modern Russian Society and Non-Conventional Identities). *Zhenshchina v rossiyskom obshchestve (Woman in the Russian Society)* 3: 56–64.

Omelchenko, E (1999) Ot 'pola' k 'genderu': opyt analiza seks-diskursov molodezhnykh rossiyskikh zhurnalov (From 'sex' to 'gender': Analysis of sexual discourse in Russian journals for youth). In: Aristarkhova, I (ed.) *Zhenshchina ne sushchestvuyet: sovremenniye issledovaniya polovogo razlichiya (Woman Does Not Exist: Contemporary Theories of Sex Diversity)*, Syktyvkar: Syktyvkar University Press, pp. 77–115.

Puar, JK, Rai, A (2002) Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots. *Social Text* 72(3): 117–148.

Richardson, D (1998) Sexuality and citizenship. *Sociology* 32(1): 83–100.

Rotkirch, A (2002) Lyubov so slovami i bez: opyt lesbiyskikh otnosheny v pozdnesovetsky period (Love with the words and without: Experience of lesbian relationship in the late Soviet period). In: Zdravomyslova, E, Temkina, A (eds) *V poiskakh seksualnosti (In the Search for Sexuality)*, St Petersburg: Dmitry Bulanin, pp. 452–468.

Sarajeva, K (2011) *Lesbian Lives: Sexuality, Space and Subculture in Moscow*, Stockholm: Visby Sweden.

Soboleva, I, Bakhmetjev, Y (2014) 'Menya kak budto vytolkali za vorota': reaktsiya LGBT na zapret 'propagandy gomoseksualizma' ('I was basically kicked off': Reaction of LGBT on the 'Prohibition of Homosexuality Propaganda'). *The Journal of Social Policy Studies* 12(2): 217–232.

Stella, F (2015) *Lesbian Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Stychin, C (2003) *Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Citizenship and Law Reform*, Oxford: Hart.

Turner, B (1990) Outline of a theory of citizenship. *Sociology* 24(2): 206–207.

Turner, B (2001) The erosion of citizenship. *British Journal of Sociology* 52(2): 189–190.

Utekhin, I (2004) *Ocherki kommunalnogo byta (Essays on Communal Life)*, Moscow: OGI.

Voronkov, V, Chikadze, E (2003) Different generations of Leningrad Jews in the context of public/private division: Paradoxes of ethnicity. In: Humphrey, R, Miller, R, Zdravomyslova, E (eds) *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe/Altered Lives and Broken Biographies*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 239–262.

Voronkov, V, Zdravomyslova, E (2002) The informal public in Soviet society: Double morality at work. *Social Research* 69(1): 49–69.

Wilkinson, C (2014) Putting ‘traditional values’ into practice: The rise and contestation of anti-homopropaganda laws in Russia. *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3): 363–379. [416]

Yurchak, A (2005) *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zdravomyslova, E (2004) Gendernoye grazhdanstvo v sovetskoy Rossii – praktiki abortov (Gendered citizenship in Soviet Russia: Practices of abortion). In: Grigorieva, I, Kildal, N(eds) *Razvitie gosudarstva blagosostoyaniya v Severnoy Evrope i Rossii (Development of Welfare State in Northern Europe and Russia)*, St Petersburg: Skifia-Print, pp. 179–195.

Zdravomyslova, E, Temkina, A (2003) Gendernoye (gendered) grazhdanstvo i sovetsky etakratichesky poryadok (Gendered citizenship and the Soviet etacratic order). In: Popkova, L, Tartakovskaya, I (eds) *Transformatsiya gendernykh otnosheny: zapadniye teorii i rossiyskiye praktiki (Transformation of Gender Relationship: Western Theories and Russian Practices)*, Samara: Samara University Press, pp. 27–61. [417]