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The Phenomenon of Violence Against Queer People in Putin's Russia

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Abstract

This article examines the phenomenon of violence against queer people in Russia under Vladimir Putin's rule. When analyzing queerphobia, I draw on the methodology of Sara Ahmed, author of *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). In the article, I explore the issue of violence against gay men, who have become the primary target of widespread attacks by Putinist propaganda and Russian public institutions. I focus on the mindset of those who initiated the homophobic witch hunt. The queer body has become the target of institutional violence, with the aggressors fixating on the physicality, sexuality, and physiology of queer individuals. Queer people are subjected to torture aimed at the ritual mutilation of their genitals. In this article, I also analyze the next stage of Putin-era queerphobia, which began with the outbreak of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Introduction

This article explores the issue of violence against queer communities in Vladimir Putin's Russia. The manifestation of violence against queer people is most conspicuous in homophobia. It is important to emphasize that homophobia is a form of violence which has deep roots in tradition. This issue has become politically entangled, and homophobic violence is sometimes dismissed as an intellectual fad (Wickberg, 2000, pp. 42–57). From a phenomenological point of view, I would like to place emphasis on the following problem: homophobia is saturated with violence, and it is driven by clan-based aggression directed toward otherness. This type of violence is most often revealed in cultures dominated by religion and in very traditional communities. However, we will not understand hatred of queer people if we focus solely on religion. After all, many religious believers today accept queer people. Therefore, inspired by Freud's findings, it is more accurate to say that homophobia is as elusive as taboo. Violence often stems from prohibitions and commands of an unknown origin, and taboo itself is a kind of elusive authority. In Freud's words, violence is the domain of taboo (Freud, 1919, pp. 100–104). Following Michael Staudigl's ideas in his essay *Entwurf einer Phänomenologie der Gewalt*, we can posit that homophobia is a form of violence reinforced by the community, whereas violence itself is always an individual act. Aggression and injury are individual phenomena. Psychological and physical injury are intimate experiences specific to each person (Staudigl, 2012, pp. 180–182).

Homophobia and its manifestations, such as verbal and physical harm, can occur unexpectedly and lead to extreme hatred and even death. Numerous studies have shown that homophobia is an extreme form of violence (Meyer, 2015, pp. 42–43). It is difficult to consider this a manifestation of political or ideological hysteria. This raises the question: What is homophobia? The easiest way to answer this question is to examine specific examples. Concentration camps in Chechnya and the organized hunting of gay men by paramilitaries in Russia are dire instances of homophobic violence. Accounts from victims and witnesses illustrate the drive to eliminate the “hated queer body” (Lokshina, 2023).

In order to explore the phenomenon of Russian and specifically Putinist violence against queer people, I draw upon the research methodology of Sara Ahmed. In the introduction to her 2006 book *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed

puts forward the argument for the application of phenomenology in queer studies as follows: "Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2). Queer people experience and perceive their bodies differently due to the violence they endure. From a humanistic perspective, this is not an exaggeration of the homophobia problem, given that this aggression takes the form of physical violence against non-heteronormative bodies. The aggressor decides to attack because they do not accept that queer people could make decisions about their own bodies. Such fury and aggression are almost exclusively directed at queer people's bodies. When examining various manifestations of violence, phenomenology should also address the experience of sexual physicality and gender expression.

The aggressor restricts the queer person's body through a whole spectrum of prohibitions and commands. This article discusses the phenomenon of violence against gay men in Putin's Russia. Due to the patriarchy and exclusionary mentality dominating the country today, men have become the sole, or almost sole, targets of violence. The obsessive hatred and fixation of persecutors on the gay body is worth examining, as it has become the object of ritual mutilation by homophobes. Mary Douglas aptly recognized that the body symbolizes a given society. The violence and wounds inflicted on victims mirrors the obsessions that exist in society (Douglas, 2001, pp. 114–115). Homophobic violence in Russia has become widespread and is an everyday experience for queer people during Putin's rule. Their everyday life involves encountering various threats.

In patriarchal and traditional societies, queerphobic hatred is predominantly directed toward men who engage in sexual and romantic relationships with other men. For this reason, I focus my attention on violence against non-heteronormative men. In patriarchal cultures, erotic and romantic relationships between women are not taken seriously; for example, in early Russian society, the clergy punished women less severely because the hymen was supposedly not broken during lesbian sex. This crude reductionism treats the body as a purely physical object that can be subjected to macroscopic examination and evaluation. From a phenomenological perspective, one could argue that sex between men is viewed as purely physical and demonstrative, a "spectacular phenomenon" due to human culture's emphasis on

visualization and perception. This perception stirs the aggressor's imagination when encountering otherness or strangeness. In the aggressor's eyes, sex must be visualized in order to ignite the imagination, making violence equally spectacular. In this paper, I will examine the issue of violence against queer men in Putin-era Russia and seek to identify the causes of this violence. Is there a factor or phenomenon responsible for it? What determines aggression and hatred?

The Phenomenon of Narrative Violence: Tradition

I referred to tradition earlier, and for the following reason. Let us examine the phenomenon of homophobia from the perspective of the absolutization of tradition. In Russia, this has become a vehicle for phobias directed toward sexual and romantic minorities. During the Putin era, various notions of an all-encompassing, normative tradition have emerged, defining what is bodily and sexual, and setting the standard for what is considered normal. It is worth recalling Edmund Husserl's reflections on the essence of tradition at this point. Husserl was not interested in learning about tradition. He argued that tradition is lived; he refers to "being-in-the-tradition" (*Stehen-in-der-Tradition*), which emerges through community (Husserl, 2006, p. 437). The strength of tradition's influence is determined by the experience of tradition itself. Tradition, as the process of *tradere*—that is, transmission—influences the human ego that constitutes the community here and now. It is also an accumulation of past egos as a heritage of meanings—*Sinneserbschaft*. This was Husserl's view, but it is worth adding that, according to Freud, love forms bonds within communities and simultaneously becomes directed toward the group's leader, undoubtedly reinforcing authoritarianism (Freud, 1922, p. 66).

What is tradition, and how does it lead to pressure and violence on a grand scale? According to Freud, tradition and taboo are linked by the fact that they exude an aura of some nameless, overbearing authority. This authority is associated with the father's presence within the community, particularly the family, where he imposes his will and instills widespread fear. Tradition, which has strong religious connotations, is formed by commandments, prohibitions, sacred principles, values, rituals, and certain ritualized activities, among other things. Together, these exert pressure and

coercion, generating violence. Given that human sexuality has historically been subject to intense taboo, the violence associated with enforcing rules, regulations, prohibitions, and other restrictions relating to sex and reproduction is correspondingly intense. Husserl overlooks this aspect in his works because he believes that there is no subject without a community and that the individual must submit to the community's will to a significant extent. However, I am interested in how tradition has led to the accumulation of ideas about human sexuality and its purpose. I am essentially concerned with the cult of fertility because, in various traditionalist systems, the body must be capable of reproduction and of bringing new life into the world in order to be recognized by the community as valuable and necessary.

The imperative to procreate exerts as powerful an influence on members of a community as the prohibitions against killing one's own kind. It is therefore fitting that, in *The Phenomenological Mind*, Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi mention birth and death alongside sexuality (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 149). This imperative has become an inherent part of tradition and, to apply Husserl's terminology, it is among the deepest and heaviest sediments at the bottom of tradition. This has concrete consequences for the individual. Those who oppose the imperatives of tradition are mutilated and killed.

According to Husserl's theory, the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is constituted by tradition, along with history and language, among other things. Tradition also gradually builds up the sedimented meanings of the homeworld (*Heimwelt*). As I mentioned earlier, the traditional world is based on the oppressive demand to subjugate the individual through constant confrontation with the *Fremdwelt*. Building on these ideas, one might propose the following thesis: in the realm of sexuality, the figure of the "alien" is the queer community, which has most often been associated with homosexuality throughout history. What is the root cause of the aggression toward queer people, particularly men? I believe the source of violence against gay men lies in patriarchal and traditionalist expectations that their bodies belong to the community. In other words, their bodies must be capable of impregnating women to sustain the life of the entire community, ensuring its strength and continuity. The male body must produce sperm to fertilize a woman. In this sense, homosexuality and same-sex intercourse can be seen as threats to the entire community. In this context, the queer body—that of the Other—belongs to the *Fremdwelt*.

The Russian-Putinist Quest for Tradition

The Putin era is an example of the restoration of a patriarchal model of supremacy. This process is linked to the resurgence of nationalism, which is shaped by religion and the trope of the “rotten West” found in Russian culture. In Putin’s reductive traditionalism, the world is divided into good (Russia) and evil (the West). This corresponds to the belief that Russians are faithful to tradition and cherish traditional heterosexuality, while those oriented toward the West are depraved.

During the Putin era, this model of traditional physicality and sexuality has been reconstructed in a more extreme form, with clear boundaries and a strict definition of what constitutes tradition and Russian identity. As I mentioned above, the essence of this identity is primitive and based on a cult of reproduction. According to this schema, heterosexuality is the body that bears children, while the queer body is regarded as reproductively barren and perverse. The Russian and Putinist concept of “traditional sexual relations” had its origins in the early years of Putin’s presidency (i.e., between 2000 and 2008). While the Russian head of state did not take a clearly homophobic stance at that time, there was already growing hostility in the State Duma and an obsession with homosexuality and gender nonconformity was beginning to emerge. This obsession would lead to an intention to harm queer people.¹

Over the years, religious traditionalism and conservatism began to revive, along with the emergence of anti-Western resentment. The brutalization of social life was accompanied by an increasingly intense search for an enemy. Europe came to be demonized in the public sphere and has contemptuously been referred to as “Gayrope” (Riabova, 2015, pp. 89–90). This narrative was somewhat abstract at first, but the violence eventually became directed at specific individuals. As Heinrich Popitz wrote in *Phänomene der Macht*, violence is the deliberate physical harm of others, with the subject always at the center (Popitz, 1992, pp. 48–49). Violence against strangers is never merely abstract; it is enacted upon concrete bodies. This violence serves

¹ Following the dissolution of the USSR, the limited freedom enjoyed by queer people in Russia came to an end with the end of the Boris Yeltsin era. Yeltsin had ordered the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993. Russia’s economic crisis and the failure of liberal rule discredited the idea of freedom.

an educational purpose and must be spectacular. Drawing on Popitz's ideas, this can be applied to queer people. Those perceived as different are subject to different treatment; violence against them must usually be justified by proving that they possess certain alien and dangerous characteristics and defects that are dysfunctional for the community. The history of homophobia and its various manifestations is very long and contains many examples of brutality. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's perspective, one could argue that violence against sexual minorities is more visible than fluctuations between violence and acceptance (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p. 109). This can be applied to the queer experience. A constant feature is aggression directed against sexual difference and gender identity. In this context, Judith Butler's observation that violence against queer people is widespread yet difficult to expose and prove is particularly pertinent: "It was difficult to bring this violence into view precisely because gender was so taken for granted at the same time that it was violently policed" (Butler, 1999, p. xix). This violence is often hidden away in people's homes, away from any witnesses. Butler mentions accounts she cites of young gay men who were forced to leave their family homes because of their sexuality.

In *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, Bernard Waldenfels stated that violence, as an outside intrusion, is always addressed. The body is the primary space in which violence can occur. However, physical injury can be preceded by a narrative that legitimizes violence, which prefigures bodily injury (Waldenfels, 2002, pp. 149–150). Violence against queer people often begins with intentional verbal abuse. For example, in early 2002, a homophobic anti-pedophile narrative emerged in Russia. The alleged protection of children was used to justify violence against homosexuals, who were equated with pedophiles. This association was not new; throughout history, gay men have often been equated with pederasts—pedophiles who "hunted" epebes out of frustration, much like the protagonist of Sartre's *Nausea* (Sartre, 2007, pp. 163–169).

Equating male homosexuality with pedophilia is intended to create an association between homosexuality and a repulsive crime against the innocent. From a phenomenological perspective, it is important to note that, in the eyes of homophobes, gay men are criminals who prey on children. In Russia, the belief inherited from the Soviet era is that homosexuality is punishable by exile to a labor camp, and that homosexuals constitute the worst and most depraved category of prisoners. In this context, it should be

recalled that State Duma deputy Svetlana Goracheva started a campaign in defense of so-called Russian morality. She proposed raising the age of consent for sexual relations. According to the biased opinions commissioned by the author, starting sexual activity too early poses a risk of developing pathologies such as sadism, a tendency toward rape, pedophilia, and homosexuality (Goracheva, 2002, p. 5).² In Russia, the Orthodox tradition has become intertwined with the “Soviet tradition,” both of which have, to adopt Husserl’s terminology, left a “lasting sediment” in the culture. This has resulted in an unusual combination of different types of homophobias. For instance, some deputies from the party led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the Communists suggested recriminalizing male homosexuality, i.e., restoring the provision from the Stalinist Criminal Code of 1934 (lesbians were not punished). It is worth noting that in 1934, Article 121 of the Criminal Code reverted to the Old Russian term for sexual contact between men, “muzhelozhstvo.” The wording of the statute explicitly framed the gay male body through the image of one man lying with another.

Over the years, queer people in Putin’s Russia have been subjected to widespread attacks in the Kremlin-controlled media. They have been portrayed as enemies of traditional, Orthodox Russia. LGBT+ people have become synonymous with depravity, and queer intimacy has been reduced to a matter of repulsive physiology. Putin’s media organizations and journalists became obsessed with documenting the physical aspects of same-sex sexual contact. The queer body has become a political and ideological issue for the state.

The bodies, physiology, and bodily fluids of queer people have been the subject of intense stigmatization. The narrative of violence has involved an attempt to disgust people with the most minute details of queer bodily fluids. On the Rossiia-1 channel, Putin’s propagandist Dmitry Kiselev argued that the ban on gay propaganda should be extended. He declared on television that gay people should be banned from donating blood and sperm. Furthermore, he stated that in the event of a car accident, the hearts of gay people should be burned so that they cannot prolong anyone’s life (Clover, 2022, p. 316). In the eyes of the propagandist, the queer body is not only

² Eminent sociologist and sexologist Igor Kon was excluded from the consultations because his research was based on reliable scientific knowledge devoid of biased and moralising assumptions.

dangerous and toxic, but, above all, unproductive in the context of traditionalist ideology, as it does not produce offspring. Thus, in this dehumanizing narrative, such a body is nothing more than a useless object. To put it another way, in Levinas's terms, it is merely a hostile category rather than a subject with a face.

Kiselev revealed a traditionalist obsession with reproducing "pure" life, which is in keeping with the spirit of tradition. In Putin's Russia, the idea that queer people are causing a demographic collapse is repeated like a mantra. This phobia ignores the fact that no sexual orientation is associated with infertility. In many countries, queer people have children, thanks to friendly relationships between gay men and lesbians, among other things. As Ahmed explains in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, sexual orientation relates to reproduction only if two people wish to form an intimate relationship (Ahmed, 2014, p. 145). A queer body can give birth or impregnate. These decisions are usually made consciously and lead to a mature approach to parenting. In the homophobic narrative of the Putin era, only heterosexual marriage and having children within such a marriage are considered acceptable and legal. As Michel Foucault aptly observed when analyzing the Victorian mindset, only formally monogamous couples who have children are entitled to rights and privileges—in other words, the "legitimate and procreative couple" (Foucault, 1990, p. 3). Violence is used as a punishment for failing to fulfill the duty to procreate.

One of the phenomena of violence against queer people in Russia is the undermining of their identity and dignity, as well as the propagation of the myth that homosexuality is contagious. This body is infectious and contaminates the nation's pure blood. For this reason, it spreads the germ of barrenness. Queer people can easily be stripped of their dignity by aggressively promoting the idea that sexual orientation is invented, inauthentic, frivolous, and a passing fad. As Ahmed reminds us, we live in a culture where heterosexuality is axiologically neutral. The term "sexual orientation" is no longer neutral, as it implies homosexuality or weirdness. Therefore, the implication is that the whole world is heterosexual (Ahmed, 2006, p. 67). Even the mildest homophobic text might sound like this: "Maybe you think you're not heterosexual?" According to Ahmed, this constitutes the first degree of narrative violence, which begins when one leaves one's comfort zone due to the dominance of heteronormativity (Ahmed, 2014, p. 152). This dominance of a single paradigm stems from

a tradition that imposes rules and prohibitions on sexual behavior and, as Katrina Roen observes, reinforces the binary division between masculinity and femininity by invoking the authority of medical science (Roen, 2005, pp. 270–271). And yet the queer community shows that, while confining oneself to binary frameworks may perpetuate social oppression, it does not facilitate self-expression. After all, how can femininity and masculinity be defined when science proves that, at a certain stage of “fetal development” and even after birth, characteristics of sexual dimorphism may be unclear?

The second level of queerphobia is more hazardous, and the narrative I am referring to is that of the pathologization of being queer. It has been argued by proponents of homophobia that non-heterosexual orientation could be treated as a contagious disease that should be cured. This myth has often led to harmful and even deadly therapies, with suicide being the most common consequence of the intensification of self-hatred. In the 21st century, this issue remains highly relevant in many regions of the world.

In homophobic discourse, even geographical space is imbued with a sexual dimension. Ahmed provocatively argues that space is considered sexual regardless of sexual orientation because a person begins to desire someone in a specific space (Ahmed, 2006, p. 1). For obvious biological reasons, this space is conditioned by heterosexual individuals. American sexologist Anne Fausto-Sterling has emphasized the significance of space in shaping gender norms, which can be influenced by spaces of various sizes, ranging from countries and cultures to the subcultures of gay bars. For instance, a gay man dressed in stereotypically feminine attire may be subjected to violence in a homophobic society, but receive compliments in a queer bar. Fausto-Sterling therefore concludes that our identities are constructed depending on our surroundings (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 244).

Encounter and confrontation create an experience that inhabits the body; especially when the body feels a desire that does not conform to the norms set by tradition. As Edmund Husserl argued, every perceiving consciousness is embodied consciousness (Husserl, 1931, p. 127). Reflecting on this idea, we might conclude that our sexuality, as a physical phenomenon, plays a significant role in shaping our consciousness, our experience of the world and our decisions, both spontaneous and deliberate. As humans, we cannot free ourselves from thoughts about the body. According to phenomenologists, there is no space in which objects exist independently. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty explained, it is the body that provides our central perspective

(Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 57). When he wrote that our sexuality cannot in any way be separated from the way our bodies experience the world, Merleau-Ponty was drawing on Freud's ideas (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 183). The body functions within a certain space on a daily basis. More precisely, it is constrained by certain objective obstacles within that space. Extending this idea to the experience of queerness, we can see that desire, as a bodily experience, encounters obstacles in the form of traditional commands and prohibitions enforced by those who adhere to tradition. In other words, the obstacles to the fulfillment of desire are encountered in the everyday bodily experience of a queer person. As noted by Lisabeth During and Terry Fealy, a phenomenology that incorporates gay and lesbian theories must closely examine the everyday experiences of homosexual persons, their place in the world and their relationships with others (During, Fealy, 1997, p. 121). Particular attention should be paid to the issues that queer individuals face in their daily lives.

In this context, let us once again consider Husserl's thoughts on tradition. I would argue that this is of significant importance when it comes to the experience of being queer in the world. When a person discovers that their body gives off signals and signs that clash with the expectations of a tradition-based culture, they experience a moment of tragic tension and self-directed violence. Tradition expects strict adherence to permanent rules, while consciousness, permeated by these traditions, must also heed the body. The individual's desires struggle against the ego-shaped consciousness that forms the community, as well as what Husserl termed the "historical ego" of all previous generations.

Bearing in mind the above reflections, let us now focus our attention on the case of Putin's homophobia discussed in this paper. In homophobic Russian narratives, queerness is depicted as a foreign phenomenon, supposedly characteristic of the West, as a culture hostile to tradition. Russian conservatives initiated the construction of a narrative that purports to demonstrate the moral purity of Orthodox Russia and its commitment to the cultivation of traditional values. The Orthodox East was expected to be free from impure, infertile (barren) queer bodies. The Russian Orthodox Church also engages in practices that can be interpreted as symbolic violence, including the act of cleansing the ground (with water) where queer persons have walked. For instance, in 2005 the missionary department issued

a statement that it would cleanse the streets with holy water after the pride parade (Corvin, 2005).

Homophobic narratives often feature the idea that the number of queer people is increasing rapidly. These people are portrayed as a threat to tradition, particularly to the traditional model of heterosexual relationships. This myth of uncontrolled growth in the number of homosexuals is further reinforced by the belief that a heterosexual person can be turned gay. In other words, it is as if homosexuality were the result of random social factors and the transition from one sexual orientation to another were a mere whim. A pseudo-scientific book published in 2003, *Gays and Lesbians*, gained widespread publicity. The author, Dilia Enikeeva, a psychiatrist and sexologist, argued that only one in a hundred Russian gays and lesbians could be considered “true homosexuals.” These self-professed homosexuals then proceed to entice heterosexuals into the same sexual orientation. The underlying reasons for this pattern of behavior remain to be elucidated. Enikeeva’s argument posits that individuals’ inclination toward homosexuality is driven by a desire to advance their professional careers, a psychological immaturity, a tendency to be dominated by influential figures, and the susceptibility to seduction. As a point of reference, it is important to note that, following Goracheva, Enikeeva proceeded to examine the alleged interdependence between homosexuality and pedophilia. In order to protect the “purity” of heterosexual orientation, Enikeeva proposed raising the age of consent for sexual activity to 18. In Enikeeva’s opinion, members of the LGBTQ+ community are responsible for the infection of mentally healthy heterosexual individuals. Although Enikeeva was unable to identify the medical cause of the increase in homosexuality, she did suggest that it may be due to some kind of pathological mutation (Enikeeva, 2003, pp. 106–109, 233–237). Enikeeva’s analysis identified gay men as the primary reason for the demographic calamity. In accordance with the Bolshevik “homophobic tradition,” Enikeeva’s research focused on homosexual men. The idea that homosexual bodies were presented as an expansive factor of depravity that was spreading in the West was put forward. The necessity to halt this incursion was a recurring theme in the discourse of the Duma, where deliberations on the matter were a regular occurrence. Rather than being curtailed through educational initiatives or persuasive discourse, the propagation of queer-ness was to be stopped through the use of psychological and, ultimately, physical violence. The anti-queer traditional narrative was marked by the

stigmatization of romantic minorities and the portrayal of queer people as sexually deviant, necessitating treatment.

The Cult of Heterosexual Masculinity

Over time, the Kremlin leader began to openly show his support for the Orthodox Church, giving the green light to the large-scale construction of a state ideology of traditionalism with an official cult of heteronormative masculinity at its core. In this context, the tenets of the dominant religion have reinforced anti-gay rhetoric, particularly within Russia's patriarchal culture. Let me draw your attention to a significant fact: in 2013, homophobia in Russia was enshrined in law. State Duma deputies tried to convince everyone that their goal was to defend traditional values and children from so-called homosexual propaganda. Since Putin's third term began in 2012, Russia has been waging a cultural war in defense of these values. Putin has consolidated his power by offering Russians, orphaned after the dissolution of the USSR, the prospect of expanding Russia's military might and sphere of dominance, as well as positioning Russia as the center of global conservatism. In this respect, Russia aspires to be the guardian of tradition. This is in opposition to the "morally corrupt" West, which, according to Putin and the Orthodox Church's propagandists, has become a breeding ground for counter-values, decadence, nihilism, gender confusion, and the "promotion" of sexual deviance. Since then, Russia has legislated to define which sexual relations are and are not traditional (Sheller-Boltz, 2017, pp. 72–73). Same-sex intimacy has officially been declared non-traditional (i.e., in Russia). The idea of defining which sexual relations are traditional is grotesque and absurd in itself. The legislator has decided to take an interest in the physicality and sexuality of its citizens. This legislative absurdity was fully endorsed by Putin and Patriarch Kirill. Such a hateful narrative has found fertile ground in a brutalized social life. Drawing on Husserl's ideas, I have shown above the significance of tradition in forming prejudices based on binary patterns and schemas.

Traditionalism implies a cult of patriarchy and brutal masculine ideals, fueling hatred toward non-heteronormative people. Tradition presents a binary division of the world between the strong man and the weak woman, with gay men being associated with a blurring of gender traits and portrayed

as effeminate. A common feature of homophobic narratives is the attribution of masculine traits to lesbians and feminine traits to gay men. This is intended to disparage individuals who supposedly exhibit a mixture of biological dimorphism and socially gender-typical behavior patterns. Before queer bodies became the target of Putin's violent campaign, a propaganda attack was launched to promote the idea of masculinity. Russian men were expected to embody the antithesis of Conchita Wurst, whom Putin's propagandists portrayed as a symbol of Europe—a continent derisively termed "Gayrope" by the aggressors. The aggressors fixated on Conchita's beard, viewing it as a harbinger of the imminent end of "Gayrope" (Cassiday, 2023, pp. 100–101). At the same time, the model of masculine Putin was promoted relentlessly. The president displayed his physical strength in the media by riding a horse bare-chested, being gallant toward women and brutal toward men. He constantly emphasized his role as the alpha male, hunting down his enemies (including Khodorkovsky and Nemtsov). In Freudian terms, one could argue that the image of Putin is a typical tribal portrayal of the dominant father figure who imposes his will on his family—or, in other words, a small, traditional community. His masculinity and libido are—in propagandist eyes—beyond question. Male family members are expected to embody the same qualities as the father: machismo, brutality, and self-assurance. At the opposite end of the spectrum were metrosexual, supposedly effeminate men who were "imports" from the West. The "Russian macho" despised "soft queers." Russian public television entertainment programs ridiculed gay men as people who only pretended to be men. The queer male body and its manner of movement were supposedly comical imitations of real, masculine Russian machos. Russian macho ideology aimed to devalue the physicality of queer people. According to this hateful narrative, only heterosexual men and cisgender women possess the bodies of "true men" and "true women," as defined by the Italian fascist thinker Julius Evola's concept of the "absolute man" and "absolute woman." Simone de Beauvoir offered an interesting commentary on the views of extreme traditionalists, stating that the man is the subject and the absolute, while the woman is simply different (de Beauvoir, 1956, pp. 15–16). In patriarchal traditionalism, a leader's brutality and rudeness not only raise no objections, but actually strengthen his position and authority.

In this context, Elizabeth Wood analyzed Putin's political image, which is based on two contrasting elements: the traditional, patriarchal "muzhik" and

the contemporary pop star (Wood, 2016, pp. 329–350). Putin's physical prowess was on display, as was his penchant for crude, physiological jokes. When he wanted to publicly humiliate his opponents, such as journalists, he would suggest castration or hanging by one testicle (Petersson, 2021, p. 68). In 2004, a song in Putin's honor, "Takogo kak Putin," was written and performed by young women. The song has little artistic merit and presents a very stereotypical image of women admiring Putin (Sperling, 2015, pp. 39–47). This primitive cult of the heterosexual Russian male body had a vulgar, almost pornographic dimension. It is precisely this glorification of Putin's body and its vulgarity that accompanied the persecution of homosexual men, whose bodies were ritually mutilated.

The cult of heterosexual masculinity and homophobia has unleashed immense hatred and violence against queer people. One victim was Vladislav, a young Russian man whose body was subjected to brutal torture.³ He was the victim of ritualistic, homophobic violence: his head was smashed with a paving stone and his genitals crushed. The final act of humiliation was brutally shoving a beer bottle into his anus. This incident occurred a few months after the Duma passed the so-called anti-gay law. When questioned, the attackers made no secret of the fact that they were punishing him for his non-traditional sexual orientation (Kirilenko, 2013). Vladislav's family emphatically stated that he was not homosexual and expressed their outrage that Elton John had dedicated his concert to the murdered boy. Nevertheless, this does not alter the fact that the murderers confessed that they tortured Vladislav under the impression that he was homosexual. Vladislav's sexuality was shrouded in secrecy due to a sense of shame. In the context of queer phenomenology, the topic of shame must be highlighted. Like taboos and tradition in general, shame is elusive. Referring once again to Husserl's reflections, one might argue that the sense of shame is a heavy residue that the individual inherits from participating in culture. It is a mixture of feelings, including panic, disgust, aggression, and opportunism, where the community and its feelings and judgements take precedence over the individual. Vladislav's parents were ashamed that their son had been murdered because of homophobia. Many

³ On the night of 9 May 2013, during the Victory Day holiday in Volgograd, tragedy struck. Vladislav Tornovoi, aged 23, and his friends were enjoying a beer near the block of flats where he lived with his grandmother. His friends accused him of being gay. The following morning, his grandmother began searching for him. He was found dead in the courtyard.

ritual honor killings (e.g., in extremely traditional Islamic communities) are caused by an explosion of shame following the revelation of a family member's homosexuality. The disgrace caused by homosexuality can only be atoned for through brutal murder.

The bodies of queer people, or those perceived as such, were treated as objects of assault and subjected to extreme violence. In cases of violence against gay men, the body—particularly the parts that could potentially be used for sexual intercourse—is the main target. Vladislav's murder was ritualistic in nature. The intention of the murderers was to mutilate the victim in such a way as to leave no doubt that the murder was a punishment for the impurity and sinfulness of queer bodies. The sense of shame that I have described, stemming from the existence of a homosexual body, is closely linked to religious traditions and their teachings. According to monotheistic religious traditions, the queer body is sinful; however, it should be noted that the aggression in the holy books is directed toward homosexual men. As I wrote above, this aggression stems from patriarchy and the belief that semen is a sacred fluid that should only be used for fertilization.

A similar ritual murder occurred in the United States in 1998. The victim was Matthew Wayne Shepard, a 21-year-old gay man. After torturing him for a prolonged period, his tormentors crucified him (Faderman, 2015, pp. 556–558). During the trial, the murderers attempted to justify their actions on the basis that Matthew was gay (Sprinkle, 2011, p. 4). They thus attempted to share responsibility with the victim, just as Vladislav's murderers had done. Following the physical violence, some people continued the verbal abuse. During Matthew's funeral, clergymen appeared with banners bearing slogans such as "Hell exists. Ask Matthew" and "God rejoices in the death of a faggot" (these displays of hatred occurred in front of Matthew's parents). According to Ahmed's phenomenological metaphor, the phenomenon of violence against queer people consists in the queer body being most often annihilated by the straight body. In this sense, this annihilation is the second dimension of being, as Sartre would say (Sartre, 1957, p. 351).

Under Putin's deeply patriarchal vision of Russian traditionalism, only heterosexual men are considered real men. This has created a widespread atmosphere of homophobia, sparking an outburst of aggression directed exclusively at gay men. The introduction of homophobic legislation during Putin's era sparked a surge in neo-Nazi militia activity. In 2013, the skinhead Maxim Martsinkevich started hunting down gay Russians. He founded the

informal organization Occupy Pedophilia (Russian: Оккупай-педофилия) in 2010, which had branches throughout Russia. Martsinkevich declared that his militias would hunt down pedophiles—i.e., gay people—because, in their opinion, homosexuality was synonymous with pedophilia (Habeck & Schröder, 2016, pp. 11–12). The victims were humiliated, degraded, and beaten. Videos of these attacks were posted online (Buyantueva, 2022, pp. 113–114).

Violence against queer people is aimed at stigmatizing their bodies. Martsinkevich touched his victims while wearing black gloves to avoid coming into contact with their skin. Black gloves are worn to protect the aggressor and create a boundary between heterosexual and homosexual bodies. This dehumanizes the victims, whose bodies become strange and even repulsive objects in the eyes of their tormentors. Emmanuel Levinas perfectly described this mechanism (although he himself did not focus on violence against homosexuals). The following quotation is significant in this regard: “Violence consists in interrupting the continuity of persons, in making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves” (Levinas, 1979, p. 21). The tormentor has reduced the Other to a mere illustration of a concept or category, swallowing them up in the process. Violence transforms the victim into a plaything for the tormentor, who toys with them as a cat toys with a mouse it has caught. In the Putin era, fascist aggressors devise various ways of depersonalizing and humiliating their victims—the victim no longer has a face, but becomes an object with specific macroscopic characteristics and nothing more. Gay men were forced to perform degrading acts, such as simulating oral sex with a rainbow-colored dildo. Their hair was shaved off the top of their heads. Their skin was painted in rainbow colors. The victims were often half-naked and had offensive, vulgar slogans placed on their torsos. After these ritual photo shoots and videos, the victims were subjected to bloody torture. This was Martsinkevich's way of staging an initiation, after which the queer body could be treated even more cruelly. The use of black gloves clearly signaled that this body was not “normal” and posed a threat to “normal” men like heterosexual Martsinkevich.

Chechnya—Extermination Camps

As I mentioned above, queer bodies have become the target of ritualized homophobic violence. The perpetrators' aim is to mutilate the genitals and thus humiliate the victim. In the case of homosexual men, the aggressors focus particularly on the anus. In their eyes, it is a symbol of absolute deviance, disconnected from the rest of the victim's body. Mary Douglas often emphasized the symbolic and physical dimensions of the human body. The body reflects the microcosm of the community and repeats spatial boundaries. Let us recall Douglas's words: "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (Douglas, 2001, p. 116). In Kadyrov's Chechnya, the queer body has become a symbol of diabolical forces. For the aggressors, it is considered unclean, contaminated and threatening; therefore, it must be mutilated and expelled beyond the boundaries of the traditional community. Kadyrov refuses to accept that Chechnya could be "corrupted" by homosexuality. The dictator has repeatedly called for gay people to be expelled from the region. This is why Ahmed has repeatedly stated that "queer" also has a spatial dimension, in that homophobia aims to remove queer bodies from heterosexual spaces. According to traditional rules, the queer body is considered to be outside the boundaries of the community that adheres to these principles.

Russian legislation at the federal level has, in a sense, legitimized and justified the unleashing of a "pink hunt." This "pink hunt" has been unleashed against LGBT+ people, particularly against gay men. Draconian anti-gay legislation has coincided with extreme anti-gay violence in various parts of Russia (Belmonte, 2021, pp. 187–188). According to reports by "Novaia Gazeta" and the Memorial Human Rights Center, in 2017 Chechnya began a "purge of sinful bodies," for which death camps were set up. These camps were used to carry out ritual torture, including brutal rape with various dangerous objects (this was probably the fate of the singer Zelimkan Bakayev). In Chechnya, lesbians were also victims of corrective rape or honor killings at the hands of their families. Kadyrov and his subordinates sought absolute control over women's bodies (Janoff, 2022, pp. 72–73). Women's bodies also became objects in the hands of their tormentors. This violence is not only conditioned by the instrumental application of Sharia law. In the USSR, violence against homosexuals was only superficially reduced in the

1920s. In Russian culture, the bodies of homosexual and transgender people were treated brutally by doctors. For example, one pseudo-study was intended to prove the homosexuality of an accused woman: "An attempt to stimulate the clitoris with a finger, carried out by Professor Fenomenov, was unsuccessful. However, such an attempt is not convincing, as homosexual women are generally uninterested in men" (Tarnovskii, 1895, p. 20). However, let us now turn to the topic of homophobia in Chechnya, which has been exacerbated by Putin's legislation.

In their article, Maria Brock and Emil Edenberg stated that the cause of violence against queer people in Chechnya was "archaic tribal culture, traditionalist attitudes among the population, and increased Muslim religiosity" (Brock & Edenberg, 2020, p. 677). While this thesis may sound convincing, it is insufficient to explain the phenomenon of violence against queer people. After all, aggression toward queer people is not limited to societies dominated by religion. For example, Guevara and Castro persecuted queer people shortly after the revolution, sending them to labor camps (López, 2015, pp. 39–49).

As I mentioned earlier, homophobic violence against homosexual and bisexual men focuses on the genitals and the idea that the victims are completely defined by their potential anality. The violence in the Chechen camps is strikingly similar to that suffered by gay men in Nazi concentration camps. Josef Kohout, a gay man who was imprisoned in a Nazi camp, wrote down his story and those of other prisoners who were arrested because of their sexual orientation. According to his account, SS officers, kapos, and fellow prisoners focused their attention on the genitals of gay men. Every roll call began with blows to the testicles. The guards were obsessed with the penises, testicles, and anuses of gay men. Kohout recounts one such violent incident: "You assholes, you butt-fuckers, you cocksuckers! I'll teach you tidiness! I'll make your asses boil!" (Heger, 1994, p. 68). This demonstrates the brutality and joy of torturing queer bodies. But what was the reason for this? Ahmed stated that homophobes cannot bear the thought that queer people can enjoy sex (Ahmed, 2014, p. 162). This explains why Kadyrov has never hidden his hatred of pride parades. The sight of happy, joyful queer people who are not ashamed of their sexuality and who enjoy closeness and intimacy infuriates homophobes, immediately arousing in them a desire to hurt queer people.

Homophobia involves the ritualistic repetition of dividing the world into two categories: one's own world and the foreign world. This pattern also

applies to sexuality. People who are sexually different must be identified and expelled: this is why victims' genitals are mutilated and why Kadyrov himself has called for "cleansing the space" of queer people (Janoff, 2022, pp. 79–88). Only those who are different, i.e., familiar strangers, can be tolerated (Jedliński & Witczak, 2017, pp. 10–11). A gay man, on the other hand, represents absolute sexual otherness. As I have previously mentioned, primitive communities were expected to maintain purity by expelling sexually different individuals beyond their borders. This mechanism of stigmatization and expulsion is primitive; for example, it was described by Florian Znaniecki in his "Studja nad antagonizmem do obcych" (Znaniecki, 1931, pp. 42–50). The wound inflicted on the victim is intended to delineate the boundary between the norm of self-identity and sexual otherness. From a phenomenological perspective, therefore, violence against queer people—specifically, primarily against homosexual and bisexual men—is distinctly spatial. The world is divided into "us" and "them." In such a patriarchal and clan-based regime, everyone who is "one of us" and not an enemy must fulfill specific roles: women should bear multiple children and men should impregnate women and fight enemies. This explains why semen is fetishized, as it provides a means of fighting enemies through the birth of new offspring who will produce more offspring (women), impregnate them, and provide the community with further generations of fighters.

The Body During War

Every period of armed conflict makes the body much more likely to become the target of violence than in times of peace, and this must be understood if we are to break the cycle of violence. It is obvious that real armed conflict is often preceded by propaganda aimed at dehumanizing the enemy. Prior to the 2014 war in Ukraine, for example, Russia had already launched a propaganda campaign against the LGBT+ community. This community was branded as agents of the West. The West itself—Europe and America—was perceived as a hotbed of moral and sexual depravity.⁴ As I have previously written,

⁴ Incidentally, this anti-Western narrative has its roots in the Bolshevik period and even the pre-history of the Tsarist era, including 19th-century classical Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism.

Putin's propaganda is fixated on European gays, using the crude metaphor of "Gayrope." From a phenomenological perspective, it is worth noting that, during the Putin era, propaganda has elevated the binary division to an absolute condition of traditional conformity. As mentioned above, Conchita Wurst, the drag queen who performed at the Eurovision Song Contest, was one of the targets of this concerted attack. Right-wing and ultraconservative circles regarded the "woman with a beard" as an example of moral degeneration and the blurring of the boundaries between masculinity and femininity. The ongoing war with Ukraine, which began in 2014, exacerbated this crude attack on her, with extreme traditionalists claiming they wanted to save Ukraine from Western moral decay. Vulgar Russian conservatives fixated on the artist's body. Her beard became a symbol of the blurring of gender roles and identity, representing an assault on the sacred tradition that upholds the binary division. This division into heterosexuality (traditional and truly Russian) and homosexuality (anti-traditional and anti-Russian) corresponds to the traditional division into two genders. In this context, homosexuality is associated with masculine excess and a betrayal of true masculinity. However, camp itself does not necessarily have its roots in homosexuality, as Fabio Cleto argues. This shows that the attributes of heterosexuality can be fluid (Cleto, 1999, p. 3). From a phenomenological perspective, one might argue that what is considered traditional and 'normal' is influenced by the sedimented "givenness level" of the homeworld. As I mentioned earlier, this kind of sediment lies at the pre-reflective structure of the life-world. Butler—drawing on Husserl's terminology—writes that sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a "natural sex" or a "real woman." Over time, "corporeal styles," as defined by Butler, have emerged within the confines of tradition. These styles exist in a binary relationship with one another (Butler, 1999, p. 178). Let us consider an example of Russian patriarchy. In the world of traditional Russian culture, beards are exclusively for men. The beard is strongly associated with loyalty to tradition and veneration of the dominant heterosexual male, the tribal chief (a similar association exists in the Islamic world).

Throughout Putin's full-scale war against Ukraine, Russian culture has been dominated by the idea of total confrontation with the West, which is supposedly spreading immorality to countries like Russia, and since then, gay people have become synonymous with contemporary depravity and effeminacy that infects "real Russian men." In a narrative typical of a binary

worldview, tradition is equated with good, while queer people are equated with evil, among other things. From a phenomenological standpoint, violence in a large-scale war becomes a systematized industry, in which previously hidden, pre-reflective desires to sadistically inflict pain come to the surface. Culture fades away, and people begin to treat the enemy's body as an experimental subject (for example, in the extermination camps of Nazi Germany and Kadyrov's Chechnya). In this anti-Western narrative, however, the promise of saving Ukraine is striking: a promise to save it from "metaphysical evil." The war against Ukraine and the genocide being committed against Ukrainians has further intensified homophobia, including in Chechnya. Media reports and interviews with refugees reveal that extreme violence against queer people remains an everyday occurrence in Chechnya during the war with Ukraine (Gavin, 2023). In Ukraine itself, Russian soldiers rape not only women, but men as well; sexual violence against men is a ritual of absolute domination intended to humiliate Ukrainians further (Shumylovych, 2025, p. 74). Although rape is presented as a form of punishment for sin, it is merely a pretext for the perpetrators, whose primary aim is to mutilate the bodies they loathe.

It is noteworthy that during the aggression against Ukraine, Putin's speeches have suggested that the LGBT+ community threatens Russian identity and contributes to a decline in fertility. Putin himself has stated: "Do we want children in the first years of school to be taught ideas that lead to degeneration and extinction?" (Kremlin.ru, 2022). As it was said, in Putin's Russia, the idea that demographic collapse is exacerbated by queer people is repeated like a mantra. The queer body is crudely portrayed as barren and useless because, in the eyes of its aggressors, it is unable to fulfill the patriotic and nationalist duty of procreation.

As I have previously mentioned, in reference to Ahmed's views, the fear held by Putin's supporters ignores the fact that no sexual orientation is associated with infertility. In many countries, queer people have children, thanks to friendly relationships between gay men and lesbians, among other methods. As Ahmed explains in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, sexual orientation relates to reproduction only if two people wish to form a relationship (Ahmed, 2014, p. 145). According to Ahmed, for ideologues of violence, the queer body is barren and infertile and has no right to sit at the common table because it will not contribute to the greater good. Ahmed, however, sees great value in queer families. Similarly, Andrew

Sullivan argues that by seeking marriage, queer people demonstrate to heterosexuals the importance of long-term relationships and starting a family (Sullivan, 1995, p. 112). Ahmed emphasizes that the only thing that makes queer families different is the way in which the queer body feels as if it is in a toxic environment. She draws attention to the various ways in which queer individuals and families learn to live, stating that “learning to live with the effects and affects of heterosexism and homophobia may be crucial to what makes queer families different from non-queer ones” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 154). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also wrote about the issue of an inclusive understanding of the family. Of course, queer relationships do not have to be limited to family life. In general, relationships between people do not have to be limited to genital relationships. Romantic love between people of the same sex or trans people comes in many forms (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1994, pp. 71–72).

In authoritarian and totalitarian states, the atmosphere of war reduces social life to vulgar and grotesque violence. In his work *Logical Investigations*, Husserl states that nonsense and absurdity must not be placed on the same level, even though they are part of the realm of what is meaningful (Husserl, 2006, pp. 67–68). The phenomenon of violence allows for the creation of hyperbolic actions and is strongly evident in this meaningfulness. The following event illustrates this: On the night of 22–23 November 2024, there was a Russian anti-terrorist raid on the “Zebra” club in the city of Voronezh. Following a violent dispersal, 40 LGBT+ people were put on a police bus. Among those arrested was the drag queen artist Zaza Napoli, who was performing at the club. This was an inevitable consequence and a physical manifestation of Russian legislation which, since 2023, has recognized the LGBT+ movement as extremist.⁵ Similar raids based on reports from so-called defenders of traditional Russian values have taken place in other underground clubs (for example, at the “Tochka” club in Chita and at the “Rose” club in Orenburg). A common pattern in these raids by aggressive anti-terrorist forces involves beating, humiliating, and hurling abuse at queer people lying on the floor; some victims are then immediately

⁵ Consequently, the fight against the LGBT+ movement involves the deployment of anti-terrorist forces. According to the Russian Criminal Code, involvement in LGBT+ extremism carries a sentence of up to 10 years in a penal colony. In practice, this means that displaying a rainbow flag or wearing a rainbow bracelet could be considered a terrorist threat to Russia.

forcibly conscripted into the army and sent to the front line to fight against Ukraine (Leybin, 2025).

Russian anti-terrorists wore black gloves during the raids on the gay clubs. Martsinkevich, a neo-Nazi, wore similar gloves. It is striking that criminals, neo-Nazis and the police employ the same methods of verbal and physical violence. These black gloves symbolize violence, revulsion and contempt, as well as the deliberate dehumanization of the victims. Gloves protect the perpetrator from contact with the blood of their victim. Furthermore, the glove signifies the boundary between the world of the “true masculine” aggressor and the homosexual man, whom the aggressor deems unworthy of belonging to the “true masculine” world. Avoiding skin-to-skin contact creates a very firm boundary between the perpetrator and that which he despises and hates.

Violence ceases to be abstract when it is experienced as pain in even the smallest wound; every wound inflicted by the aggressor is a sign of the tormentor’s sadistic domination and pleasure. Ahmed argues that violence devastates the body. It is not merely a matter of physically slicing the victim’s tissue and causing blood to flow. Even in its initial stage of discrimination, violence has a negative impact on the body: “Such forms of discrimination can have negative effects involving pain, anxiety, fear, depression and shame, all of which can restrict the body” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 154). At this point, we should note the shame that I mentioned when describing the violent incident involving Vladislav. Although it is difficult to define shame unequivocally, it plays a significant role in the theater of violence. Returning to my earlier reflections on tradition, I must again emphasize that its accumulated sediments—such as disgust, the dominance of the binary gender division, the cult of virginity, hypocrisy and silence surrounding sex—are particularly painful for queer people, especially gay men. When their homosexuality is revealed within the community, it triggers an explosion of shame not only for them, but for the entire community. Before gaining life experience, a person functions in a pre-reflective world, probably feeling no shame. It is only oppressive tradition that imposes this emotional state. This feeling is determined by where one finds oneself, the specific circumstances and the culture. Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann stated that my present “now” is the starting point for my spatial orientation (Schütz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 36). Gay and transgender Russians are trapped in a world of violence, particularly during wartime. Aggressors impose a sense of shame

on homosexuals, and it could be argued that wartime politics of shame are intended to justify violence. The aggressor's shame, rooted in traditional principles, intensifies their desire to harm homosexuals.

Conclusion

I would like to draw attention to an incident affecting the queer community that could lead to further violence in the near future. On August 6, 2025, Russia announced its intention to formally withdraw from the European Convention against Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Guilbert, 2025). What might this mean for the Russian and Ukrainian LGBT+ communities? Many soldiers serving in the Ukrainian army are open about their sexual orientation. They are fighting for a free Ukraine and for their dignity. A Russian victory would mean one thing for them: genocide preceded by torture. Let us not forget that this war is being fought in the name of tradition and so-called traditional Russian values. Adherence to these values implies the primacy of the ideal of heterosexual intimacy. In this case, tradition and traditionalism are associated with violence, in that tradition is the source of pre-reflective patterns of thought that justify violence.

In Putin's homophobic world, violence is fully justified. Therefore, from the Putin regime's point of view, the anti-terrorist operation is perfectly reasonable. Not only does Putin's regime see the sense in this violence, it also sees it as its mission to eradicate queer people from Russia. This violence is intended to force queer people back into hiding, locking them away in dark basements or, preferably, burying them in mass graves, as was the case in Chechnya. In light of the above, one might wonder whether the abolition of authoritarian rule in Russia would put an end to violence against queer people. In his essay *Aporien der Gewalt* Waldenfels provocatively stated that violence could only be stopped by violence (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 24). However, Waldenfels' statement needs to be supplemented. Defensive violence can protect queer people. This is why so many queer soldiers are fighting on the front lines against Putin's troops.

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