

# MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA

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## MEDIA STUDIES

JOURNAL FOR CRITICAL MEDIA INQUIRY

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To cite this article:

Moskvina, Y. (2019). Their Fight, Our News: A Case Study of Pussy Riot in British and Russian Online Media. *Mediální studia*, 13(2), 123–142.

ISSN 2464-4846

Journal website: <https://www.medialnistudia.fsv.cuni.cz/>

**2/2019**

# THEIR FIGHT, OUR NEWS: A CASE STUDY OF PUSSY RIOT IN BRITISH AND RUSSIAN ONLINE MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Russian punk band Pussy Riot became famous after a performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow and a trial which came to be well-known worldwide. The paper compares Russian pro-Kremlin and liberal media to British conservative and liberal media in order to demonstrate how components of ideology reinforced the genesis of a critical actor in foreign news. In the Russian case, Pussy Riot, as a critical actor, did not appear in the news because of the ideological structures and role of the selected newspapers in the society. In the case of selected British online media, Pussy Riot was presented as an autonomous collective critical actor engaged in the process of politicization. Therefore, ideology embedded in foreign news can play not only a reductive role, as previous research has shown, but also a productive one, reinforcing the genesis of critique.*

Keywords: Foreign news ▪ critique ▪ ideology ▪ Russia ▪ Great Britain

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On February 21, 2012, a video with women in colourful balaclavas and short dresses dancing and punching the air in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow was released on YouTube. It was an artistic protest made by the Russian punk band Pussy Riot, formed in 2011. The members of the band were previously known for their controversial and provoking hit-and-run performances in public places as part of their membership in the art group Voina. Unlike the members of Voina, Pussy Riot wore balaclavas in order to preserve anonymity, allowing ideas to overcome the particular individuals protesting, and their actions had a clear feminist message: they call for a “feminist whip” for Russia and for sexual freedom, criticize a “triple working day for women” and male domination in politics and by colourful mini dresses and abrupt movements demonstrate liberation from boredom of women’s everyday life (Pussy Riot, 2011). The performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was not an

exception – the band members wore provocative clothes, were twitching and shouting “Virgin Mary, drive Putin away”, as well as calling Virgin Mary to become a feminist and condemning the role of women in the Orthodox Church, whose only task is “to love and give birth” (Pussy Riot, 2011). Moreover, they used the altar (a place in the cathedral where women according to Orthodox religion cannot enter) as a scene. In other performances, Pussy Riot have protested the repression of artists by the federal government, supported sexual minority rights and radical decentralization, and promoted anti-Putinism, conservation of the Khimki Forest, and relocation of the capital to Eastern Siberia (Pussy Riot, 2011). The band members (Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina) were sentenced to two years in a penal colony for their performance in the cathedral and were pardoned during Vladimir Putin’s amnesty in 2013. In 2018, the band members won a lawsuit against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights.

There is little agreement among researchers on the feminist nature of the band’s performances. Some claim that stereotypical and homophobic lyrics could be found in their songs (Sperling, 2014) and that non-universal Western feminist ideas do not make sense in the Russian context (Yusupova, 2014). A connection between the performance and feminism was not clear for the general public, because “the considerable part of audience ... does not consider sexuality to be a political category” (Gapova, 2012, para. 1). Others claim that their actions have a clear feminist message and a further repressive response from state authorities has to be interpreted as a reaction of a patriarchal system joined with Orthodox traditions (Lipovskaya, 2012). There was even less agreement in the public opinion (Levada-Center, 2012, Yusupova 2014). A conservative part of the Russian population was clearly hostile to the women, while liberal intelligentsia condemned the charges, but also denounced a choice of the venue for the performance (Bernstein, 2013). Correspondingly, the Russian media also did not maintain a homogeneous position.

Seven years after the performance, we can observe the development of what was originally the band members’ anarchist profile, coming from the art-group Voina, into a liberal oppositional identity. While at the beginning, the actions encapsulated antagonism towards the ruling order and intervened into everyday life in public spaces (actions such as “Putin Zassal” and “Osvobodi Bruschatku”), today the former members prefer music videos of high quality and theatre plays with paid admission.

Western media played an important role in this transformation. The liberal ideology of Western journalists was the closest to the thinking of the band members themselves: “The Pussy Riot story is clearly a story the West wanted to hear” (Yusupova, 2014, p. 604). Ideology here is understood in a Van Dijkian perspective as a tool to grasp social reality. Primarily, it is not a sum of abstract values, but a construction made through specific linguistic means which have to be critically studied in order to unveil structures of power. This paper analyses how the ideology (here represented by the British online media) served the genesis of a radical political critique (an autonomous collective social actor passing judgement on the current state of affairs)

and how Russian media did not create such critique even in the case when they were closer to the social actors and political and social environment of the events. The main question of the paper is: Which ideological means were used by journalists in Britain and Russia to create the image of the band they have created? This question has to be understood in a broader context of a connection between ideology as a social cognition, professional journalists' ideology and (foreign) news. The scope of the paper goes beyond explanations based on a difference between democratic and (neo)-authoritarian media systems (e.g. Becker, 2004) and examines the ways journalists use language to create one or another critical position.

In such a manner, ideology plays not only a reductive role, as previous research indicates, but a productive one: it creates critique while simultaneously adapting it to the semiotic framework of national/regional contexts. The media become a co-producer of critique. The comparison of British and Russian online media demonstrates the pivotal role of the foreign news genre and the ideology embedded within it: both liberal and pro-Kremlin Russian newspapers failed to create critique due to the way in which they construct ideological positions and owing to the editors' understanding of the meaning of their jobs. The last factor is close to an understanding of journalism as professional ideology, meaning a consensus on particular beliefs and on a process of the production of meaning used in journalists' work (Deuze, 2005). What is especially important for this paper is the way journalists see their role in society and acknowledging of the fact that in the same society there might be distinct views on this role. While in the above-mentioned work, Deuze speaks about values, strategies, and formal codes of journalists as their professional ideology, in this paper, I combine this understanding with ideology as a broader social and political phenomenon, in which media are embedded as well as other social actors. Western media models (objectivity, autonomy, journalism as a public service, etc.) cannot be easily applied to non-Western countries, including Russia, inter alia because of the specificity of the culture (De Smaele, 1999) or historical development which finally led oligarchs-financiers to adopt pro-Kremlin stances after media wars in the end of 1990s (Arutunyan, 2009). Deuze himself claims, that "in decades of journalism studies ... [journalism as ideology] served to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who was a 'real' journalist, and what (parts of) news media at any time would be considered examples of 'real' journalism" (2005, p. 444). This consensus cannot be understood separately from broader social cognitive constructions that social actors use so as to give sense to their lives (ideologies in Van Dijk' understanding), therefore professional journalists' ideology cannot be analysed without a broader ideological context.

I start with an overview of the main theses on the foreign news genre, followed by a definition of ideology and critical actors. In the ensuing chapters, I analyse separately autonomy, political conflict and collective actor in the selected news. This is followed by a conclusion. The methodology of the article is inspired by Van Dijk's

discourse analysis and the definition of critique proposed by Luc Boltanski and Paul Blokker from the positions of French pragmatic sociology of critique.

## 2. (TRANS)NATIONAL RHETORIC AND IDEOLOGY IN FOREIGN NEWS

Despite the structural factors of the globalized world (the presence of international news agencies and trade volume), foreign news is highly determined by national/regional rhetoric (Wu, 2000; Nossek, 2004; Shamir, 1988). This is due to several factors: the comprehension of foreign events by means of local/national identities, the selection of news by editors, and systemic factors.

First, journalists and editors use cultural filters which determine news selection and the portrayal of others when presenting other cultures and countries (Beaudoin and Thorson, 2001; Ibelema, 2014). While some scholars claim that national identity is incompatible with journalists' professional values (Nossek, 2004), others argue that "reporters do not simply choose between professional and national narratives because assumptions about the world and state interests are already locked up in the professional narrative" (Handley and Ismail, 2010, p. 281). The interests of protest and oppositional movements are defined in terms of local, national, or regional ideologies and interests (Lee and Yang, 1992). Journalists use different strategies of domestication (appealing to emotions, speaking about compatriots involved in events; Alasuutari et al., 2013). The localization of the news means simplification and loss. For example, Pussy Riot has never been punk versus Putin, as it was presented by Western journalists, because their inspiration comes from the Russian underground, and punk as such in Russia is not a movement of resistance (Steinholt, 2013).

Second, the editors' choice of foreign news is determined by assumptions about the role of the state in the global arena—the threat to the United States coming from China, for instance (Chang and Lee, 1992; Golan and Lukito, 2015). The interests of the states are a further factor influencing news selection. Russian media tend to present a strong Russian national identity, incompatible with Western values (Popkova, 2016), and the West is seen as a danger invading through the subject of a *provocateur* in the Russian system of values (Yablokov, 2014). On a more general scale, news can serve as means of soft power (Zhang, 2017). More critical scholars claim that foreign news maintains and legitimates the status quo of the Eurocentric or American system of values (Abalo, 2016; Fayyaz and Shirazi, 2013). Foreign news though is a strong weapon in advocating transnational regional powers and in condemning deviations from them. Such an imbalance is not new; for some scholars, it reminds of the informational asymmetry during the Cold War (Van Dijk, 1988).

Third, systemic factors guarantee the predominance of Western media (the presence of international news agencies, the development of a news gathering system, trade, cultural ties to other countries, provided financial support [Wu, 2000; Zhang and Fahmy, 2009]). The structure of power influences the media as well: The Russian state uses media as a method of domination over elites (Burrett in Meng

and Rantanen, 2015) and, therefore, the news is always in compliance with stories acceptable to the authorities.

In this article, I argue that Pussy Riot's story underlines the leading role of the West, portrayed as a critic of the Other's reluctance to respect freedom of speech and the freedom to protest (the West was perceived by British journalists as the United Kingdom, the United States, and European countries such as France and Germany). However, in the case of Pussy Riot, this is only one side of the story. Western ideology helped to form Pussy Riot as a critical actor, despite their critique being modified. A comparison of the ideology present in the Russian liberal and pro-Kremlin media demonstrates the importance of these ideological means, which were not present in the Russian discourse or the critique itself. In the following chapters, I will introduce the concepts of ideology and critique and then continue with the analysis of the Pussy Riot case.

### 3. DEFINITION OF IDEOLOGY

The ideology of the news has to be analysed as embedded in a social, economic, and political context (Van Dijk, 2008). Van Dijk understands ideology as a "form of *social cognition*" (2008, p. 193, emphasis in the original) applied by journalists while writing news articles.

This definition refers to the articulation of meanings and is based on three different dimensions (social, discursive, and cognitive). It is not merely secondary to an economic determinant, which Marxist definitions of ideologies might presuppose, but is connected to social practices, cognitive constructions, and the living world of individuals. What matters is the communicative nature of human comprehension and its embeddedness in a social context (national and regional in the case of this study). Rather than false consciousness, ideologies are cognitive constructions transferable through discourse and which host social functions as they help articulate the interests of social groups based on their beliefs and social representations and the positive self-image of these groups (Van Dijk, 1982, 2008). Ideologies "have the cognitive function of organizing the social representations (attitudes, knowledge) of the group, and thus indirectly monitor the group-related social practices, and hence also the text and talk of members" (1995, p. 248).

### 4. DEFINITION OF A CRITICAL ACTOR

Pragmatic sociology of critique claims that critique is an ability to grasp the uncertainty of reality and make *the real* a matter of concern. Reality is defined as social norms and rules stated by institutions; a radical critique is always a critique of the institutions. In such a manner, critique is essentially democratic; society without a possibility to criticize institutions is totalitarian (Boltanski, 2011). While French pragmatics emphasize the inner critical capacity of every human being and develop

the “sociology of critical capacity” (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999; Boltanski and Thevenot 2006; Boltanski, 2011), they ignore the role of media in its genesis. This also applies to a mediated construction of a critical actor.

I define three main components of critique as follows. The first one is autonomy which is necessary for making a radical critical claim (Boltanski, 2011). Autonomy is the possibility of an actor to adopt a name of their choice. In this sense, autonomy is a rejection of the use of social institution definitions and a revolt against the meanings and labels they state. Autonomy is self-determination and independence from institutions—the “true individualization of the individual” (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 146), which implies contesting social laws by an individual and taking a part in their creation. This is possible in a society where *instituted heteronomy* does not prevail on the individual or the collective level.

While exploring the Pussy Riot case, it is important to consider the political nature of their protest and a call for politicization of social reality in a sense of creating a visible contradiction with an established order. The second element of critique is the participation of a critical actor in the process of politicization, which is defined as a process of dispute and conflict, as a flow of power, creating capacity for agency and autonomous life while understanding that things may be different (Jenkins, 2007; Hay, 2007). While politicization is associated with the creation of the space for agency, depoliticization means removing this agency, removing the political character from the decision-making process (Burnham, 2001).

Finally, while an individual autonomy is important for a robust participation of an individual on a social life, the collective component of critique is essential for confronting political power and creating collective emancipatory projects (Wagner in Blokker 2014). Collectivity challenges individualization and fragmentation caused by systems of domination. Political critique is thus connected to the “re-imagination of forms of commonality” (Blokker, 2014). Collective agency strives for the common project as the commonality of the goals and visions of social change challenges the logic of independent personal success symptomatic of neoliberal systems.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

For this analysis, I used online recourses due to their wide reach and availability. These consisted of 200 articles from online newspapers: *The Guardian* (TG) (liberal) and *The Daily Telegraph* (DT) (conservative) in the UK and, in Russia, the pro-Kremlin *Life.ru* and the liberal *Novaya Gazeta* (NG). The Russian media were analysed separately because of the obvious differences in the newspapers’ political stands. The selected British media might seem to be politically different, but they reported on events in a similar manner, thus an analytical separation was not so useful as in the Russian case. All articles are dated from 21 February 2012 (the day of performance) until 2016 (so to cover not only a trial, but also its aftermath), with 50 articles from each source (this number of articles was enough for data saturation, meaning

that new information stopped to appear); the articles were selected manually and analysed with Atlas.ti. This selection does not reflect the extent of attention that the individual media paid to the band, nor the popularity of Pussy Riot in the Russian or British media context. This limitation does not hinder from accomplishing the qualitative research and answering the research question posed in this paper.

The criteria for the selection were: (a) relevance stated by the media itself (meaning the strongest correspondence between the intention of the search and its result; for NG, popularity replaces relevance as this news is not sorted by relevance); (b) the keyword “Pussy Riot” in the headline; and (c) the news genre for all and the foreign news genre for the UK.

The methodology comprises the critical discourse analysis as proposed by Van Dijk (1988, 1982). Ideology in media discourse is analysed on the levels of lexicology, rhetoric, ideological square, and the coherence of the text (Van Dijk, 1988). The autonomy and collectivity are explored through lexicology. The conflict is analysed through tropes and other figures of speech. Here, I am also interested in the opposition between “us” and “them” and in the emphasis put on the good and bad qualities of both (Van Dijk, 1982). Lexicology (the words by which the band and the actions were named, e.g. “punk band”, “a protest band that has been convicted” “a protest”, “a stunt”; naming other actors involved, e.g. the codes such as “oppositional movement”, “supporters”, or “provocateurs”) serves to explore autonomy and collectivity by grouping the codes into these two categories. Special attention was paid to the repeated elements thought all the articles (such codes as “position of prosecution”, “summary of events”); these repetitive elements reinforce global coherence. Rhetoric (tropes, figures of speech, or descriptions) were used for an analysis of a conflict between “us” and “them” (the codes such as “allusion: Libya, Syria, Egypt”, or “epithet: shabby room/flag”).

It is worth mentioning that the style of the selected media is different: while the Russian media seek to use a strict and neutral style (especially the non-partisan NG [Muratov, 2019]), the British media are very rich in tropes and openly political. The selected British media include a very limited number of journalists, likely because there were not that many British journalists in Russia reporting on the case. The Russian media also used a bigger, yet still limited, number of journalists to report on the case. This systemic factor presents a methodological limitation of the research.

## **6. PUSSY RIOT CASE IN THE SELECTED RUSSIAN AND BRITISH MEDIA**

### **6.1. Autonomous Actor**

Both analysed Russian media failed to create an image of Pussy Riot as autonomous critical actors, yet due to different reasons. The NG focused on the prosecution instead of political nature of the action and in such a manner put a legal conflict above the original political one. The newspaper frequently described the band as a “feminist



punk-band” and “girls with children” and the action as a “scandalous action” or a “punk-prayer”. But previous activities of Pussy Riot members were referred to only in reference to the characteristics used in court or as mitigating circumstances, such as being students or young mothers. Due to this lack of the political ideas associated with the protest, the band lacked an autonomous political position necessary for the critique. The descriptions of the women were put in contrast with an atrocious legal system: “Keeping young mothers under arrest is cruel” [Fomina, 2012a]). Repetitive summaries reflect the arrest as a consequence of the punk-prayer (“an action, a reason for an arrest” [Pussy Riot *oficial’no priznali status uznic sovesti*, 2012]). One of the rare notions emphasizing a political nature of the action claimed that the protest song was about “the introduction of Orthodox culture into school curricula, about the limousines of priests, about the Patriarch’s faith in Putin” (Kostyuchenko, 2012a).

*Life.ru* also depicted Pussy Riot as convicts and it did not recognize other than legally defined identity of the band. But instead of legal injustice, it demonstrated only minor mistakes of the correction system. *Life.ru* described the action as “so-called punk prayer” (Lednev, 2012a), yet the details of the act, its motifs or the feminist nature of the band were missing. The news coming from the penal colony, the police, the Federal Penitentiary Service, the court reported on Tolokonnikova’s wellbeing: “[E]mployees of the Penitentiary 14 allowed Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, a member of a scandalous punk-group, to use scientific literature to write a PhD thesis” (Vadeeva, 2012), and “the soloist of the scandalously famous punk-band [...] cuts out trousers patterns” (Selivanova, 2012). Information about death threats and “unbearable working conditions” (*Kolonija, gde sodержitsja Tolokonnikova*, 2013) was put in contrast with Tolokonnikova’s transfer to a prison hospital, where she was “making solo concerts [...] singing songs, and participating in wit and humour competitions” (*Nadezhda Tolokonnikova spela*, 2013). Global coherence of the discourse was sustained by the repetitive descriptions of the changes.

The TG and DT used slightly different rhetoric in descriptions of the band, but both newspapers built an image of political autonomy of feminist protesters. The TG described the band mainly as a feminist punk band, but other descriptions related to the protest character of a band were present (such as “radical feminists” or “Russia’s most famous political prisoners” [Elder, 2012a]). The coherence was supported by references to the charges of hooliganism (an institutionally defined identity), but the meaning of this charge was immediately translated into charges for political protest against Putin (autonomous action): “The judge set August 17 as the day she would deliver a verdict against the women, charged with hooliganism motivated by religious hatred following an anti-Putin performance in a Moscow cathedral” (Elder, 2012b). This description involves the main conflict of Pussy Riot against Putin (or the Kremlin). The conflict was supported by metonymies (Putin or the Kremlin instead of Russian institutions) bringing about a feeling that the Russian institutional order is soaked in the figure of one person/one building: “The three women urged Russians to reject Putin’s system and embrace freedom” (Elder, 2012b).

The DT described the band in a less radical way. The act seemed odder: “they [...] shouted a few words as they danced manically, then knelt in front of the iconostasis, the screen bearing religious icons that divide the nave from the sanctuary” (Parfitt, 2012a). The DT did not look into the political meaning of the protest but into the legal arrangements that followed it: “In truth, the trio’s ‘punk prayer’ in Christ the Saviour Cathedral was at best tactless and at worst offensive—they admit themselves it was an ‘ethical error’. The problem is the disproportionate punishment that was meted out” (Parfitt, 2012b). The global coherence was supported by a neutral description of the civil characteristics of the members: “A philosophy graduate [...], a charity worker and environmental activist and [...] a computer programming graduate” (*The ‘punk prayer’*, 2012). However, references to their feminist nature were also frequent. The translation to the logic of being punished for their performance against Putin is clear: “The punk band [...] stormed the pulpit of Moscow’s main Orthodox church and asked for Russia to be freed from Vladimir Putin” (*Russia extends jail time*, 2012).

## 6.2. The conflict

The NG was rich in presenting the complexity of the issue in three lines of conflict: civil (between supporters and opponents with the participation of the police), religious and legal. Conflicts between Pussy Riot supporters and opponents occurred during the protests, pickets, and bus rides. The police created obstacles for the protestors who supported Pussy Riot by “disrupting the action” (*Policija sorvala avtobusnuyu ekskursiju*, 2012), “arresting one and all” (Fomina, Kostyuchenko, 2012), and “arresting civic and political activists” (Feldman, 2012). The police did not intervene in the actions of opponents—Russian nationalists, those beating Pussy Riot supporters, and Orthodox Christians. The opponents of the band acting in an aggressive way were named *provocateurs* (“Orthodox provocateurs throwing missiles” [Fomina, Kostyuchenko, 2012a], or “provocateurs [...] from pro-Kremlin movements” [Fomina, 2012b]) or associated with Russian nationalists. Putin was mentioned mainly in the reference to the name of the song and only once in a different context: “Tour guides were explaining to foreign tourists that those who are for and against Putin came here [during the protest]” (Fomina, 2012c). The religious contradiction was based on the interpretation of mercy. Church officials named the action the “work of the Devil” (*Patriarch Kirill*, 2012), while believers called the criminal indictment and reaction of the Church authorities “inadmissible” in a letter published in its entirety by the NG (because the Gospels call for “blessing those who curse you” [Kostyuchenko, 2012b]). Calmly praying for the band members, believers were put in contrast with Orthodox provocateurs or nationalist-fundamentalist religious groups (such as Orthodox Banner-Bearers “who were raising their arms in Nazi greetings” [Fomina, 2012c], an allusion to the Nazi regime). While the former were asking for mercy, the latter cooperated with the police against journalists: “‘Orthodox’ young men turned journalists from the Associated Press into the police” (Fomina, 2012c). The legal conflict

was based on repetitive references to the band advocates' commentaries, which were richly covered by NG and mainly referred to mistakes in the investigation—for example, “materials [...] were collected carelessly and improperly” (Kostyuchenko, 2012c), there was “no reason for the arrest [...] except low income” (Fomina, 2012d), and the “body of evidence was absent” (Fomina, 2012a). Moreover, “judges did not accept the arguments of the lawyers” (Fomina 2012b), which insinuates that the trial was biased.

While the NG shatter the trust in the institutional order by suspicion to the police, nationalists, Orthodox institutions and the legal system (by this presenting them as sources of corruption in Russian society), *Life.ru* promoted legitimacy of the police and mercy of the institutionalized religion. While the band's supporters violated the public order and conducted themselves poorly, the police maintained the public order and protected the law. The police were mentioned in the context of stopping Pussy Riot supporters while they were crossing the street on a red light, guiding them to the patrol car so they could “calm down and a traffic accident could be prevented” (Kozlickaya, 2012); checking the documents of those illegally making videos in the prison (Desyatnichenko, 2012); arresting the band members on suspicion of theft (*Policija zaderzhala v Sochi*, 2014); and “asking participants of a protest not to break the law, leaving [the protest site] in peace” (Antipova, 2012). The Federal Penitentiary Service was reported as keeping the good health of the convicted members and their ability to work (Dmitrieva, 2012), “providing security in the colony” (Kopancev, 2012), organizing trainings against jailbreaks (Tomashevich, 2012), and protecting the order in numerous other ways. The Church's position was both supportive of the Russian legal order and of the value or mercy: “[T]he Russian Orthodox Church is calling for mercy for Pussy Riot. At the same time there are no doubts about the justice of the verdict in the Patriarch's office” (Zazykin, 2012).

### 6.3. Us and Them

The conflict in the selected British media is a conflict between democratic West and dictatorial Russia. “Us” stands for freedom and the protection of human rights is lacking in the Putin's regime. Epithets frequently used to describe Russia were “authoritarian,” “intolerant,” or, in a stronger lexicology, “quite simply, a dictatorship” (Cadwalladr, 2012). The trial was seen as a crackdown on dissent and freedom: “The case against Pussy Riot has highlighted the crackdown on freedoms inside Russia since Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency in May amid a wave of discontent” (Elder, 2012c). The image of an unfree country was supported by numerous allusions to tsarist Russia, Libya, and Egypt (as unfree countries), and to the USSR and Stalin. The allusions to the USSR were less present in the DT than in the TG. The bad qualities of “them” were emphasized by tropes such as hyperbole and comparison: “And the police dog—a 100lb black Rottweiler—no longer sat in the corner she

had occupied since the start of Russia's trial of the year, but barked and foamed at the mouth as if she were in search of blood" (Elder, 2012e).

Pussy Riot as an anti-Putin actor fighting for the values of the West (freedom of speech, human rights, no censorship) is connected to "us". This is demonstrated by the numerous supporters: celebrities and politicians such as Madonna calling for freedom of speech or Amnesty International: "Western governments and pop star Madonna condemning the sentences as disproportionate, a view not widely shared in Russia where public opinion was shocked by the protest" (*Freed Pussy Riot member*, 2012).

The role of Pussy Riot is emphasized by numerous epithets and hyperboles, for instance, "it is, many people say (practically everybody, in fact) a moment when Russia's future is, in some as yet undetermined way, being decided" (Cadwalladr, 2012). The DT has a reserved position towards the act itself; however, it was critical of the Russian legal system and the limitation of individual human rights: "Mr Putin has made an example of his crooked legal system, which has been designed to deny enemies of the state any chance of receiving justice" (Dyer, 2012). The metonymy, Putin's legal system, presents Putin's direct involvement in the criminal justice system. References to the possible limitation of freedom of speech in the West were rare. Pussy Riot ultimately is the sign of fear and weakness of Putin's regime (less in the DT than in the TG): "Russia's crackdown on punk group Pussy Riot has handed Vladimir Putin's opponents a victory and begun a new phase in Russian politics" (Lough, 2012). There was an inclination that the influence of Pussy Riot had had a pivotal effect on Russian politics, presenting it metaphorically as "a weathervane of Russia's course after Mr Putin's return" (Parfitt, 2012c). These exaggerations play an important role for construction of critique: they make the reality uncertain and fragile – ready to be changed.

#### 6.4. Collective actor

The NG covered events supportive of the band, news from the court, and, to a lesser extent, events organized by opponents. The coverage of conflicting groups was used as a means to report on injustices conducted by the police and in the courtroom; however, there are no links among those who experienced these injustices except their support for Pussy Riot. This fragmented presentation of conflicts made impossible genesis of a collective actor (a movement or an opposition) that represents a general disenchantment with a political regime. All those who live through the mentioned conflicts are not united in one resisting or discontented entity. References to the opposition were rare: it was mentioned in Pussy Riot's letter to Patriarch Kirill, in which condemnation of the opposition was described as an "explicit lie of the national television" station (Pussy Riot *otvetili*, 2012), as well as in association with protests near the court, with a call for support: "As usual, they need hot tea and food" (*Aktivisty zjavljajut*, 2012).

*Life.ru* described supporters of the band as those who start disorders, attack the

police, use tear gas, etc. Provocateurs from the side of the opposition were present at the protests where gas was used (Antipova, 2012); oppositional leaders such as Kseniya Sobchak, were referred to in the context of “yet another scandal” (Lednev, 2012b). International support was covered in two articles. The first spoke of Yoko Ono’s Grant for Peace, while another reported on a meeting with Hillary Clinton. In the latter, the opposition was described as bribed: Meeting Clinton “is not patriotic” because the “Russian oppositionists are bribed by the US State Dept.” (Hillary Clinton, 2014). Aside from these articles, references to the opposition were rare.

In the TG and DT, frequent references to an opposition movement enabled the talk of a relation between Pussy Riot and a collective Russian opposition actor. This collectivity was supported by putting Pussy Riot in the same line as oppositionists, political prisoners, or soviet dissidents (Alexey Navalny was mentioned frequently in the TG [less in the DT]; Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Josef Brodsky, and Garry Kasparov in the DT). In both newspapers, the crackdown on Pussy Riot was a crackdown on dissent which brought all the pieces of the movement together: “The jailed members of feminist punk band Pussy Riot, who have thrust Vladimir Putin’s crackdown on dissent into the spotlight” (Elder, 2012d).

## 7. CONCLUSION

Numerous conflicts emerged on the pages of the NG (civil, legal, or religious). Other authors already discussed the general differences in conflicts between Russian and Western public sphere in the case of Pussy Riot (Gapova, 2012), however the role of media and journalists remained unexamined. By the type of the conflicts, one can say what was important for journalists in the case of Pussy Riot in Russia (and what is ideological about it, in a sense of shared meaning that social actors give to social reality). This is an unjust legal system and the outrage of law-enforcement agencies, corrupted Church which betrayed one of its main values – mercy, Russian nationalists and biased Orthodox believers who make provocations during the protests instead of calm demonstration of their civil position. All these conflicts (mainly, the legal one to which the biggest space was dedicated) are put above the political essence and an explanation “Pussy Riot versus Putin” (which ironically was used to describe the situation to tourists who are not aware of Russian realities). In these conflicts, it is impossible to follow the collectivity between believers, protestors, and Pussy Riot, as well as to follow an identity of Pussy Riot beyond a courtroom (therefore, Pussy Riot does not seem autonomous). The social reality is very fragmented, and there is no collective disenchantment or uncertainty that gives rise to strong critique.

This manifestation of an ideology as a social cognition should be understood in combination with journalists’ professional ideology. The former main editor of the NG described the political stance of the newspaper: “[W]e are a non-partisan newspaper. We do not have hickeys on our neck after the kisses of political parties [...]. Our newspaper is not with the opposition, but with a position. And this position is

simple: to the best of our ability, we control power in the interests of society. This is a usual task of the mass media” (Muratov, 2019). The self-identification as a nonpartisan alien to politics watchdog looking for the mistakes of the regime enables the NG to demonstrate all the variety of conflicts and fragmented grievances embedded in the conflict around Pussy Riot, yet at the same time renders impossible to state a clear political conflict between the collective body of those concerned by the conflicts and an institutional order.

The pro-Kremlin newspaper represents the prevailing instituted heteronomy, with no space for critique. It serves its political purpose: the demonstration of the institutional stability (in contrast with the NG). Yet the ideological picture of the Russian society is similar to what the NG presented: the conflict is about law-enforcement agencies, biased protesters and the mercy of the Church. The positions of *Life.ru* and the NG towards these social realities are different, but in none of the newspapers the Pussy Riot case was presented as primarily political. In the case of *Life.ru* depoliticization happens via the fragmentation of conflicts, which appear to be non-systemic mistakes within a generally certain institutional reality. The opposition lacks authenticity, the band members are not protestors, but convicts, the police protect the order, and the institutionalized Church is merciful to those who fell into error. This difference between two newspapers is due to professional ideology of the journalists: while the NG is an investigative newspaper that positions itself as a watchdog, *Life.ru* is owned by an oligarch in the era of Russian media development which Arutunyan (2009) characterized by the connection between oligarchs-financiers and Kremlin. While the ideology as social cognition is the same (components of a conflict), journalists’ professional ideology is different (meaning and relation of components) in these two Russian newspapers.

Whereas the ideology, in the case of Russian media, prevented the critical actor from appearing, in the case of British media, the ideological components (lexicology, tropes, summaries, contrasts, or examples) reinforced its genesis. In other words, what made Pussy Riot seems critical in these newspapers, was not what they did, but the way media reported on what they did. The ideology and localization of news that is usually understood in a reductive way, in this case, should be understood as productive; it is not only a loss (of complexity of unfamiliar social reality), but also a gain (the genesis of a critical actor in the national context where foreign news appears). The lexicology used in Pussy Riot’s description and the sequence of repetitive summaries depicting the band members being accused of political protest clearly stated that Pussy Riot has subjectivity and it is an autonomous radical feminist group, not just mere convicted women. In contrast with the Russian media, their protest had an obvious political meaning. These types of lexicology and summaries are not only components of ideology; they are also constructive elements of critique—the means to describe autonomy and involvement into a process of politicization. The conflict with the Russian system is described with rich tropes (allusion to the Tsar, the USSR, Egypt, Libya, etc.—epithets emphasizing authoritarianism and dictatorship), so

the contradiction between the freedom of speech and human rights and its absence seems historical and systematic. The meaning of a Pussy Riot's message is localized by references to the values of Western governments and artists: the freedom of speech and human rights. While the division between us and them is ideological, it is also constructive for Pussy Riot, while it also condemns the same order they do but through different means and with a translated system of values. Finally, the collectivity constructed by frequent references to the opposition is not only empowering for critique but also for ideology, as it demonstrates that the oppression of the opposition is something historically essential to "their" Russian system as opposed to "ours" and is not a single mistake. In the case of the British media, the ideology as a social cognition (seeing the world as divided, where West stands for democracy and Russia for dictatorship) is combined with journalists' professional ideology (the role journalists play in a political process, e.g. open political stances of newspapers). This combination gave a rise to a genesis of a critical actor in the British media, which did not happen in the Russian media due to the different perception of the conflict (therefore the lack of ideological linguistic means that can describe a political essence of it) and apolitical/pro-order understanding of journalists' professional position.

### Funding

CEFRES, USR 3138 CNRS-MEAE

The work was supported by the grant SVV 260 462. The funding source has no involvement in the study design; in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the decision to submit the article for publication.

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