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Sexual citizenship, nationalism and biopolitics in Putin's Russia

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Introduction

Since the mid-2000s sexual and reproductive rights have become increasingly politicised in Russian society (Zdravomyslova 2009; Temikina 2013; Rivkin-Fisch 2006, 2013; Stella 2007, 2013). This politicisation has occurred both from above, as a result of the introduction of new legislation and social policy restricting sexual and reproductive rights, and from below, as laws and policies are debated and contested by activists and ordinary citizens. A substantial amount of international media coverage and academic analysis has focussed on the introduction of the infamous 'gay propaganda' laws and discussed the ambiguous impact of global LGBT solidarities on the Russian domestic context (Stella 2013; Kondakov 2014; Wilkinson 2014). However, an exclusive focus on LGBT rights overlooks the fact that recent restrictions on sexual and reproductive rights affect other social groups (particularly women). This chapter explores the relationship between sexuality and nationalism in the Russian context. We consider how restrictions on citizens' sexual and reproductive rights are justified in the name of the national interest, and how family and demographic policies are deployed in the construction of ideals of nation and national belonging which are both sexualised and gendered. We draw on Foucault's concept of biopower as a technology of power specific to modern nation-states, which is

concerned with the control of social and biological processes at the level of the population (Foucault 1978/1998, 1997/2004).

Our discussion of sexual nationalism in Russia is based on discourse analysis of official documents and media sources. Official documents comprise the text of new laws concerning sexual and reproductive rights introduced in 2011-2013, as well as official commentaries on the rationale and intended effects of the legislation. Media sources include articles and opinion pieces published in the Russian daily newspaper *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* (RG) from January 2011 until December 2013, a period marked by heated political debate on new legislation and policy concerning sexual and reproductive rights (notably restriction on access to abortion and the introduction of the ‘gay propaganda’ laws), and a heightened politicisation of sexuality in the public sphere. RG is the official mouthpiece of the Russian government. As well as articles and opinion pieces, RG publishes official statements and documents issued by the government and state bodies, including the text of newly approved federal laws and presidential decrees¹. Relevant articles were retrieved through keyword searches on RG’s online archive².

Sexuality, biopolitics and the ‘national interest’ in Russia

A substantial body of recently published work has explored the links between sexuality, normativity and nationalism (Puar 2007; Fassin 2010; Kulpa 2011; Farris 2013). Puar’s concept of homonationalism has been particularly influential in work focussed on societies where non-heterosexual citizens, traditionally cast as outlaws and perverts, have been recently more fully included into the citizenry as worthy of legal protection from discrimination and violence. Puar

and others have argued that this inclusion is selective and often reinforces new social divisions, as the new legitimisation of same-sex relations is often paralleled by the othering and demonisation of racialised ethnic communities, assumed to come from deeply homophobic cultures and to be unable to embrace sexual diversity and respect for LGBT rights as a newly shared national value (Puar 2007; Fassin 2010). Drawing explicitly on Puar's work, Farris (2012) argues that in western societies – increasingly dependent on a migrant workforce to perform domestic and care work – migrant women are portrayed as oppressed 'victims of their own culture', in need to be rescued. Amidst demands that migrants should integrate and adopt the national cultural values of the host society, gender equality is mobilised as a distinctive 'national' value by an odd coalition of (sometimes accidental) bedfellows, ranging from feminist movements, to neoliberal government, to nationalist and overtly xenophobic parties. Internationally, gender and LGBT equality are increasingly upheld as a paradigmatic 'European' value by some states and supranational institutions such as the EU, and have been instrumentally used to reinforce notions of a 'progressive' west and a 'conservative' east (Binnie 2004; Fassin 2010; Farris 2012).

Less attention, however, has been given in recent work to other articulations of sexuality and nationalism, which, unlike homonationalism or femonationalism, do not hinge on liberal attitudes towards sexual and reproductive rights as a defining feature of national identity, but emphasise 'traditional' family values, gender roles and sexual norms. In this chapter, we seek to understand how discourses about the national interest, national identity and patriotism in contemporary Russia promote a specific brand of sexual conservatism as a shared value, as well as specific sexual and gender normativities which are constructed as 'traditionally Russian'. As Billig (1991) argues, the pervasive yet taken for granted and hidden nature of everyday, 'banal nationalism'

makes it a very powerful ideology. It should be pointed out, however, that soul-searching over national identity has been very prominent in the Russian Federation as a nationalising state, which emerged in 1991 from the breakup of the Soviet Union and the demise of state socialism. Indeed, as Gal and Kligman (2000) point out, debates on gender relations and sexuality have been central to the renegotiation of national identity across the post-socialist region more generally. It is common for analyses of Russian nationalism to focus on its most extreme manifestations (the ‘red-brown’ threat), or to brand Kremlin-backed patriotism as fascist. As Laruelle (2009) perceptively notes, however, nationalist rhetoric has become prominent across the political spectrum in contemporary Russia, and is used by extremist movements, populist protest parties and mainstream political parties alike, albeit with different nuances and aims. Indeed, Laruelle (2009) argues that nationalism is the ideological matrix of United Russia, the current ruling party closely associated with three-times president Vladimir Putin. Ever since the late 1990s the ruling political elites have sought to appropriate the narrative of national unity and national interest in order to create order, build consensus and strengthen their dwindling legitimacy in a deeply divided society, fraught with gaping social inequalities and interethnic tensions, and United Russia has promoted itself as the party of national reconciliation. We understand nationalism as a strategy deployed to deal with symbolic conflicts of interests, and to establish and naturalise a normative set of beliefs and values around sexuality, family and intimate life; through our analysis of legislation and government media sources, we focus on the hegemonic sexual nationalism of the political elites. It should be noted that political pluralism has been systematically eroded in Russia over the last 15 years³, and in this context politically hegemonic discourses about national values and sexual morality have a particularly strong normative force.

Concerns about national population decline, and strategies to reverse this trend, have featured prominently in Russian political discourse, significantly impacting on debates on sexual and reproductive rights. Since the mid-2000s, ‘national priority projects’ became prominent in the agenda of the ruling party and of expert think-tanks such as the Institute of Contemporary Development (INSOR) (Laruelle 2009: 137-138)⁴. INSOR currently lists five national priorities, including health, education, housing, agriculture and demographic sustainability. Indeed, demographic sustainability has been considered a priority policy area by the Russian government since the mid-2000s. Deep anxieties about Russia’s demographic crisis and its impact on the nation’s future stemmed from the steep population decline experienced by the newly independent country, as the population fell from 148.5 million in 1993 to 142 in 2007; very high mortality rates (particularly among working-age men) consistently exceeded falling birth rates, and could not be offset by net migration (United Nations in Russia 2008)⁵. As Yuval-Davis (1997: 29) points out, in some forms of nationalist discourse, population is seen as a source of collective wealth and power, and the future of ‘nation’ is seen as dependent on its continuous growth. The discourse of ‘people as power’ is dominant in contemporary Russia, amidst concerns about the implications of Russia’s demographic crisis for the country’s economic development and international geopolitical standing (Snarskaia 2009). The problem of population as an object of political economy and state administration is, according to Foucault, central to modern forms of government:

[...] [P]opulation comes to appear above all else as the ultimate end of government. In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth,

longevity, health, and so on; and the means the government uses to attain these ends are themselves all, in some sense, immanent to the population; it is the population itself on which government will act either directly, through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly, through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of population into certain regions or activities, and so on (Foucault, 1978/2001: 216–17).

Foucault's notions of biopower and biopolitics are helpful in trying to unpack the relationship between power/knowledge, sexuality and the nation as an imagined community (Anderson 1983). Foucault defines biopower as the power over life exercised at the level of the (nation) state: with the onset of modernity, the realm of the biological and of the sexual, once the domain of religious morality in feudal societies, 'came under state control' (Foucault 1997/2004: 240). This reflects a more general process of rationalisation and centralisation, as the state became an instrument of national unification. Biopower is, according to Foucault, a technology of power specific to modern nation-states: whereas in feudal societies sovereign power translated into the king or queen's right to make die or let live, biopower concerns social and biological processes at the level of the population, and its essence can be encapsulated in the right to make live or let die. A related concept used by Foucault is biopolitics, or a mode of governance that 'deals with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as a power's problem' (Foucault 1997/2004: 245). Biopolitics finds expression in 'an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations' (Foucault 1978/1998: 140), and is concerned with issues such as the birth rate, reproduction, the mortality rate, public hygiene, social medicine, and the

urban environment. Although Foucault was writing about biopolitics as a phenomenon and a mode of governance specific to western modernity, we draw on some of his insights to reflect on how, in contemporary Russia, policies and legislation restricting sexual and reproductive rights are justified in the name of national values and of the national interest, thereby naturalising normative discourses about sexual morality, family and intimate life. Indeed, population growth and the wellbeing of the nation are explicitly linked to fertility and family values in two white papers [Russian: *Kontseptsii*, literally ‘Concepts’] issued by the Russian government, the Concept on the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025 (CDP 2007) and the Concept on State Family Policy (CFP 2013). The two white papers set out government policy priorities and preferences which are reflected in new policies and legislation in the areas of reproductive health and family policy. Two of the six key aims of CDP concerned support for families and for ‘traditional’ family values: the growth of the birth rate on account of the birth of a second child or subsequent children in families; and the strengthening of the family as an institution (CDP 2007). The notion that family policies are key to the success of demographic policies, and that both hinge on the preservation of ‘traditional’ family values is articulated even more explicitly in the Concept on Family Policy (2013), which explicitly references CDP and defines the family as ‘the foundation of Russian society’.

Among family values worthy of state protection, CFP explicitly mentions marriage, understood ‘solely as the union between a man and a woman [...] and undertaken by the spouses with the aim of perpetuating their kin, birth and joint upbringing of children’ (CFP 2013), although Russian law does not explicitly define ‘marriage’ or ‘family’ as the union between two differently gendered heterosexual individuals (Gorbachev 2014: 91). The case made in CFP for traditional

family values is both pragmatic and ideological. Pragmatically, heterosexual nuclear families are presented as both more fertile and as a better environment for children's upbringing than other types of households. CFP notes that divorce and birth outside of wedlock are very common in Russia, and estimates that one every third child is born into a single-parent family. However the document emphasises that birth rates among married women are higher, and that children from single-parent family lack a model of 'harmonious relations between a man and a woman on which they can orient themselves in future' (CFP 2013). Ideologically, CFP states that 'for almost a thousand years', a family with many children and with different generations living under the same roof has part of Russia's traditions; however, the 'social engineering' that followed the 1917 Russian Revolution dealt a blow to Russia's traditional family values, by giving legal recognition to *de facto* relationships and by legalising abortion. CFP emphasises the biological and symbolic continuity between kin and nation, and explicitly advocates a return to spiritual and family values grounded in Russia's pre-revolutionary past:

Russian Orthodoxy strengthens the spiritual maintenance of kin and family. The family is not only the communion of two spouses, parents and children, but also a spiritual unit, a 'little church'. This approach to the institution of the family allows us to emphasise not the private side of family problems, but rather to see family in the context of the society out of which it grows (CFP 2013).

The reference to Russian Orthodoxy reflects its growing influence in Russian political and social life, and its symbolic use as a marker of national identity by the political elites. Indeed, prominent politicians such as Elena Mizulina, head of the Committee on Family, Women and Children and

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main author of CFP, Dmitrii Medvedev, former President and current Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, and Vitalii Milonov, the author of the 2012 'gay propaganda law' for the city of Saint Petersburg, have publicly declared their Orthodox faith and advocated a greater role for religious values in Russian society.

In the remainder of the article, we explore how moral discourses about sexual and reproductive behaviour are legitimised in the name of the nation, and naturalised through references to the biologising ideas of the nation as an extension of blood-based kinship (Anderson 1983; Rivkin-Fish 2006). We analyse legislation restricting sexual and reproductive rights and coverage of related issues in the government newspaper *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*. We aim to tease out how the naturalisation of values rooted in an imagined national tradition produces new normativities which are deeply gendered and sexualised.

Women's reproductive rights

In the summer of 2011 MP Valerii Draganov submitted a draft bill on abortion to State Duma, the Russian Federal Parliament. The bill stipulated, among other things, that: 1) abortion for married women should only be conducted with the written consent of her husband; 2) abortion during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy should be conducted no sooner than 48 hours after a woman's medical examination; 3) before signing a consent form for surgical abortion, a woman is required to undergo the following procedures: visualization of the foetus by means of ultrasound, listening to the foetal heartbeat (after 6 weeks' gestation), consultation with a psychologist and/or a social worker 'during which the right to refuse abortion is explained'; 4) physicians have the right to

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refuse to perform an abortion for religious or other beliefs (Draganov and Gerasimova 2011). The explanatory note to the bill linked the demographic crisis to the high number of abortions; this, Draganov argued, reflects

[...] the imperfection of Russian legislation, its inconsistency with Russian traditions. [Current] Russian abortion legislation is based on the principle of freedom of reproductive choice and the protection of the mother's reproductive health. This approach, based on the freedom of reproductive choice, goes against traditional Christian values and leads to the spiritual and moral degradation of the Russian people (Draganov 2011).

Consistently high abortion rates in Russia, the highest in Europe, have long been a cause for concern among health professionals. During the Soviet period, abortion was one of the main means of birth control, as contraceptives were unavailable or unreliable, and their use was either not promoted or discouraged by health professionals. This legacy still shapes attitudes to birth control: amidst resistance to the introduction of sex education and moral panics about the commodification of sexuality, the use of contraceptives remains comparatively low whilst abortion rates, albeit much lower than in the Soviet period, remain very high (Zdravomyslova 2009; Sankevich 2009:140). It is worth noting, however, that Draganov's draft bill presented a distinctive pro-life argument. Firstly, restrictions on abortion were argued on moral grounds, invoking national traditions and values. Secondly, the proposal called for an amendment of the existing law on the protection of *children's rights* and other legislation aimed to strengthen the *right to life* (Draganov and Gerasimova 2011). A number of provisions from Draganov's draft bill were eventually included in the Federal law 'On the fundamental healthcare principles in the

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Russian Federation' (N323–FZ). However, concerns for women's sexual and reproductive health were rarely foregrounded by those supporting restrictions on abortion.

Although Draganov's proposal caused widespread debate and resistance among gender studies researchers, feminist activists, health practitioners and women in general (Rivkin-Fish 2013: 574-577), the State Duma approved law N323–FZ. The new law restricted free access to abortion by establishing a mandatory 'week of silence' from 7 days to 48 hours between the visit to a medical facility and the termination of pregnancy, depending on gestational age (N323-FZ, art.56). Postponing abortion surgery was explicitly aimed at reducing the number of abortions, as the coverage of the issue in RG makes clear:

[P]rovisions are made to reduce the number of abortions. Women will be given a minimum of 2 days to think about their decision (Zykova, 2012).

Postponing abortion surgery was not justified on medical grounds: rather, it was meant to provide a period for reflection when a woman can reconsider her decision independently or through external influence. Health minister Veronika Skvortsova quoted the decline in the number of abortion as evidence that the new policies, including the provision of counselling services for pregnant women, were working. She did not respond to criticisms about the additional pressures put on women to reconsider their decision under the new system:

The set of measures on protection of motherhood and childhood had a positive effect. Counselling services for pregnant women, including those who find themselves in

difficult situations, were set up, resulting in a 53.9 thousand decline in the number of abortions (Gritsiuk 2013).

Whilst up to the 12th week of pregnancy abortion can be performed solely on the request of the pregnant woman, for the past several decades Russian legislation has also allowed abortion up to the 22nd week of pregnancy for medical reasons or difficult personal circumstances. However, over the last ten years, access to abortion within the second trimester of pregnancy on the grounds of so-called ‘social reasons’ has also been drastically limited. While 1996 legislation specified 13 such ‘social reasons’ (RF Government Decree N. 567, 1996), by 2003 these had been reduced to 4: deprivation or restriction of parental rights; pregnancy resulting from rape; pregnancy while serving time in prison; and the woman’s husband having a type I-II disability or dying during pregnancy (RF Government Decree N. 485, 2003). In February 2012, this list was further reduced, and abortion in the second trimester is currently only permitted for pregnancies resulting from rape (RF Government Decree N. 98, 2012). Another important change in the legal regulation of abortion concerns the right of the doctor to refuse to perform medical ‘termination of pregnancy if it does not directly threaten the patient’s life and health of others’ (N323-FZ, art.70, item 3). Thus, abortion is no longer considered a moral choice only for the patient, but also for the doctor (Zdravomyslova 2009).

The new abortion legislation was not intended to protect women’s reproductive rights or health; rather, it was conceived as a measure to boost the birth rate. The legislation focuses on hindering access to surgical abortion and discursively constructs individual socio-economic reasons for terminating a pregnancy as unjustifiable. At the same time, measures to prevent abortion are

directed primarily towards already pregnant women, not towards promoting contraception and sex education. Russian demographers have argued that these measures reinforce the misplaced idea, widespread among ordinary Russians and policy-makers alike, that ‘birth control is synonymous with birth reduction, and access to contraception allegedly leads to birth rate decrease and depopulation’ (Sakevich and Denisov 2011). Indeed, despite the recent commitment to invest in counselling services for pregnant women, the provision of family planning facilities and information on birth control was curtailed or neglected for years. Most programmes set up in post-Soviet Russia to increase awareness of sexual and reproductive health were discontinued, and family planning centres created in the 1990s were closed due to the lack of funding (Sakevich and Denisov 2011; Temkina 2013). Anna Temkina’s study shows that doctors and gynaecologists in municipal hospitals are aware of the importance of discussing contraception with women. However, they do not have sufficient time for it in their daily practice, which is now aimed at preparing women for pregnancy, a shift has been stimulated by a pay increase for practitioners working in prenatal care:

While supporting the idea of “family planning”, in practice they [doctors] redefine it as “pregnancy planning”, meaning primarily preparing women for pregnancy. In the area of reproduction, birth rate increase and the preferential treatment of pregnant women are the biopolitical priority for the state, which is reflected in the institutional rules of medical facilities, while contraception issues in interactions with medical personnel are given much less attention (Temkina, 2013:20).

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In public debate, health care issues in the context of reproductive health are primarily associated with the availability and quality of obstetrics care, as well as ease of access to it, particularly for women living in rural areas:

If a woman gives birth once in her life, she can just endure it, live through this horror of having to travel many miles and just forget about it; but what if she thinks about giving birth more than once? Each subsequent childbirth occurs quicker, and it is important for her to have a hospital nearby. (Trukhanova 2013).

Desired developments in reproductive medicine are constructed primarily as the improvement of obstetric, gynaecological and paediatric care. Access to information about contraception and safer sex practices, however, are either ignored or opposed on the grounds that they stimulate hedonistic attitudes towards sex.

The debate on sexual and reproductive rights is also linked to new normative discourses about the ideal family. Providing support for a 'model' family in order to stimulate the national birthrate has become a state policy priority since the introduction of the 'mother's capital' scheme in 2007. The scheme provides financial incentives to families who give birth or adopt a second or third child; although it was later renamed 'family capital', the expectation is that the funds should be administered by, and directly benefit, women, thus reinforcing the notion of women's primary role as mothers and carers. Indeed, the fund can only be spent on housing improvement, children's education or to boost a working mother's pension fund (as a way to 'compensate' women for lower achievements in paid work owing to time spent on domestic unpaid labour)

(Borodzina et al. 2012). The scheme, explicitly couched in pronatalist terms, strengthens the idea that a woman is a mother first and foremost, and that she gains moral legitimacy and social status from motherhood. Indeed, despite the fact that in most dual-parent families both partners work, current policies are underpinned by the assumption that the care of children, especially young ones, should be carried out by the mother. Critics of the ‘family capital’ and related policies have pointed out that the financial support provided via the scheme is too limited to make a difference, particularly for poorer families (Borodzina et al. 2012). Moreover, financial support is mostly directed at individual families rather than being invested in developing adequate structures to support women in managing work and family responsibilities, such as affordable childcare facilities; this disadvantages women on the labour market (Chernova 2013).

The debates surrounding the ‘family capital’ scheme and other measures aimed at supporting working families explicitly promote a normative model of family, childbirth and motherhood: a dual-parent family formed of a heterosexual couple with two or more children. Alternative choices, such as, for example, single motherhood, are problematized because of the potential inability of single mothers to meet state-set reproductive targets:

Let's start with the fact that single women will not give birth to more than one child, - director of the Institute for Demographic Research Igor Beloborodov explains his point of view. - Of course, there are single mothers who have two and even three children, but as a rule, single mothers only have one child (Vladykina 2011).

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Delayed childbearing is not seen as a modern demographic trend associated, among other things, with women's increased autonomy and career choices, but as a consequence of their selfish, immoral behaviour. RG references the expert opinion of specialists such as Irina Soldatova, Moscow chief neonatologist and deputy chief physician of the Filatov Children's Clinical Hospital:

These things are so popular nowadays: changing sexual partners, frequent abortions, a carefree attitude to your own health, when everything is allowed: you can smoke, drink, choose to have children some time later – nothing good will come out of this. There are inexorable statistics – the majority of premature infants are born from first-time mothers who are over 30 years old. Maybe it sounds trivial, but believe me, it is important: we sometimes have to pay through the nose for our lack of spirituality (Krasnopol'skaia 2013a).

'Lack of spirituality' as a cause of reproductive problems is also raised in relation to assisted reproductive technology (ART):

It is no secret that many modern women prefer to think of children after ... they have already had a lot of abortions and contracted different diseases - including sexually transmitted ones - changed sexual partners several times, and so on. (Krasnopol'skaia 2013b).

ART use is associated with the consequences of the ‘wrong’ sexual behaviour, and is not seen as an independent reproductive strategy (e.g. choosing donor and surrogate programmes). Only heterosexual couples desperately wanting to have children and having fertility problems are portrayed as having relatively legitimate access to ART in RG:

If the decision to hire a surrogate mother is serious and carefully thought through, and all parties are satisfied, then it is very good that there is such a possibility. A wanted and loved baby is born. People who have a yearned-for child, and have to turn to surrogate mothers but not on a whim, usually make good parents because they really do want this child. (TSENZURY.NET 2013).

Although allowances are made for heterosexual couples with fertility problems, RG generally upholds the idea that ‘it’s [sexually] healthy young people who should give birth to children’ (TSENZURY.NET, 2013). Thus, despite the fact that Russia has one of the most liberal ART legislations and that it is increasing government financial support for IVF protocols (Nartova 2008; Brednikova, Nartova and Tkach 2009), everyday moral regulation is embedded in the discourse of the nuclear heterosexual family and of ‘proper’ motherhood (Tkach 2013).

We argue that the spectrum of reproductive rights in modern Russia has been restricted to the right to give birth, disavowing the right to abortion, and neglecting the right to birth control, sexual health and sex education. Underpinned by demographic objectives and by the political will to promote specific models of family and intimate life, recent policies and legislation prioritise the ‘national interest’ and the idea of ‘people as power’. In their explicit attempt to optimise

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Russian women's reproductive capabilities, they reinforce the notion of women as the reproducers of the nation (and implicitly as second class workers) and of womanhood as 'naturally' rooted in heterosexual motherhood.

The 'gay propaganda' law

On 27 March 2012, the Legislative Assembly of the Novosibirsk Region approved a law banning the 'propaganda' of homosexuality among minors. Novosibirsk joined a growing list of regional and city administrations across Russia in approving legislation banning the promotion of homosexuality to minors. The list included Ryazan (2006), Arkhangel'sk (2011), Kostroma (2012), and, most notably, Saint Petersburg city, where the law had been introduced only a few of weeks earlier than in the Novosibirsk region. The introduction of the law in Saint Petersburg was particularly controversial and unexpected, since the city had a reputation for being the most gay-friendly in Russia and for having a very active LGBT community.

The introduction of the 'gay propaganda' law in Saint Petersburg and Novosibirsk marked a turning point, as the debate began to shift from the regional to the Federal level. Indeed, in an official letter to the speaker of the State Duma, the Novosibirsk Legislative Assembly officially proposed extending the ban on 'gay propaganda' to the whole of the Russian Federation, by amending the existing Code for Administrative Offences (*Zakonodatel'noe Sobranie Novosibirskoi Oblasti* 2012). The accompanying note explained thus explained the rationale of the proposal:

The propaganda of homosexuality has acquired a wide resonance in contemporary Russia. This propaganda is conducted both through the media and through the active organising of social demonstrations, which promote homosexuality as normal behaviour. This is especially harmful for children and young people, who are not yet able to critically assess the onslaught of information that befalls them every day. As a consequence, it is necessary to protect the new generations from the influence of homosexual propaganda (Moroz 2012).

The draft bill ‘On the introduction of amendments in the Code of the Russian Federation on administrative offences’ proposed the introduction of fines for private citizens, officials and legal entities. The explanatory note clarifies that the law would punish the promotion of homosexuality to *minors*, and not a person’s homosexual orientation *per se*, therefore not falling foul of constitutional guarantees of protection from discrimination and freedom of expression (Moroz 2012). The emphasis is very much on the pernicious effect that exposure to same-sex relations can have on children and young people: indeed, the draft bill was subsequently modified and debated in the Russian Duma as project N44554-6-FZ, proposing amendments to the existing Federal law ‘On defending children from information harmful for their health and development’ (N124-FZ), and other legislative acts aimed at defending children from information ‘promoting the negation of traditional family values’. Indeed, in debates on the ‘gay propaganda’ law, anxieties over the relatively new visibility of same-sex relations in Russian society are articulated in relation to the future of the nation, embodied by children and young people. A renewed commitment to the protection of children and adolescents is central to both the Concept on Family Policy (CFP 2013) and to the National Strategy to Act in the Interest of Children (RF

Presidential Decree N. 761, 2012): both highlight concerns about the falling number of children and young people in the country, as well as their healthy upbringing and development. Significantly, after the approval of the ‘gay propaganda law’, the Russian government imposed temporary restrictions on the international adoption of Russian children in countries where same-sex unions are legally recognised (N167-FZ). The final version of the law, incorporated into the amended Family Law of the Russian Federation as Article 127, excludes spouses in a gay marriage or civil partnership, as well as single people from countries where same-sex unions are recognised, from becoming adoptive or foster parents of Russian children (SKRF, 2014). An explanatory note states that adopted children had to be protected ‘from possible unwanted influence, such as artificial forcing of non-traditional sexual behaviour and the suffering, complexes and stresses that, according to psychological studies, are often experienced by children raised in same-sex families’ (Vneseny Izmeneniia 2013). Thus, non-heterosexual citizens, both in Russia and abroad, are constructed as both morally deviant (and therefore as a negative influence on children and young people) and as unfit, and biologically unable, to parent.

The ‘gay propaganda law’ was eventually approved by an overwhelming majority of MPs, and signed into law in June 2013 (N135-FZ). As critics have pointed out, the term ‘propaganda’ is legally ill-defined; nonetheless, the scope of what can potentially be punished as ‘propaganda’ is very broad. It includes any public discussion of same-sex relations (restricting among others the activities of school teachers and LGBT organisation), as well as representations of same-sex relations in the media and the internet⁶. ‘Propaganda’ is defined as the as the ‘dissemination of information among minors’ whose aim is ‘forming non-traditional sexual arrangements, making non-traditional sexual relationships look attractive, perversely presenting traditional and non-

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traditional sexual relations as socially equal', or creating an interest in 'non-traditional' sexual relations (N135-FZ). Thus, the law restricts sexual citizenship for non-heterosexuals to the private sphere.

Both in the debates on the 'gay propaganda' law and in RG's coverage of LGBT issues, same-sex sexualities are constructed as the 'Other' to Russian national traditions and family values. Indeed, while the original draft bill referred to the 'propaganda of homosexuality', subsequent drafts debated in the State Duma refer to the 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations' (Gorbachev 2014; Kondakov 2014). In Russia, 'non-traditional' immediately evokes the association with same-sex relationships: indeed, the term 'non-traditional sexual orientation' has been commonly used in Russia since the 1990s to refer to male homosexuality, lesbianism and bisexuality. Moreover, as Gorbachev (2014) perceptively notes, previous regional 'propaganda' legislation had reinforced the dichotomy between 'traditional' (heterosexual) family relations and same-sex sexualities (or, in some formulations, a range of non-normative sexual and gender practices variously named as homosexuality, *muzhelozhestvo*⁷, bisexuality, transgenderism and paedophilia). Thus, heterosexuality is normalised as 'natural' and 'traditional' through its association with reproduction, while same-sex relations are othered through their association with non-reproductive sex and deviance.

The meaning of national 'traditional family relations' is also buttressed in relation to what is 'non-traditional', foreign and alien through the pages of *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, often by juxtaposing Russia to a sexually and morally decadent Europe. Indeed, most of RG's articles focussing on LGBT issues discuss other European countries rather than the domestic context and the

introduction of the ‘gay propaganda’ laws. Between December 2012 and December 2013, RG published 17 full-length features by its Paris correspondent Viacheslav Prokof’ev. The articles discuss in detail the controversies surrounding the introduction of gay marriage in different parts of Europe, focussing mostly on France. The importance of ‘Europe’ as a point of reference and contestation is apparent in other articles that mention LGBT issues only in passing; in these article European liberalism is equated to political correctness gone mad, and criticised for being imposed on sovereign states through institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, and for going against prevailing local customs and sensibilities (see for example Iamshanov 2011). Furthermore, ‘European’ values of gender equality, respect for minority groups and sexual democracy are presented not only in opposition to Russian ones, but as majorly controversial in Europe itself. The coverage of gay marriage in France is a case in point: the introduction of gay marriage is portrayed as very divisive and controversial, as evidenced by the large scale street protests and the refusal of some French mayors to officiate gay marriages on the grounds of ‘freedom of conscience’. The coverage is very heavily skewed, as the views presented almost invariably belong to the anti-gay marriage campaign, and the tone of the articles clearly indicates the author’s support for the anti-gay marriage camp. For example, a very lengthy article on the controversies around gay marriage in France and Britain concludes that gay marriage is a threat to the institution of marriage and family, as well as a threat to the moral fabric of society (Prokof’ev 2012). The titles of some of the articles also make the author’s stance on the issue clear (for example: ‘Europe: the rape of the family’; ‘Marriage has lost it orientation’, Prokof’ev 2012, 2013). Furthermore, both in France and elsewhere in Europe, the anti-gay marriage camp is portrayed as reflecting the ‘commonsense’ majority opinion. An article on the referendum on gay

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marriage in Croatia, which saw a landslide victory of the ‘no’ vote, applauds Croatians’ resistance to EU norms:

Croatians refused to be like everyone else in the EU. Croatians were not afraid of being the black sheep of the EU. At a time when same-sex couples parade triumphantly across Western European countries, Croatia dared to say ‘no’ (Vorob’ev 2013).

The prominence given to gay marriage abroad contrasts with the much slimmer volume of articles about LGBT issues in Russia itself, which unsurprisingly focus on the ‘gay propaganda’ laws. There is a noticeable change of tone between the first two articles on the proposed introduction of the law in Saint Petersburg and subsequent coverage related to the Saint Petersburg and federal laws. In early coverage, the Saint Petersburg law is described as controversial [*skandal’nyi*] and is jokingly referred to as the ‘don’t say gay’ law; the features focus on the criticisms surrounding the introduction of the law (Golubkova 2012a, 2012b). Subsequent articles, however, discursively legitimise the law by quoting the opinions of the city’s inhabitants supporting the law (Tsikler and Golubkova 2012), and by referring to the ruling of the Russian Supreme Court, which deemed that the law was not discriminatory and did not violate the Russian constitution (Kozlova 2012). This corroborates the view that the law seriously hinders any criticism and open debate about the law itself (Gorbachev, 2014).

Indeed, in RG there is no open debate of the federal law at all. In the run-up to the first Duma debate on the federal law (January 2013), RG was silent on the issue except for a brief reference to it in an interview with Prime Minister Medved’ev, who suggested that the law may not be

necessary as moral issues are not always best regulated by the law (Kuz'min 2012). An opinion piece published in early June 2013, just a few days before the law was approved upon second and third reading by the State Duma, speculated that the progress of the law had been hampered because of pressures from western 'pro-homosexual oriented elites', while also pointing out how controversial the support for LGBT rights remains in most of Europe. The article also emphasised that the majority of the Russian population is 'traditionally oriented' and mostly opposed to gay marriage, and that the propaganda law would enhance social cohesion in Russian society (Kasatonova 2013). A subsequent article published after the approval of the law portrayed the latter very much as a triumph of national unity and consensus. Entitled 'Laws greeted by 'Bravo!''', the article emphasised that the law had been approved by a majority of 436 MPs in favour to 1 abstained. The article also pointed out that, despite unauthorised protests in Moscow, the law enjoyed extraordinary popular support::

By the evening, when the Duma had already voted in favour of both laws [...] the supporters of traditional family values came back. The head of the committee on family, women and children Elena Mizulina and her colleagues, who successfully led the draft law on the ban of gay propaganda, were met with applause and approving remarks. The crowd addressed one of the MPs with the cry of 'bravo!'. The MPs could not remember a comparable expression of appreciation for their legislative work (Shkel' 2013).

Thus, the 'gay propaganda' law is presented as the triumph of the 'commonsense' majority view and of traditional national values. Subsequent coverage of LGBT issue focuses on the outcry generated the law outside of Russia: calls to boycott Russian vodka and the 2014 Sochi

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Olympics, gestures of solidarity with the Russian LGBT community by foreign athletes competing at the 2013 World Athletic Championships in Moscow, and criticisms of a Russian athlete who publicly supported the law. Criticism from abroad, however, is dismissed as an example of political correctness gone mad or as politically motivated, once more reinforcing the symbolic and moral distance between 'European' sexual democracy and Russian national traditions and values.

Conclusions

In Putin's Russia, restrictions on sexual and reproductive rights are justified on both pragmatic and ideological grounds. On a practical level, they are advocated in the name of the national interest and of the state's biopolitical aims of increasing the population and improving its health. Restrictions on abortion are intended to boost the birth rate and optimise women's reproductive capabilities; the 'gay propaganda' law is meant to contribute to the healthy psychological and moral development of Russia's younger generations by strengthening 'traditional' family values. On an ideological level, these restrictions construct specific models of motherhood, relationships and family as legitimate and 'traditionally' Russian. Pragmatic reasons and moral values are deeply intertwined, particularly in the case of reproductive rights: pro-natalist policies deploy pro-life rhetoric, and construct motherhood as simultaneously a moral issue, a patriotic duty and as a public concern. Importantly, the meaning of Russian 'traditional values' is constructed in opposition to European 'sexual democracy' (Fassin 2010), particularly in relation to same-sex relationships.

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Internationally, Russia increasingly presents itself on the international stage as a stronghold of social conservatism and the defender of traditional family values (Wilkinson 2014), while domestically these very values are deployed to shore up specific notions about Russian national identity. A vision of the Russian nation as an ‘imagined community’ built on tradition and biological kinship promotes specific sexual and gender normativities. Women are valued first and foremost as reproducers of the nation, although not all models of motherhood and family relationships are equally legitimised. Non-heterosexual citizens are constructed as deviant both because of their polluting effect on young people, and as unfit parents.

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¹ <http://www.rg.ru/about.html>.

² Over 400 articles were retrieved through keyword searches. Keywords utilised were: gender, abortion, to give birth, sex, gay, lesbian, homosexual, same-sex love [*odnopolaiia liubov*'], sexual orientation, sexual relationships, family values, traditional family, reproductive rights.

³ United Russia, purposefully created as a presidential party and to remain in power over the long term, has dominated Russian electoral politics and state institutions since it was created in 2001.

⁴ INSOR was created in March 2008 and originally overseen by then-First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, see http://www.insor-russia.ru/en/about_us/history.

⁵ An in-depth discussion of the reasons behind Russia's demographic crisis is beyond the scope of this chapter. The socio-economic upheavals that followed Russia's 'transition' to market capitalism, high levels of poverty and the downsizing and partial monetisation of the country's welfare system are widely considered important factors behind declining public health indicators and high mortality rates, although historical demographic imbalances also play a role (United Nations in Russia 2008; Field 2000). Russian demographers have debated the relative impact on population decline of mortality rates (very high by European standards) and declining birth rates (broadly in line with European trends, and reflecting a combination of economic and socio-cultural factors, such as changing patterns of marriage and cohabitation, delayed childbearing). They have generally been critical of the Russian government's emphasis on boosting the birth rates as a key measure to solve the demographic crisis vis-à-vis the neglect of measures to tackle of mortality and poor public health indicators (United Nations in Russia 2008).

⁶ Article 6.21 has been compared to infamous UK Section 2A of the 1988 Local Government Act, which forbade teaching in schools about homosexuality as a 'pretended family relation'. Whilst the UK law only concerned the activities of local authorities (and particularly educational settings), the implications of article 6.21 are much broader. Russian citizens, public officials and registered organisations are liable to fines, or (in the case of organisations) can be sanctioned to stop operations for up to 90 days; however, even harsher penalties are contemplated for the propaganda of 'non-traditional relations' in the media or on the internet. Moreover, the law specifies that non-Russian citizens (foreigners or stateless subjects) are subject to fines, or can jailed for up to 15 days and subsequently deported if found guilty.

⁷ Literally 'a man lying with a man', this was the term used in Soviet legislation criminalising consensual relations between men.