International Human Rights through Queer Theory: A Discursive Analysis of the Russian, Lithuanian, and Kyrgyz LGBTQ+ Lived Experience within the Global Paradigm

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International Human Rights through Queer Theory: A Discursive Analysis of the Russian, Lithuanian, and Kyrgyz LGBTQ+ Lived Experience within the Global Paradigm

A Thesis Submitted by
Mariem Youssef

to the
Department of Political Science
Graduate Program

May 2023

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Political Science with Specialization in International Relations MA
Declaration of Authorship

I, Mariem Youssef, declare that this thesis titled, “International Human Rights through Queer Theory: A Discursive Analysis of the Russian, Lithuanian, and Kyrgyz LGBTQ+ Lived Experience within the Global Paradigm” and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

• This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.

• Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.

• Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.

• Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.

• I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

• Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.

Signed:

[Signature]

Date:

05/07/2023
Abstract

This thesis attempts to shed light on the subordination of international human rights law to that of the paradigm of international relations through asserting the existence of US Empire i.e., that emulates historical empires, British and French, which aims to emancipate subjugated minorities, formerly women and presently LGBTQ+ individuals from their national oppressive regimes. This is achieved through a discussion of pervious literature that discusses queer theory with a special focus on Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan as the main case studies. While the overt intentionality of the “empire” is to protect LGBTQ+ individuals through perpetuating the prototype of the “International Gay”, this actually further compounds the problem of LGBTQ+ individuals who find themselves unable to fit within the normative structure of the “International Gay” and being further oppressed by their respective regimes due to the mounting international pressure, such as in Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan. This research argues that the discourses mobilized by activists is a 'queer' discourse that both uses and opposes the symbols, categorizations, and language of the international LGBTQ+ rights regime. At the same time uses and opposes nationalist symbols, categorizations, and language of their state governments, responsible for their oppression and repression. In addition, it draws from queer theory to help explain this dynamic.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Marco Pinfari, my supervisor who has continuously supported me throughout this project. Without your words of encouragement and constructive feedback I would not have been able to see this through. I would also like to thank Dr Reham El-Morally and Dr Martina Rieker for agreeing to be my readers, your expertise are integral to the assessment of this project. Moreover, I also want to acknowledge Dr Andrew Delatolla for helping me choose this topic in the first place.

To my family, thank you for constantly pushing me even when I thought this is not what I wanted and supporting me throughout this very long journey. To my sister Heba, I will always be grateful for your kind words, validation, countless times where I made you read and discuss my work, and for all the articles and ideas you sent me and discussed with me; without you I would not be writing this today.

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To my best friend Farida, even though you are no longer with us you have always been a huge part of my journey. Every time I felt like giving up, I would always remember you joking about how I’m going to fail and forcing me to work so we can have fun later on thesis-free, thinking about that would instantly put a smile on my face and push me to get back to work. So, I would like to dedicate this to you, out of sight but never out of mind.
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GA</td>
<td>General Assembly</td>
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<td>HRC</td>
<td>Human Rights Council</td>
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<td>ICCPR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</td>
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<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUSA LGBTQ+</td>
<td>Russian-Speaking American LGBTQ+</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Security Council</td>
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<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Statement

“...Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights.” that is how the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton illustrated the fundamental essence of the LGBTQ+ community as people of the world in one of her speeches in 2011. Reading this “bold” statement I begin to ponder the connotations that such a statement carries. At first glance this declaration seems to hold hope and validation, however when trying to unpack the assertion some negative elements emerge. I believe that Clinton’s need to validate the existence and normativity of LGBTQ+ as “human”; alludes to the notion that human beings who do not conform to heteronormative structures were not considered human beings all together. Thus, an affirmation needed to be made to re-institute their humanity by the current most powerful Western power, the US. Nevertheless, the question needs to be asked regarding the level of complicity of the West, particularly the US, in constructing the hegemonic heteronormative structure whereby those who do not conform to it become subhuman.

As historical precedence has exhibited the Western forces in the form of previous empires, such as British and French, have consistently imposed their version of civilization upon their colonies in an effort to save them from their own “barbarity”. The White Savior complex paid special attention to the emancipation of women from their perceived subjugation by men within their societies. The outcome of those efforts is well documented through global history and feminist scholarship. With the decay of the European empires, a new empire emerged from across the Atlantic; The US became the new empire. Staying true to the aims of empire, with modification to the mode of imposition of its ideology, the US has become the new
white savior that is on a quest to emancipate the most oppressed, the LGBTQ+ individual. Hence, two main facets need to be interrogated: first, the historical responsibility of the West in the demonization and criminalization of homosexuality as against nature and civility. Second, the success of current efforts to champion LGBTQ+ rights through the creation and perpetuation of the prototype of “International Gay”, a concept within Queer theory, propagated by International Human rights. It is my aim to understand whether or not what actually occurred through the “well-intentioned” efforts of the US to emancipate the LGBTQ+ individual has actually resulted in placing this individual in a crossroad between the national and international subject formations, or national and international oppressions where they feel unrepresented in both paradigms. This will be carried out through paying special attention to Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan as my case studies. Though Russia and Lithuania do not fit within the East vs. West divide, and Russia is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia still fails to uphold its duty in protecting its LGBTQ+ community and is actively discriminating against them; while on the other hand, Lithuania has made certain concessions to be eligible for EU membership, but queer understandings and perceptions remain complex and at times are not culturally tolerated. Hence, this unveils the internal divide within the West, where “Western” values, which are championed by the US, are not adopted by other Western countries, i.e., Russia and Lithuania. Consequently, the prototype of the “International Gay” does not narrate the reality of the Russian LGBTQ+ individual. I will hopefully tackle those issues through the proposed following chapters:

1) Introduction

2) Social Movements
3) Queer Individuals under the USSR
4) The Cultural Cold War: Russia vs US
5) Queer Subjects and Activism in Kyrgyzstan
6) Eastern Queer Subjects: Lithuanian Queer Perceptions under Western Laws
7) Conclusion

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Introduction

Through a discussion of various scholarly work some of which are: Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Cynthia Weber’s *Queer International Relations*, C. Heike Schotten’s *Queer Terror*, and Ratna Kapur’s article *Human Rights in the 21st Century: Take a Walk on the Dark Side*; I attempt to portray how Queer theory is at the core of international human rights law and international relations. In an attempt to argue that the US is a form of empire that regulates and manipulates the international legal order (human rights law) through interactions, sanctions, and the establishment of universal norms (international relations). Thus, by default Hans Morgenthau’s argument finds itself realized “...the most powerful state, i.e., the state whose sanctions are the most effective relative to the system of sanctions of other states, will generally have the greatest chance of realizing the order it aspired to through the norms of international law” (Jütersonke 2010, 96).

1.2.2 Queer Theory

My research has led me to believe that Queer theory, a very useful tool that sheds light on the pertinent issue of LGBTQ+ rights within the global scale is inherently limited. Hence, it is my aim to remedy this issue by looking at various
factors, like that of the divide between the West itself (Eastern Europe vs. the rest of the West) and the international human rights project at large to allow for a more holistic queer theory analysis of the US as Empire and the international human rights project. Through a discussion of the trajectory of the LGBTQ communities in Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan and the roles played by the US, international human rights community and bodies, and their respective governments and cultures. This will be hopefully accomplished through weaving the threads from various Queer theorists, briefly discussed below, to create a consistent paradigm extending beyond current limitations and allow for a nuanced view of the issue at hand.

In an effort to trace back the origins of Queer theory that impacts US policy and understanding regarding LGBTQ+, we must begin with Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. This book presents a genealogy of the origin of sexual practices and how they developed and transformed. This endeavor is achieved through explicating the differences and parallels between Greek Paganism and Christianity regarding notions of sexuality and desire.

*In short, it was a matter of seeing how an “experience” came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a “sexuality,” which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints. What I planned, therefore, was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture* (Foucault 1979, 4).

What Foucault intended on doing then, is to explain how certain forms of knowledge and culture reproduced certain norms and limits to the notion of sexuality
in terms of theory and application, that is heteronormativity. Similarly, C. Heike Schotten (2018, 35) contends that “...at the heart of European sovereign biopolitics is an oppressive, heteronormative, ordering of time that queers all those before, beyond, or outside its civilized progress narrative as specters of death, “savage” and immoral others who become valid targets of necropolitical elimination, and precisely in the sanctimonious name of preserving “life itself” and upholding its value.” According to Foucault (1979, 4), the notion of sexuality was assumed to be static in nature and thus, singular in form. Hence, a flawed presumption arose, that is, that the tools needed to analyze sexuality and its three main constituents were evident. These constituents were: “...(1) the formation of sciences (saviors) that refer to it, (2) the systems of power that regulate its practices, (3) the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality” (Foucault 1979, 4). Denoting the boundaries drawn by society and power structures that reproduce and validate certain subject formations and by virtue of that neglecting and invalidating various others. He then asks a question: “…how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain” (Foucault, 1979, 10)?

Referring to Greco-Roman culture he introduces his notion of “problematization”, or what he calls the “arts of existence”. This is the process by which men voluntarily and intentionally establish “...rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (Foucault, 1979, 11). In an attempt to assess and explain these problematizations, Foucault then divides this notion into four pillars, based on historical scripts from Greco-Roman culture and Christianity. These classifications ensure the establishment of the aforementioned and the classification and codification
of sexuality and desire. The first problematization is **fear**, the use of fear as a means to ensure control, due to the belief that sexual acts that did not result in reproduction were the cause of many illnesses and overall unnecessary. Individuals were cautioned not to indulge in the enjoyment of such acts and to be “economic” about it (Foucault 1979, 16). The second problematization is an **ideal of conduct**, that is the moral value of monogamy and fidelity (Foucault 1979, 18). The third is the **image**, the stigma attached to the masculine homosexual from ancient Greek times, being portrayed as too feminine and confusing others as to whether they are females or males (Foucault 1979, 19). Finally, the fourth problematization is the **model of abstention**, the good and virtuous man versus the bad, overindulgent, selfish man. The good man is seen as superior and wise who overcomes his sexual desires and abstains from those acts of abomination (Foucault, 1979, 20).

Each pillar mentioned above pronounced a moral concern, put together these four pillars classified, transcribed, and ascribed certain normative paradigms that one must follow to lead a good or virtuous life. In Foucault’s (1979, 22) words, “…moral systems develop the most insistent demands for austerity.” This raises a question, what is this ethical paradigm? Better yet, how does it become this engraved and dogmatized within and between societies? Foucault (1979, 28) explains, “…for an action to be “moral,” it must be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value.” Highlighting the paradigm’s intrinsic role within all domains of a given society that is able to create and validate certain norms while frowning upon others and at times employing severe sanctions to eradicate them, due to their “nonnormative or nonconforming” nature.

Koen Slootmaeckers, a prominent queer theorist (2019, 242), argues that if homophobia is perceived as political, it in turn becomes “a (masculine) technology of
Othering” that is used to structure and sustain “...the gendered hierarchy within and among nations.” On that note, I now turn to Cynthia Weber’s *Queer International Relations*, the book attempts to answer four questions: “What is ‘homosexuality’?” “Who is the ‘homosexual’?” “How is the ‘homosexual’ figured as/in relation to ‘sovereign man’?” and “Why are these questions relevant for IR and for transnational/global queer studies?” (Weber 2016, 5). “This book seeks to answer the last two of these questions by tracing how the will to knowledge about male ‘homosexuality’ and the male ‘homosexual’ drives some always imagined and unstable ‘Western’ hegemonic discourses of sovereign statecraft as sovereign mancraft” (Weber 2016, 5). Referring to Foucault, she explains that not all homosexuals are males, however, due to the ancient figuration of the homosexual as male and, at several instances, masculine, which has been established and adopted by Western hegemonic discourses, she focuses on this specific figuration to shed light on “statecraft as mancraft” (Weber 2016, 6). The book is composed of 7 chapters; the first discusses the goals of the book and how the three main themes, sovereignty, sexuality, and the will to knowledge, are related to one another; while the second chapter explains two methodological approaches or frameworks to analyze the what the author calls “...sexualized orders of international relation” (Weber 2016, 6). On the other hand, chapters 3 to 6 put these frameworks outlined in chapter 2 into practice, through the analysis of empirical examples; and finally, chapter 7 is a short wrap-up of the aforementioned.

...my own usage of queer has a specific content, even if that content’s function is to keep open spaces for critical queer thinking and practice. For me, that analytical content does not extended to all things nonnormative (as it does for some queer theorists). Rather, it extends specifically to how queer is deployed
in relation to normative and/or perverse understandings of sex, gender, and of sexuality in ways that make two refusals. The first refusal is to reduce ‘queer’ to only that which is antinormative... The second refusal is to disconnect queer from any consideration of sexes, genders, and sexualities and from those bodies that refuse/fail to signify monolithically in these terms... (Weber 2016, 14)

From this we can derive two important aspects that lead the rest of the book’s discussion; the first is that a study that uses queer theory is not a study of all that is nonnormative, but should actually outline its bounds of research; while the second is Weber’s (2016, 7) use of the “...Roland and Barthes’s rule of the and/or...” which aids in the analysis of plural figures. Adding to Weber’s idea, Schotten (2018 127) explains that “...queer theory is a project that is fundamentally anti- ‘life,’ an anticolonial alliance with ‘death,’ an unthinkable absurdity and perverse, nihilist opposition to all futurist notions of security, happiness, health, and wholeness.” Weber (2016, 21) explains that sexes, genders and sexualities enables the categorization of individuals and geopolitical spaces as “normal or pathological” by the West. “Because policymakers occasionally employ these figurations to construct and legitimate how they order international politics and tame anarchy, figurations of ‘homosexuality’ and the ‘homosexual’ participate in constructing ‘sexualized orders of international relations’ (Weber 2016, 22). Further asserting this claim Schotten (2018, 32) argues that sovereignty is biopolitical given that sovereignty plays a fundamental role in forming “life as life”. She notes that “...‘life’ in sovereign biopolitics is what is impossible to refuse without being constituted as backward, irrational, unthinkable, and abominable” (Schotten 2018, 32). The employment of classifications and the rather ancient and flawed notion of the either/or, enables states
or in specific the West to categorize states, groups, and individuals thus enabling them to construct their foreign policy and international normative structures.

In her endeavor to analyze those figurations of the homosexual, Weber (2016, 23) combines Foucault’s three main elements in the *History of Sexuality*, “‘putting sex into discourse, productive power, and networks of power/knowledge/pleasure’”, with Donna Haraway’s “figuration as the distillation of shared meanings in forms or images, Judith Butler’s “theory of performativity”, and finally Richard Ashley’s “statecraft as man craft”. Weber (2016, 25-26) begins by explaining Foucault’s three elements. The first element according to Foucault is that the same Victorians that called for abstention form immoral sexual acts established the “sexual norm and sexual deviance”. The second element is the Victorians need to monitor, manage, and correct the homosexual is what brought it into being. And finally in the last element he deduces that the image of the homosexual enabled the Victorians to classify normal sexual acts (Weber 2016, 26). Then she moves on to Haraway’s figuration, which is comprised of four elements: “...tropes, temporalities, performativities, and worldings” (Weber 2016, 28). “Tropes are material and semiotic references to actual things that express how we understand them” (Weber 2016, 29). While temporalities describe the relationship of something to time (Weber 2016, 29). The third is Butler’s notion of performativity, which is the process in which “...repeated iterations of acts constitute the subjects who are said to be performing them (Weber 2016, 31). Those three aspects combined, produce what Haraway calls worlding, the environment that establishes knowledge, practice, and power (Weber 2016, 33). Finally, Weber (2016, 34) explains Ashley’s notion of “statecraft as mancraft”: “Ashley argues it is impossible to understand the formation of modern sovereign states and international orders without understanding how a particular version of ‘sovereign man’ is inscribed
as the *necessary* foundation of a sovereign state and how this procedure of ‘statecraft as mancraft’ produces a specific ordering of international relations.”

Weber then moves on to use this framework to analyze different empirical cases; the first of which is the “perverse homosexual” or the “underdeveloped and undevelopable”. According to Weber (2016, 48), “…the ‘perverse homosexual’ is figured as that threat to ‘sovereign man’ who enables the production of (and is produced through) specific order-versus-anarchy binaries.” Who are the ‘underdeveloped’ and the ‘undevelopable’? Weber (2016, 50) asserts that the underdeveloped was a threat to the Western bloc that had to be under its control, rather than that of the Soviet bloc. Thus the underdeveloped was figured as a primitive creature in contrast to the advanced West, in terms of social, economic, psychological, and political progression, therefore in need of Western supervision (Weber 2016, 50). Whereas the undevelopable was figured “…as those who would not or could not achieve Western-style development and who were accordingly cast as pure threats to Western global security” (Weber 2016, 50), i.e., Eastern European countries (the Soviet bloc). In her book, Schotten (2018, 49) expounds on Weber’s argument and introduces the element of settler colonialism, she says: “… ‘life’ in biopolitical sovereignty is specifically settler life, characterized as “civilization,” while death “death” demarcates “savagery,” or all those who cannot or will not conform to this particular political formation, as its foremost threat.

Following this trail of thought Weber introduces Neville Hoad’s notion of “decadence and degeneracy”, where degeneracy is the process of regressing to an earlier stage; and decadence is the process of bringing into the present a very late/backward state (Weber 2016, 53-54). The underdeveloped is classified as the degenerate, while the undevelopable is categorized as decadent. She then asks who is
the “”degenerate homosexual”? Using Sigmund Freud’s argument, she explicates that this type of homosexual has the ability to progress just like the “degenerate underdeveloped”, and thus can be normalized within Western society (Weber 2016, 57-58) (more on this when I discuss chapter 6 of her book). Contrary to that is the “decadent homosexual” like the “decadent undevelopable” this type of homosexual will never be able to progress and become incorporated within society, due to their extreme opposition to Western principles (Weber 2016, 61). In chapter 4, Weber discusses the “unwanted im/migrant and the terrorist” in relation to the perverse homosexual, which can be appropriated to Schotten’s (2018, 53) reference to Veracini in discussing the “transfer of natives”, highlighting “...that settler colonialism must nevertheless constantly imagine native people as elsewhere, an act of symbolic displacement that effaces the actual existence of native peoples and erases them even in their existence.” Envisioning Weber’s figurations of the “degenerate and decadent homosexual” and Schotten’s notions of erasure as intertwined rather than apart accentuates the recurrent pattern of what Jasbir Puar (2007, 1) refers to as “U.S. exceptionalism”, the process of excluding or eliminating an “other.”

Momin Rahman & Stevi Jackson contend that: “Implicitly or explicitly the equal rights agenda takes the normality of heterosexuality as given, as the natural condition of the majority, and hence fails to question the legitimacy of its institutionalization. Instead, rights are pursued as if equality for lesbians and gays could be accommodated within the existing social order, without significantly undermining heterosexual privilege.” Which paves the way for a discussion of chapter 5 of Weber’s book, “the normal homosexual” or the “gay rights holder and the gay patriot”.
In the dominant transnational/global queer studies literatures, these figurations of ‘sovereign man’ as the normal ‘homosexual’ seem to arise out of and in turn produce what Lisa Duggan calls homonormitivity, ‘a new neoliberal sexual politics’ that ‘does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay in domesticity and consumption (Weber 2016, 104).

This depiction of the homosexual, Weber (2016, 104-105) describes, is an illustration of a form of neo-colonialism and an assertion of neoliberal ideals. This scenario proposes that the pathological state is the state that does not recognize this “normal homosexual”, and by virtue employing the either/or binaries, i.e., “normal state versus the pathological state”. Nonetheless, Weber (2016, 106) states that while the West may have embodied and incorporated the “homosexual”, a perverse version of the homosexual still persists; the underdeveloped or undevelopable homosexual (i.e., the terrorist, the Muslim, the “non-western states”); those who have not realized and internalized neoliberal policies and ideals. Here it is worthwhile to outline a point that Weber (2016, 107) mentions that I will turn to later in this paper, “Human Rights have long been a feature of Western liberal discourses, which confer political rights onto those subjects whom a political community (often the state) recognizes as human.” By this she means that those rights are extended to individuals deemed ‘human’ by the state, and in this case the “gay rights holder and gay patriot” who fights for their nation, adopts neoliberal policies, consumes, and eventually is part of a monogamous couple and as a result awarded this right (Weber 2016, 107-110). This process Weber (2016, 111) explains is what Puar labels “homonationalism”, the “...’constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state,
capitalism and sexuality’ that produces what she calls ‘the human rights industrial complex.’

This complex in short, combines homonormitivy with nationalism, creating homonationalism that is then used to differentiate between “good homosexuals” that are protected by the state, and bad ones that pose a threat to the state (Weber 2016, 111). Puar (2007, 3) introduces this notion as “U.S. sexual exceptionalism”, arguing that due to the US’s “war on terror” the state had to override its heteronormative structure and accept some homosexuals in an attempt to integrate and polarize domestic opinion against the so-called war. Building on that, Weber (2016, 112-113) explains that the Western states and Israel’s promotion of LGBT rights as human rights is what some queer activists call “pinkwashing”, which Puar defines as their way to ignite “…crusades against the spectral threat of “radical Islam” or “Islamo-facism” and ‘is only one more justification for imperial/racial/national violence within this long tradition of intimate rhetorics around “victim” populations.’”

Pinkwashing can also be seen as a form of homointernationalism where it becomes an inherent part of international normative structures, with Western countries calling for the realization of LGBT rights on a universal level. Puar (2007, 4) explains that the “exception” of the US as singular and “exceptional” as teleological allows the US to “…restore, protect, and maintain the status quo…” and as a result this normative structure allows the US to assert what Weber discusses on a universal level. Moreover, Weber (2016, 113) demonstrates how such calls are only directed to the south, while several states in the North like Russia for instance have not realized and embodied such rights. This is what Rahman refers to as homocolonialism, asserting that the West’s fight for homosexual rights is “a tool of empire.”
“...I argue that the deployment of queer rights, both at “home” and “abroad” operates through a triangulated “homocolonialist” fashion that renders resistant populations inferior in relation to superior Western values, rather than simply being populations that are “lagging behind” Western development” (Rahman 2014, 275). Further, he argues that that those figurations of the homosexual are conceptualized as Western rather than universal, and thus is used by Muslims to argue against LGBTQ+ rights, which in turn reasserts Islamophobic tendencies leaving queer rights at the center of the “East-West divide” or what he calls the “triangulation process” (Rahman 2014, 280). In a similar vein to that of Weber and Rahman, Schotten (2018, 127) argues that unlike Foucault and Puar, her argument appropriates the biopolitical to “...settler sovereignty, which establishes life “itself” not through biology but rather through the moralization of desire.” Connoting that this change is the essence of understanding the notion “...of “terrorism,” which is primarily a phenomenon of neither racialization, as Foucauldian biopolitics might have it, nor queerness as sexual deviance, as Puar might have it, but rather, of a civilizationalist moralizing of settler life as the only life worthy of protection and preservation” (Schotten 2018, 127-128).

“Through the transnational production of terrorist corporealties, homosexual subjects who have limited legal rights within the U.S. civil context gain significant representational currency when situated within the global scene of the war on terror” (Puar 2007, 4). In analyzing Hilary Clinton’s LGBT rights speech, Weber (2016, 122, 124) makes a couple of important deductions that reaffirm Puar’s contentions, the first of which is the “legitimate minority” which is fully human and deserves rights in contrast to the “rogue individual” who is not fully human, and thus by virtue is not deemed worthy of such rights. The second is the normalization of the LGBTQ+,
replacing it with the desire to love (Weber 2016, 125). The third is her presupposition of those rights as always being there but are currently being realized, hence making them universal; the introduction of a “right side” and a “wrong side” of history (Weber 2016, 126). Where the right side is the Western progressive side that acknowledges LGBTQ+ rights, and the wrong side is the underdeveloped or undevelopable or perverse homosexual that is unable to realize such rights (Weber 2016, 126). All combined enable her to make her final move, which is to declare a “war” in the name of LGBTQ+ rights against the pathological state (Weber 2016, 127). This along with other notions raised in the chapter, like that of the gay conditionality (giving states funds based on whether they embody LGBTQ+ rights), and questions like “how do you treat your gays?” have reshaped and transformed the paradigms of International Law and International Relations.

While all the aforementioned literature demonstrates how international relations is guided by an East-West divide, that manifests as historical Eurocentrism or modern-day US Empire, they mostly overlook various dimensions and emphasize the “war on terror”, terrorism, and Islamophobia. This in my opinion restricts and reduces the scope of analysis. Accordingly, a dialogue between all those thinkers can hopefully usher a more holistic understanding beyond the present limitations of Queer theory.

1.2.3 International Human Rights: a queer critique

But the single, basic meaning of representation will have very different applications depending on what is being made present or considered present, and in what circumstances. Not just anything can be represented anywhere and when, and being made present in a representative sample is very different from being represented by a symbol on a map... And that is also why the
single, basic definition is not much help. What we need is not just an accurate definition, but a way of doing justice to the various more detailed applications of representation in various contexts – how the absent thing is made present, and who considers it so (Pitkin, 1967, p.10).

Hanna Pitkin’s notion of representation helps us understand the difference of representation in application depending on the variables that are present in a certain area rather than the prerogative attributed to this representation. Coupling Pitkin’s conception of representation with Ratna Kapur’s insight’s on the ineffectiveness of international human rights helps explain the failure of the human rights’ system. Kapur attempts to embark on a journey of deconstructing the reasons behind its failure and a remedy that can help the project get back on track. She explains that “Human rights become a site for reconciling moments of rupture and exclusion and bringing the past into synch with the norms and values of liberalism, rather than bringing about a deeper interrogation of those norms and values” (Kapur 2006, 667). Meaning that instead of dealing with those ruptures and attempting to cure those deeply rooted issues, the human rights project attempts to “civilize” the “uncivilized”, which according to Weber, Schotten, Rahman, and Puar is how homointernationalism and homocolonialism is realized. My initial contention as articulated before is that the human rights project is one of the biggest contenders that enables the processes of exploitation and categorization of subject formations that all scholars explore and assert in their books and articles. Kapur then divides the article into 3 different parts:

The first is the “narrative of progress”, “State sovereignty could be cast aside, and a state’s acts subjected to human rights scrutiny. It was a new form of interventionism that emboldened the liberal internationalist and his or her belief in the virtue of law and principle of universality” (Kapur 2006, 668). “This belief in the
transformative and progressive potential of human rights is contingent on an assumption that we have, as a civilized world, moved forward, and that the coming together of nation-states in the recognition of universal human rights is a critical part of the liberal project that seeks to advance individual rights and human desires” (Kapur 2006, 668). Emphasizing the notion of the “civilized world” I argue that human rights in this context has achieved its goal, simply put in Weber and Rahman’s words the “civilized world” has realized the normative structures that legitimizes and justifies its power partly because of its use of human rights and the internationalization of certain ideas and norms under this so-called human rights paradigm. “The muscle flexing and macho talk, the language of evil, darkness and crusades that permeated the initial representation of the military conquest, came to be superseded by the gentler tones of women’s rights, peace, religious freedom and democracy that ultimately provided legitimacy for the intervention” (Kapur 2006, 671).

The second section is what the author calls “discriminatory universality”, she explains that while human rights are supposedly for all people and call for notions like equality and freedom; in reality they are built upon concepts of inferiority and discrimination (Kapur 2006, 673). “…incorporates arguments about civilization, cultural backwardness, racial and religious superiority” (Kapur 2006, 674). Coupled with the notion of “othering”, this asserts Weber, Schotten, Rahman, Puar and Foucault’s arguments on how the creation of subject formation be it the state or the homosexual is based on what it is not, or better yet, in Western phenomenon it is based on what it’s superior to. The third section is the “troubling subject”, where what weber would call the “perverse homosexual”, poses a threat to civilized neo-liberal, in Weber’s words “normal homosexual.” Resulting in three solutions that Kapur (2006,
675) explain: the first is the transfer of Western ideals and elimination of the “other’s” subject formation; the second is the acceptance of the “other” as is and finally the third is eradication of the other altogether.

1.3 Methodology/Case Studies

I have chosen to pay particular attention to LGBTQ+ rights in Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan due to their contentious and counterintuitive nature. On the one hand Russia belongs to the “Western Civilized World”, yet it does not conform to the hegemonic structure peddled by the US through its international relations and human rights. While Lithuania has been forced to fit in this Western model of progression without taking note of the cultural backgrounds and differences Lithuanian queer individuals have. This schism within Western countries reveals on one level a discrepancy in value system, where values upheld by Western countries are not as homogenous as they are presented to the world at large. This divide is further explained in the US and international arena’s failure to shed light on atrocities committed by the Kyrgyz government and society against Kyrgyz queer individuals. In this thesis the West is defined as the US, Western European nation states, and mechanisms such as the EU and UN that follow a neo-liberal model. If the global powers are serious in alleviating the suffering of the post-Soviet LGBTQ+ community, then a thorough investigation should be carried out regarding the particular experiences of the LGBTQ+ individual and their specific needs which might not be in congruence with the supposedly universal Western notion of the “International Gay” as the prototype.

Post the dismantling of the Soviet Union, in 1993 Article 121(1) of the USSR, which prohibited sexual activity between males and penalized them with up to five years in prison was removed (Carroll & Mendos 2017, 35). And was soon replaced in
the criminal code of the Russian Federation of 1996, with the penalizing of individuals that sexually transmitted diseases to others while knowing that they had them (RF. Crim. Code § 121). This gave the Russian LGBTQ+ community a sense of belonging, a change that would pave the way for their recognition and integration within the larger community. However, this notion has been continuously suppressed and shattered by the Russian government; this tragedy is exemplified in the Alekseyev vs. Russia case of the European Court of Human Rights (ECoHR).

Nikolay Aleksandrovich Alekseyev is a Russian national and gay rights activist who attempted to exercise his right to freedom of speech and assembly that is supposedly protected under Russian law, however, was denied access to such rights by the authorities (Alekseyev v. Russia 2010, para. 1 & 5). In 2006, Mr. Alekseyev along with other Russian LGBTQ+ activists attempted to exercise their right to freedom of assembly under Russian law in the form of a “Pride March” in the annual memory of the removal of Article 121 of USSR criminal code but were prohibited by the government under the pretext of “safety and security measures” (Alekseyev v. Russia 2010, para. 6). Furthermore, a closer look at the facts of the case shows the homophobic tendencies employed by the government and the level of corruption and repressive method that paint the domestic political scene within the country. Mr. Alekseyev took the case to the ECoHR, because the domestic court ruled in favor of the Russian government, again under the pretext of “civilian protection.”

Moreover, the occurrence of the same issue for three consecutive years inclined the ECoHR to take action. In 2010, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff and found the Russian Federation guilty of nonconformance to domestic laws and international treaties and obligations (Alekseyev v. Russia 2010, para. 88, 100 & 110). Ammaturo (2015, 1160) emphasizes how Alekseyev’s argument resonates Darja
Davydova’s effort to differentiate between Eastern European Pride Parades to that of the West, expounding on the differences between LGBTQ+ subject formations and communities. This difference further asserts the invalidity of LGBTQ+ universalism and sheds light on the Western domination of the project. Shortly after in 2013 the Russian Federation passed the “propaganda ban,” which essentially prohibits gay propaganda (Polsdofer 2014, 1070). This ban further exacerbated the issue by essentially re-criminalizing public existence of the LGBTQ+ community within Russia.

Robert Jervis (1989, 113) highlights the importance of signals in the international arena. He explains that in the international domain actors use diplomatic language, that is, a set of conventional idioms that attempt to reveal a state’s stance on a given issue. He divides behavior into two classes, signals and indices; where signals are statements or actions that derive meaning through implicit or explicit discourse between actors; while on the other hand, indices are statements or actions that are perceived as real or valid by other actors, due to their intrinsic association with the actor’s image within the international domain (that’s based on intentions and capabilities) (Jervis 1989, 18). Thus, I have chosen to employ a multiple case study approach: to Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan. To fulfill my aim, I rely on literature on queer subject formations in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, including diaspora communities, in an attempt to gain a nuanced understanding of the discourse; while also using discourse analysis of online forums, lists, groups’ critical visuals pertaining the topic of LGBTQ+ and more specifically that of Russian, Lithuanian, and Kyrgyz communities. I draw on Jervis’s notion of signal and indices to accomplish the aforementioned. It is important to note that due to linguistic limitations the work
analyzed in this thesis is from pre-translated secondary sources, and thus does not account for linguistic variations in expression of queer subject formations.
Chapter 2: Social Movements

2.1 Introduction

Homosexuality has been historically reformulated and reimagined, beginning in ancient Greece where male sexual relations were celebrated (Dover et al, 2016), to early modern cultures and the use of the reductionist term “sodomite,” and finally to what is contemporarily defined as the “homosexual.” Each term brought about certain connotations and attributes, some of which were negative while others were positive or neutral. However, throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries the gay subject was constantly demonized and viewed as an unnatural perversion. In this chapter, I discuss the developments that took place in various movements across time and space, leading up to the lesbian, gay, and queer movements in an attempt to deconstruct the strides made and assess the level of success of such movements. This is done in an effort to deconstruct the nuances that led to our contemporary understanding of the “international gay” subject and assess its applicability to the universalism it claims to embody.

To achieve the aforementioned, I analyze the nuances of the queer movements that took place through tracing the effects of various social movements that have led to and reinforced queer movements, and thus by virtue are intertwined with the multiple notions and discourses of queer. The use of the word queer emphasizes the terminology’s nonconformity to labels, either/or binaries, and social constructions that are forced upon individuals and groups. Referring to Schotten’s (2018, p.127) definition of queer further elaborates on the aforementioned: “…queer theory is a project that is fundamentally anti- “life,” an anticolonial alliance with “death,” an
unthinkable absurdity and perverse, nihilist opposition to all futurist notions of security, happiness, health, and wholeness.”

### 2.2 Women’s Emancipation and the Female Human

In order to properly deconstruct “women’s emancipation” and the “female human,” I must start by offering the historical narrative that sheds light on the topic’s multifaceted complexities. I focus on the history of women’s emancipation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to inquire as to why and how it came about to illustrate the ramifications that resulted in modern day terms. In her article, *Whose Security? State-Building and the ‘Emancipation’ of Women in Central Asia*, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe (2004) explores the reasons and the manner in which women’s emancipation rose in the soviet era. Kennedy-Pipe (2004, p.91) provides a detailed account of the Kremlin’s plan to exploit the call for women’s emancipation in his endeavor to “...secure the periphery of the USSR against both external forces and internal Islamic opposition.” Further elaborating on that, the author explains that the Soviet government designed an institution to lead the initiative. However, due to the fact that this plan was orchestrated by the Kremlin as a manipulation scheme and was in actuality a sham that could not find solid footing within the “conservative” and patriarchal nature of the Soviet Union it began to unfold in an adverse manner. “...women worked supposedly the same as men but in fact women actually earned 60–70 percent of male wages for most of the Soviet period, while on the other hand women still acted as the nurturers for children and families. Biology remained the key to a range of economic, political and military issues” (Kennedy-Pipe, 2004, p.92). “During the civil war bourgeois women were drafted for hard work to support the revolution. These women might be forced to perform tasks such as the washing of the
barracks of the Red Army, or it might mean that they were subjected to the ordeal of rape” (Kennedy-Pipe, 2004, p.93).

Kennedy-Pipe’s discussion of women’s emancipation under the Soviet Union demonstrates the bounds of women’s emancipation within the Soviet narrative. Further building on that Nadia Kaneva and Elza Ibrroscheva’s (2011) article *Hidden in Public View: Visual Representations of Women in the Bulgarian Communist Press* discusses Tuchman’s notion of “symbolic annihilation” and women’s emancipation under a socialist context. The authors analyze photographic and press representation of women in the socialist Bulgaria, explaining that “The Soviet press as a whole was structurally bound to the communist party and to the government and performed a deliberate ideological function. Lenin had outlined the role of the press as that of a “collective propagandist, agitator, and organizer” … did not hesitate to manipulate photographic images…” (Kaneva & Ibrroscheva, 2011, p.340).

The authors propose the notion of “symbolic glorification” which is the opposite of Tuchman’s notion of “symbolic annihilation,” Kaneva & Ibrroscheva (2011) center their idea around how the Soviet Union used certain images to convey to the public that women’s participation in the economic and political realms was the only way forward under socialism. Furthermore, they explain that: “the image of emancipation was narrowly circumscribed to show women only in the public sphere, where they appeared as members of the labor force and political functionaries” (Kaneva & Ibrroscheva, 2011, p.350). Simultaneously this “glorification” gave rise to “symbolic annihilation,” in the sense that the women’s roles as wives, mothers, and sexual beings were limited to the private sphere and hence did not gain actual “emancipation” and empowered patriarchal structures (Kaneva & Ibrroscheva, 2011, p.350).
References in the newspaper to the iconic Bulgarian woman as “the tireless one” and the “honorable creator” reinforced the communist party line. Simultaneously, they put pressure on women to reject individualism and self-serving motives and, instead, to devote their energies to the common good, exercising their remarkable abilities to serve their families and attend to their social duties all at the same time (Kaneva & Ibroscheva, 2011, p. 351).

In her article, *Sex under socialism: From emancipation of women to normalized families in Czechoslovakia* Katerina Liskova (2016) discusses the shift in attitude towards sex from the period of the 1950s to the 1970s. “The new gender regime was, however, stripped of feminist underpinnings and administered in a top-down fashion through expert knowledge and state policies” (Liskova, 2016, p.221). Liskova (2016, p.224) discusses the importance of sex in the socialist state as a mechanism of increasing reproduction and the lack of discussion of pleasure, which asserts that people and especially young people should not get involved in sexual practices without deep connections of love and emotion. Love became an instrument of control to discipline young people, “…but romantic feelings should also be pragmatically abandoned after the wedding. Sexuality without the check of long-term bonds could endanger the social order, so only discipline and self-composure could bring about peace of mind” (Liskova, 2016, p.226).

Contrary to the 1950s’ which focused on and advocated for sexuality and reproduction in the public realm, the 1970s witnessed a new totalitarian movement called “normalization.” (Liskova, 2016, p.226) “Its aim was to eradicate any opposition and extinguish any spark of revolt… requiring conformity from its citizens and their political obedience. The state strove to draw its citizens away from the public realm, luring them into families instead (Liskova, 2016, p.227). Liskova (2016,
p.227) centers her argument on the shift of sexuality and intimacy from the public to the private domain, which perpetuated the illusion of emancipation but in actuality, further solidified patriarchal and authoritative structures.

2.3 Black Emancipation and the Black Human

The advent of the American civil war was also the beginning of a continuous struggle against oppression and daily brutalities. *Rethinking American Emancipation: Legacies of Slavery and the Quest for Black Freedom* is a book composed of nine essays written by several authors that examines the history of black emancipation since its very beginning. This period witnessed the flight of thousands of African Americans that were enslaved on plantations in the south to the federal union armies in the north and south (Sternhell, 2015, p.1). Sternhell (2015, p.20) introduces the notion of “spatial mobility” at the core of black emancipation, both metaphorically and physically. This notion molded the political, cultural and social atmosphere in which black people imagined freedom and struggles; however, by virtue the fleeing of slaves led to the weakening of the confederates (Sternhell, 2015, p.21). “Since patrols denied slaves freedom of movement, the association between a journey and liberty seemed self-evident; escape was claiming the freedom to be able to move toward freedom” (Downs, 2015, p.43).

The freedom that has different meanings and is constantly reimagined and shaped needed to be backed up by coercive intervention to ensure its sustainability (Downs, 2015, p.44). However, many white northerners took their reliance on governmental coercion for granted and some even believed that their independence was not correlated with it, making them unable to differentiate between freedom and individual liberation (Downs, 2015, p.45). Nevertheless, black people and their allies knew that without those coercive measures freedom would not be sustainable nor
attainable (Downs, 2015, p.46). “Only by restricting the actions of white Southerners could black Southerners finally become free. While such force might come from quasi-state organizations – like self-defense leagues – in practice, in the face of the power of planters and white Southerners, it required the intervention of external agents in the shape of the state” (Downs, 2015, p.47).

Freedom depended on both the freed and agents of the state, shedding light on the entrenched nature of government practices in shaping and enforcing freedom; rather than moving towards liberation from government and its practices what is evident is a move towards the direction of government protection. (Downs, 2015, p.47). “This meant that freedom was inherently a place of contest and of coercion, a way of asking for particular forms of forceful aid to overcome restraints. But this human dependence upon external intervention also made freedom fragile…” (Downs, 2015, p.47). The military assumed a pioneering role in the fight for emancipation; under Lincoln’s leadership, “…the military’s interference in elections allowed for pro-administration men to gain public office in time to further the cause of emancipation (Blair, 2015, p.70). However, many Americans supported Lincoln’s policies as a means to an end rather than actually internalizing the call for emancipation, they saw it as the way to win the war, “…expecting that slaves who were not freed by the military during the war might well remain in bondage (Blair, 2015, p.71). Nevertheless, full emancipation was far off and required a continuous dual military effort to fight off rebellious states, and simultaneously ratify eternal freedom (Blair, 2015, p.71).

A couple of themes addressed throughout the book can be derived and raise questions while opening new paths of interpretation: was racial “emancipation” a means to an end, a ploy that aided the union in winning the war? Does the notion of
freedom as a contested concept give or take from the meaning of freedom? Did the
government intervene to protect or police? Was the “stretching” of constitutional
regulations justified? How does the notion of freedom as contested and dynamic
affect the emancipation process? What does the relationship between gender and race
constitute? Can it be called emancipation if new forms of racial discrimination came
to be? What does the international racial liberation movement tell us about the nature
of US politics and the West at large? Throughout the next paragraphs the questions
posed will be answered in an attempt to shed light not only on black emancipation but
also on the interlinkages between this specific movement and others discussed in this
research project, while also accounting for the internationalization of US politics.

In order to deconstruct the aforementioned notions and answer the questions,
one must first begin by tackling the notion of emancipation, more specifically
emancipation in the context of historical racial hierarchical structures in the US. In
this project emancipation is defined as the freedom to act freely without having to
conform to structural narratives of oppression, discrimination, and classification.
However, this project also takes into account that both terms (emancipation and
freedom) are extremely fluid and gain meaning through both individual and shared
experiences. That being said, an analysis of US narratives of black emancipation
sheds light on the similarity of mechanisms employed by the US and USSR; just as
the Soviet Union used women’s limited “emancipation” to fight their enemies and
portray a certain image that they controlled, manipulated, and policed; the union’s
shift in attitude and its call for racial “emancipation” was directed towards the same
goals. However, this analysis of the issue at hand however should not negate the
positive impact it had on the movement; but rather show that there is, in most cases if
not all, an ulterior motive that drives positive actions but does not ensure their longevity nor sustainability.

Reiterating the pervious point, this thesis argues that the notion of freedom as a contested concept gives meaning to the word as freedom cannot be socially ascribed and when it is it becomes meaningless and restrictive. The next three questions complement each other and the rest of the arguments; hence, will be answered concurrently. Firstly, the government’s intervention consisted a duality of policing and protecting, making sure that the freed slaves’ agendas were aligned with their own and hence protecting them as long as it was mutually beneficial. However, the “stretching” of the constitution was not aligned with the US’s “democratic” governance, which illuminates the historical root existence of political hypocrisy. The concept of freedom as contested and dynamic proves worthy of our attention, in that it highlights the different layers of freedom as constantly challenged and disrupted while instantaneously evolving and gaining different meanings and modes.

The remaining questions are at the core of this thesis dissertation: What does the relationship between gender and race constitute? Can it be called emancipation if new forms of racial discrimination came to be? What does the international racial liberation movement tell us about the nature of US politics and the West at large? The relationship between both paradigms accentuates the existence of binary structures that continuously generate classifications and oppressive mechanisms that aid in the policing of bodies and thoughts through social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. In other terms “black emancipation” signaled some sort of hope for the realization of other rights, yet the its limited bounds actually brought about an increase of categorizations and labels within a given group or community. Which brings the next question into perspective, the continuous generation of classifications
introduces new oppressive measures and agents, and thus it becomes clear that while racial emancipation has made strides it is still far from actual emancipation whatever that may mean. Finally, the internationalization of the movement as a focal pillar of US democracy is the epitome of US imperialism and as always under the guise of “human rights” and “democracy.” In that the US exports its domestic ideologies elsewhere to portray a certain image of progression and “exceptionalism”, while in reality the model they attempt to internationalize is imperfect and underdeveloped within the context of the domestic sphere. As will be discussed in futures wes of this chapter and other chapters throughout this project, this internationalization process did not only take place on the topic of racial structures, but also on women, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, compounding all aforementioned concepts reveals a systematic mode of oppression, i.e., a woman is not equal to a man, more so a queer woman is not equal to a heterosexual woman, furthermore a queer black woman is not equal to a queer white woman.

2.4 LGBTQ+ Liberation and the Gay Human

I begin with an examination of the classical or ancient denotation of homosexuality, which offers a substantive background that inherently molds a chunk of the discourse. Sabastian Matzner (2010) enunciates the Greeks’ notion of homosexuality and homoeroticism, dividing the topic into two subcategories “internally directed reception and externally directed reception.” The author explains that internally directed reception is the process in which an individual uses the literature to formulate and internalize their gay subject formation; while on the other hand, externally directed reception is the process of using the literature to engage with the societal sphere. (Matzner, 2010) Following this trail of thought, the author explains that internally directed reception is a course of action where individuals use
the literature as a means of identifying with other individuals in order to articulate their own gay subject formation. (Matzner, 2010) Meanwhile, the author divides externally directed reception into what he calls perpetuating-affirmative reception and demonstrative-subversive reception. In which the first entails the reciting of literature that highlights the existence of homosexuality and homoeroticism throughout Greek history, to emphasize its normativity to a dominantly heterosexist society; while the latter focused on the use of factual evidence from ancient Greek literature to argue for same-sex love. (Matzner, 2010)

In the book Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement, Marc Stein (2012) offers an alternative reality to the one posed by the US and the West at large pertaining the success of gay and lesbian movements. “Gay and lesbian activists have fought successfully for reform and revolution in medical science, corporate capitalism, organized religion, and popular culture.” (Stein 2012, 1) However, the author argues that the movement has failed in shifting the thinking and policies of the US citizens; “Antihomosexual discrimination remains legal in most U.S. jurisdictions and in policies affecting education, employment, health, housing, immigration, marriage, military service, parenthood, prisons, taxation, and welfare.” (Stein 2012, 1) The book is divided into six different chapters the first discusses the pre-movements era from the 1500s up until the 1940s, while the rest of the chapters focus on the different movements that took place from the 1940s to the 1990s and their ramifications. (Stein, 2012) “Same-sex sex was commonly practiced in North America before and after Europeans invaded the continent, but political and religious leaders in the European colonies generally regarded it as a crime and a sin, as did early U.S. authorities… it continued to be conceptualized as a sin, a crime, and a disease…” (Stein, 2012, 13) However, the author explains that a noticeable segment
of American society that was involved or interested in same-sex acts began conceptualizing and assuming different gender and sexual subject formations. (Stein, 2012) “By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were sexual communities in many locations that featured diverse groups of people interested in same-sex sex, including some who saw their sexual preferences as core components of their subject formations and some who believed that everyone could enjoy same-sex sex.” (Stein, 2012, 13)

The historical narrative of same-sex desires acts etc. along with the introduction of various oppressive mechanisms shaped and proliferated the necessary environment for the advent of the American gay and lesbian movements that followed. (Stein, 2012) Contrary to the Greek’s notion of homosexuality, the Europeans and Euro-Americans held a drastically different view of homosexuality and same-sex sex. “When Europeans and Euro-Americans looked at the bodies of the peoples they encountered, they sometimes responded with homoerotic curiosity, interest, and lust, but they also viewed indigenous sexual characteristics and traditions as proof of their inferiority.” (Stein 2012, 15) “Heathen” sexual practices became one of the justifications Europeans used for invading, conquering, and “civilizing” the Americas and the Pacific… as Europeans tried to impose their gender and sexual values, indigenous peoples responded with resistance and accommodation.” (Stein 2012, 15) The Europeans that colonized the lands that would later become the US dealt with same-sex sex in a perplexing manner; “…a combination of condemnation, indifference, tolerance, and acceptance.” (Stein 2012, 16) Many Christian leaders despised same-sex sex because it was out of the bounds of marital and reproductive normative structures and included “grave sins” such as oral and anal sex. (Stein 2012, 16) “For most religious and political authorities, marriage and reproduction were
important to the success of their colonies; nonmarital and nonreproductive sex were seen as threats. Same-sex sex also was viewed as a challenge to the established gender order, which positioned men as superior and women as subordinate.” (Stein, 2012, 17)

European colonial legal codes contained harsh penalties for same-sex sex. Some individuals found guilty of sodomy, buggery, crimes against nature, or other crimes related to same-sex sex were fined, jailed, whipped, expelled, or put to death... Some colonial legal codes contained more severe penalties for sex crimes committed by people of color. (Stein 2012, 17)

Stein (2012) explains that it was uncommon for settler colonials engaging in same-sex sex to be charged and when they were they rarely received punitive sentences. Adding that campaigns against same-sex sex were widespread in Europe, nonetheless it has been suggested that in the absence of centralized authorities in North American colonies same-sex sex was perceived as an indiscretion or an unimportant fact. (Stein, 2012) Three key developments during this period further ensured the aggravation of colonized people and contributed to the strengthening of the movements that would come about in the future. (Stein, 2012) Firstly, the adoption of new legal codes criminalizing non-marital sex; secondly, social changes due to the expansion of cities and towns; and finally, the development of “…an ideology of separate but unequal spheres for women and men — and the practices associated with that ideology — created new opportunities for and constraints on same-sex love, intimacy, and sex.” (Stein 2012, 20) “Most people who engaged in same-sex sex did not think of themselves as members of a distinct minority (a fact that remains true today), but more and more people did. These two conceptions — one minoritizing and the other universalizing…” (Stein 2012, 22)
Those communities were painted with sexism, racism and social hierarchies, “…based on ability, age, class, language, and religion.” (Stein 2012, 26) For instance, the author explains that early campaigns propose that white men initiated same-sex sex reform, while in actuality anarchist Emma Goldman assumed a pioneering role in those early campaigns. (Stein, 2012) “Social divisions and divisive dynamics shaped the character of the new sexual communities that formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, just as they shaped the character of the gay and lesbian movement that developed later.” (Stein 2012, 26)

The US homophile movement began in 1950, it advocated for gay and lesbian rights in a time of social, political and cultural change. (Stein, 2012) “Most people who engaged in same-sex sex in this period did not think of themselves as gay or lesbian and most gays and lesbians did not become activists, but thousands participated in homophile political projects.” (Stein, 2012, 41) The movement tackled four fronts: 1) its groups prepared meetings and events to discuss opinions on matters such as sexuality, sex, and gender; 2) to provide assistance to those who needed it; 3) promoted and established lectures and talks about aforementioned topics; 4) and finally, in the late stages of the movement there was a focus on media attention. (Stein, 2012)

1969 witnessed the advent of the Stonewall riots, which later aided in the American Psychiatric Association’s decision to remove homosexuality from the DSM in 1973. (Stein, 2012) This period brought about three different directions: “…gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and gay and lesbian liberalism…” (Stein, 2012, p. 79) The gay liberation movement differed than that of the homophile in three focal points: 1) the movement stressed on the notion of “coming out”; 2) gender liberation was at the core of the movement’s belief system; 3) most groups in the movement were
leftist and more radical than their predecessors. (Stein, 2012) “Coming out did not require an exclusive commitment to same-sex sex; it rejected compulsory heterosexuality… gay liberationists hoped that everyone would come out as gay, but also wanted to transcend the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality, which were seen as limiting human potential.” (Stein, 2012, p. 85) The movements made great strides towards liberation; however, the 1973 came along with a new set of limitations, the biggest of which was the New Right and Christian Right. (Stein, 2012) As the New Right and Christian Right’s political power increased the movement faced obstacles and impediments, specifically as it had moved to liberal and reformist stances. (Stein 2012) Nonetheless, the author notes that “While gay and lesbian liberals achieved substantial reforms in this period, lesbian feminists, gays and lesbians of color, sexual liberationists, and gay and lesbian leftists promoted more radical visions of social transformation.” (Stein 2012, p. 115) The rise of conservative rights had several complains, one of which was the growing shift in the stance on gender and sexuality and their effect on marriage. “During the 1970s, New Right and Christian Right leaders mobilized millions of U.S. Americans in campaigns against gender and sexual liberalism, which in turn helped constitute the New Right and Christian Right as powerful movements”. (Stein 2012, 117)

Nevertheless, the 1970s also observed a somewhat homosexual renaissance, where people began viewing themselves as gay or lesbian, as homosexual neighborhoods grew, and gender policing lessened. (Stein, 2012)

One sign of the combined success of liberal and radical mobilization was the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which brought more than 100,000 people to the nation’s capital. Another was the growth of pride marches in many cities; by the end of the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of people
participated in the annual marches and in autonomous activities organized by and for lesbians and people of color... A third sign of success was the development and expansion of gay and lesbian community centers, health centers, and antiviolence projects. A fourth was the formation of new alliances. The ACLU continued to be the movement’s most valuable ally, but gay and lesbian activists also developed productive relationships with various feminist, labor, left, professional, and religious groups. (Stein 2012, 120-121)

The 1980s had vital ramifications on the movement due to the rise of right-wing conservatives and the AIDS epidemic. (Stein, 2012) “In turn, AIDS contributed to the mobilization of the gay and lesbian movement in the first half of the decade, its radicalization in the second half, and its changing fortunes throughout this period.” (Stein, 2012, p. 143) This period also led to the development of queer activism, which took mold in the 1990s; “Early queer activists used many of the strategies and tactics that had worked for the ACT UP movement, but concentrated on sex, gender, and sexuality rather than AIDS. Queer activism varied across time and place, but many of its early projects focused on defending queer people and places, criticizing LGBT conservatism and liberalism, and celebrating gender and sexual transgression.” (Stein, 2012, p. 184) Queer was a term historically used to define gender and sexual rebellion, yet it was regained as a celebration that called against gender and sexual normativity. (Stein, 2012) “Along similar lines, while some activists thought that all LGBT people were queer and all non-LGBT people were nonqueer, others argued that non-LGBT people who defied gender and sexual norms were queerer than LGBT assimilationists.” (Stein 2012, p. 185)

Throughout my reading of Stein’s book, a couple of themes and points have come to light, relating to the liberation of LGBT and queer and their intertwined
nature with women and black emancipation. The most important of which is the question of emancipation itself and the stretching of the normative structures that we live in. As we divulged in the history of LGBT and queer liberation the words sexism and racism were used, bearing in mind that this movement started decades or centuries later. This highlights the fragility of the word emancipation and sheds light on the constant strive for freedom of the oppressed that is never fully realized. This brings me to my second point, which relates to the normative structures, I believe that the emancipation we celebrate, be it racial, sexual or gender related, is essentially the stretching of normative structures that once oppressed us and continues to through different mechanisms. Without the erasure of normative structures that are built upon codes of patriarchy, racism, and oppression are we actually free? I do not intend on negating the wins of the aforementioned movements, what I aim to emphasize is how those movements continue to be relevant and need to be continuously revitalized and

2.5 Conclusion

The sub-section of this chapter have been carefully curated to outline a story, one that has many layers and complex underpinnings. This project however does not intend on getting into all the different layers, as this would require a different project than the one at hand, but rather to shed light on the intertwined nature of the various movements that have been discussed and offer an explanation towards understanding the choice of those movements and their specific geographical locations. At first glance, one might think that this chapter has not been cohesively written due to the mere fact that each sub-section of this chapter discusses a movement in a different geographical location; however, the choice is based on the story conveyed throughout this chapter and built upon in the ones that follow. This is a story about various
struggles, ones for freedom, others for power and control, but above all a struggle to be “human”.

The first sub-section focused on women’s emancipation, discussing women’s movements in Eastern Europe. Throughout the first sub-section the motives behind any emancipation project were discussed, drawing on literature recounting the women’s emancipation project under the USSR, which shed light on the states’ willingness to provide what I call conditional freedom where freedom is granted when aligned with the government’s agenda. This paves the way to my second sub-section which focuses on black emancipation; the focus here is on the US not just because the movement stemmed from there but also because this project focuses on this geographical area and how its politics shape the world. Like women’s emancipation, black emancipation was only granted when it aligned with the US government’s agenda and it was also conditional, allowing black individuals a fraction of the entitlements their white counterparts enjoy.

The question remains however, how do these movements relate to the homosexual and queer movements that took place? Why choose to focus on the US specifically when discussing those movements? The answer is simple; the US is the international image of liberalism and democracy the developed hegemon that is helping the entire world become a better and more “progressive” version of itself. Here the conditional freedom that was discussed becomes of extreme importance because in the third sub-section we see various waves of homosexual and queer movements that were finally granted the emancipation they called for but like their predecessors, this freedom was confined to the already existing heteronormative structures that have existed for centuries. What further perplexes this arrangement is the further categorization of the queer community based on race, gender, ethnicity etc.
If actual emancipation had been achieved throughout the previous movements the aforementioned would not have mattered; but in reality, individuals continue to be categorized and in turn assigned to a segment of society where, depending on the individual’s layers of subject formation, they receive entitlements that have been ascribed to their specific “grouping”. Referring to the second sub-section, “emancipation is never fully realized, it is a continuous struggle.”
Chapter 3: Queer Individuals under the USSR

3.1 Introduction

Governments and nation-states have constantly sought to order and organize societies by mechanisms of grouping some individuals and marginalizing other within given societies. In order to deconstruct such claim one must first define what a nation-state is, according to Marx (2002, p.104) “The nation is that group viewed as the legitimate owner of the state; the collective sentiment of such ownership (that is, nationalism) is what gives the state legitimacy… state first, building national loyalty, or a national community creating a state, though often these processes occur together.” This process is oriented and reoriented through a process of labeling that prioritizes certain groups and, at the same time, oppresses and discriminates against other groups. In order to validate and enforce this process, governments portray the groups they established as possessing the same characteristics and subject formation (Weber, 2016, p.21). However, this process has proved to be arbitrary due to the evident diverse nature of individuals within a given group; and thus, results in a reinforcement of oppression, negative group conformity, conflict, and subject formation crises among other issues (Schotten, 2018, p.35). The aforementioned issues ensue feelings of resentment that translate into social movements and protests to counteract governments’ oppressive strategies, as depicted in the previous chapter. This chapter focuses on homosexual and queer communities under the USSR, in an attempt to portray, and in the following chapters assess, the stigmas that have been engraved within various contemporary post-Soviet states.

In order to decompress the layers of the notion of being queer I must first begin by offering an account of the evolution of labels and groupings that have led to
internalized and externalized understandings of queer in the USSR. Based on various sources utilized for this research project I contend that the idea of the nation-state introduced a system of groupings in an attempt to maximize power and secure interests; this system is realized through the mitigation of laws that reinforce certain norms granting some individuals rights and freedoms while neglecting and discriminating against others. This chapter is divided into two parts, the first introduces the history of homosexual individuals and their narratives under the USSR, while the second discusses human rights treaties and conventions in general, and more specifically the one’s that the USSR was party to, focusing on the linguistic and global meanings they attempt to convey and enforce.

3.2 The Gay Subject throughout the Soviet Era

The history of queer individuals’ lived experiences under the Soviet Union has multitudes of complexities and layers that come to light when attempting to decipher the notion of being queer and how it has changed and evolved. In an effort to understand the aforementioned, I aim at presenting an in-depth assessment of the situation and changes under the USSR. This is achieved through a discussion of laws pre and during the Soviet era in order to set the tone for the chapters to follow which will focus on Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan post the dismantling of the USSR.

In the book Soviet and Post-Soviet Sexualities, Richard C.M. Mole offers an account of homosexuality laws in the pre-Soviet era in Russia. Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution male homosexuality was banned by law, but the revolution and Lenin brought about many ideological changes, one of which was the removal of this ban. “…the 1920s was a period in which working-- class queer Russians had, for the first time, the freedom to construct their sexual subjectivities and make sense of their sexual desires and behaviours with reference to the legal, political and, in particular,
medical discourses circulating in Russia at that time” (Mole 2019, p.2). However, shortly after it became clear that the decriminalization of homosexual acts between males did not necessitate the protection or acceptance of homosexual acts. Lenin saw that “perverse sexual acts” were a symptom of the bourgeoisie class, a luxury that they could afford, and thus it had no place in the proletariat struggle (Mole, 2019, p.2). Furthermore, the death of Lenin and the ascent of Stalin as head of government signaled a new shift in the USSR’s sociopolitical stance and a rise in nationalism that had detrimental consequences on queer individuals (Mole, 2019, p.3).

In terms of the regime’s economic objectives, the policy of mass industrialisation announced by Stalin... required a major expansion of the labour force... Considerable effort went into boosting the birth rate and this was supported by the institutionalisation of a much more conservative gender order and by endorsing ‘the nuclear heterosexual family as the founding unit of Soviet society” ... In a society in which citizens were expected to put the collective interest above their individual desires, homosexuality was reconceived as abnormal, decadent and – in that it could not produce children – contrary to the public good (Mole 2019, p. 3).

According to Mole (2019, p.3), “A further strategy to satisfy the increased demand for industrial labour which had an impact on the lives of Soviet queers was to convert so-- called ‘social anomalies’ (female prostitutes, beggars, alcoholics and homeless adults) into ‘legitimate factory labor’...” Due to the police’s unintended encounters with queer individuals during their raids to achieve the aforementioned, queer individuals and more specifically male homosexuals became on the USSR secrete police’s radar; resulting in their 1933 proposal to criminalize sodomy (Mole, 2019, p. 3). “The law recriminalising male homosexuality – Article 121 of the Soviet
Penal Code – entered into force on 7 March 1934. Punishment for muzhelozhhestvo - (literally, ‘man lying with man’) was set at ‘five years of hard labor for voluntary sexual acts and eight years for using force or threats and for sex with a consenting minor’” (Mole 2019, p. 3). Moreover, the re-criminalization of sodomy was hailed by the public and seen as a stride towards achieving the socialist agenda “…with Nikolai Krylenko, the Soviet Commissar of Justice, proclaiming in 1936 that after two decades of socialism ‘there was no reason for anyone to be homosexual’ and anyone continuing to do so must be ‘remnants of the exploiting classes’” (Mole 2019, p. 4). Male homosexual acts remained illegal across the Soviet countries until the USSRs dismantlement in the 1990s; but even then, “…decriminalisation was agreed on the understanding that homosexuals would remain out of sight” (Mole 2019, p.5). This goes to show that while the legal status of queer individuals has changed over different periods and governments, the tolerance and acceptance of queer individuals was never on the table.

Ira Roldugina (2019), on the other hand, offers compelling insights on queer-lived experiences pre and during the Soviet era by analyzing letters written by homosexual males to the prominent psychiatrist Bekhterev, an expert on sexuality, and interrogation reports from the secret trials of homosexuals from 1933 to 1934. In the pages that follow homosexual subjects’ letters and interrogations are quoted at large and then analyzed in order to shed light on Soviet homosexuals’ narratives and the role the USSR played in shaping them.

In one of his early letters to Bekhterev, Nika Polyakov (a homosexual living in the USSR) wrote:

*You said that our laws only punished the propaganda of our goals or inducement to that. But it’s not a secret to anyone that these things aren’t*
done without consent, even with women, and in this case it is possible to say without any mistake, that if desired, it is possible accuse anyone, as it is possible to accuse a man of rape, because no woman spreads her legs before a man, and he has to recourse to ‘supposed’ violence. This certainly wouldn’t be denied by any man or woman (Roldugina 2019, p.22).

The attitude of the authorities towards us, the authorities, whose laws must be built on science and logic, is absolutely unfair, the authorities for whose existence most of us have struggled since the beginning, and now, when peaceful life has started, we do not have the right to the same existence as others (Roldugina 2019, p.23).

You cannot get acquainted with a new man and use him. After the man uses you, he will be willing to give himself to you in his turn. Only in this case can there be equality in deeds and the insulting form vanishes (Roldugina 2019, p.23).

But who was to blame? … Of course, the circumstances that had generated this marriage. This is when I realised what a crime had been committed. There were two lives wasted, especially the life of the woman. Where could she go then? She found herself at a crossroads. For in the tsarist times it wasn’t so easy to get a divorce and what was a woman without a husband back then? (Roldugina 2019, p.23).

Travelling along the Elbe, I was astonished by the order reigning everywhere. There was no uncultivated land. And all of that was done by the hand of man. That’s where I saw the border between our native country and Germany. I was outraged by the fact that all of our former rulers, who have been there
and the majority of whom belonged to this nation, didn’t pay any attention to their country (Roldugina 2019, p.24).

In notes from the police’s homosexual interrogations with Nika Polyakov:

‘I’ve been engaged in pederasty since 1907’, says Polyakov during the interrogation. He uses the term ‘homosexual’, but the investigator, who writes down his story by hand, puts ‘pederast’ in brackets (and so this goes in the typewritten copy). Since the 1930s, the scientifically used terms ‘homosexuality’ and ‘homosexual’ were being replaced by the sub-cultural offensive equivalents ‘pederasty’ and ‘pederast’, which were widespread before... The second interrogation record of Polyakov features some terms that seemed to have become a thing of the past, describing male homosexuality in the terms of the normative gender dichotomy (men performing of the female role) and thus depriving homosexuals of any subjectivity and any social reality outside of the ‘perversion’ of the only possible gender subject formations (Roldugina 2019, p.25).

In a letter L.G. wrote to Bekhterev:

...the author of another letter from 1925 from the first set – L.G. from Rostov – starts his letter to Bekhterev with the following words: ‘I’m 35 years old, I’m a pederast... a man, called in your terms homexalist.’ (Roldugina 2019, p.25).

Videnek, Attorney General of the Leningrad region:

In August 1933 there were nearly 40 hideouts for homosexualists disclosed in Leningrad, comprising around 400 pederasts. The pederasts developed a broad recruiting network to their hideouts in the public gardens and parks of Leningrad and in public restrooms; they organised orgies in their hideouts, dragged the working youth and Red Army servicemen into them, engaged in
perverted forms of sexual intercourse with minors and infected those involved with sexually transmitted diseases. The hideouts were organised by the representatives of hostile classes and there was active counter-revolutionary organising and agitation work conducted in all of these hideouts (Roldugina 2019, p.26).

In the last chapter Kaneva and Ibroscheva’s notion of symbolic glorification and Tuchman’s concept of symbolic annihilation were introduced; relying on such notions it becomes evident that the Soviet government utilized both modes in solidifying their grounds for a call against homosexuals and homosexuality. What also becomes clear and at the same time interesting is how the Soviet government used symbolic glorification and annihilation together; in the last chapter symbolic glorification was introduced as the opposite of symbolic annihilation, however in this chapter there are various instances where symbolic annihilation is a symptom of symbolic glorification. For instance, going back to the early years of the USSR, the government decriminalizes “sodomy” yet in one of his speeches Lenin announces that homosexuality is a perverse characteristic of the bourgeoisie class, denoting symbolic annihilation, where he associates homosexuality and queerness to the decadent bourgeoisie class. Throughout the previous pages of this chapter the homophobic narrative of the Soviet government is further solidified, the war on homosexuals is clear in Stalin’s recriminalization of “sodomy”, his nationalist agenda and the integral role of the nuclear heterosexual/reproducing family. Furthermore, state agents such as Nikolai Krylenko announcing in a public speech that there is no reason to be homosexual in the new communist order, or Videnek’s use of terminologies such as “pederasts” and his portrayal of homosexuals as the boogiemen who drag pious youth and army servicemen to do perverse acts and infect them with diseases. Highlights the
existence of mass campaigning against homosexuals, not only through the use of state force and law enforcement, but also within the culture, media and linguistic terminologies. The question then becomes how did such occurrences affect homosexuals living in the Soviet region? Moreover, how did their perceptions change with the evolution of the Soviet regime?

Nika Polyakov narrates his journey as a homosexual living in the Soviet region, reading his letters to Bekhterev and the officer’s transcribed reports from his interrogations during the time he spent in prison various linguistic shifts arise, which in turn emphasize the effect of state campaigning on self-perception and modes of understanding or giving meaning to oneself. Initially, Lenin’s decriminalization of “sodomy” gave hope to homosexuals all around the Soviet region, believing that they would finally exercise their rights and be treated as equals within society. Nonetheless, Polyakov discusses how even after the decriminalization of “sodomy” the government continues to oppress homosexuals and deny them their rights. On equality Polyakov discusses the propaganda law and how it is unfair due to the mere fact that homosexual sex like heterosexual sex must be based on consent and if it is not, it should be defined and tried as rape. On marriage Polyakov not only emphasizes his distress with forced marriage but his wife’s as well, discussing how two lives were ruined due to the heteronormative structure that confined them to such a space. And finally, when he travels to Germany, he highlights the differences between the government in Germany and that of the USSR, agitated by how government representatives have seen how life could be but continue to oppress homosexuals. In all Polyakov’s early letters to Bekhterev he is holding the government accountable for his oppression, knowing well that he deserves an equal chance to live a life free from oppression and fear; however, in the transcribed interrogations a shift in his self-
perception occurs. In his first interrogation Polyakov refers to himself as a homosexual, but the interrogator puts down “pederast” between brackets, while in his second interrogation record, he discusses homosexuality as an act where males perform the role of females. Further, asserting this shift in self-perception is L.G’s reference to himself as a “pederast” in his letter to Bekhterev.

The aforementioned quotes shed light on the USSR’s attempts to alienate and annihilate the queer community from within. The USSR not only put laws in place to ensure the criminalization of “sodomy”, but it also made an active effort to ensure that queer individuals felt “abnormal” and “perverse”. The quotes highlight the linguistic changes that have resulted from the USSR’s anti-homosexual campaigns and its effect on the queer community. It instilled a sense of decadence and perversion in Soviet queer individuals and even led them to define their “perversion” within the context of the already existing normative and heterosexual structures. In the quote, we see how the interrogator wrote “pederast” between brackets when N.P. said homosexual and how the author of another letter described himself as a “pederast”, showcasing the effect of state campaigning on the formulation of ideas and notions about the “other” and on one’s own subject formation. The remainder of the quote suggests that Lenin’s notion “decadent bourgeoisie” or what I term “homosexual bourgeoisie” and the Stalin government’s emphasis on homosexuality as “a thing of the past” had been deeply enshrined within the Soviet community to a point where queer individuals believe it themselves. From this, two integral elements pertinent to the success of the Soviet project to discourage and “eliminate” homosexuality and the queer community can be deduced; the first is that the campaigning is not only directed towards the supporting public but also the homosexual and queer community themselves. As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the Soviet government has attempted to
internalize homophobia within the queer individuals themselves, through mass media campaigning, policing, and a play on linguistic terms, making them feel “perverse” and in need of “fixing”. This was coupled with a rise in nationalism, where procreation and the nuclear family is at the locus of their political agenda; the “perverse and decadent bourgeoisie homosexual” had no place in the USSR. Nonetheless, the USSR as one of the founding members of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 had a certain role to uphold in public international view; thus in the following sub-section the intricacies of the UN especially on human rights and the USSR’s international role on such matters vis-à-vis its the domestic politics will be highlighted.

3.3 International Human Rights and the Soviet Queer Subject

The establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 signaled a new promise based on the premise of a “civilized” international order. In the wake of WWII and the atrocities, loss and damage that resulted from it, the world sought out a fairer system guided by laws and alliances that deter states and empires from committing such heinous crimes. According to Krasner (1982, p.1861) “Regimes can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations.”

In 1948 the first international document on human rights was drafted in the form of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which brought about ideas of freedom, justice and equality in the form of norms and principles to guide the international arena. Article 2 of the UDHR stated that:

*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin,*
property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty (UN General Assembly, 1948).

The UDHR marked the beginning of a new era for “humankind” everywhere, it promised the elimination of all forms of discrimination and the realization of equal rights around the globe through the establishment of international norms and principles that dictate domestic and international interaction. However, to many the USSR’s abstention during the General Assembly (GA) voting on the document gestured their disapproval and neglect of human rights (Lukina, 2017, p. 2). In her article, Lukina (2017, p.5) argues that the USSR’s abstention was due to the union’s opposition to the Western focus on the individual and political rather than the collective and social. Nonetheless, since the ratification of the UDHR various treaties, resolutions, conventions, committees, and councils have been established to further outline human rights and ensure their realization. In this sub-section the work and documents of such mechanisms will be analyzed for two reasons; the first is to assess the validity of human rights law, while the second is to understand where and how queer individuals fit within this mechanism, more specifically Soviet and post-Soviet queer subjects.

In the previous chapter several social movements were discussed that share the same ultimate goal of attaining rights and freedoms for the groups they represent. Some social movements preceded the establishment of the UN and the UDHR, while others took place years after. And yet one commonality persisted; the call for rights, to be seen as equal beings within a given society. This call expounds on international
human rights law’s inadequacy and inability to realize and validate its claims, which begs the question of why human rights law exists and for whom? The UDHR was drafted by the “civilized” and victorious empires and nation states of WWII, the white cisgendered males to be more accurate. Bearing that in mind, one begins to see the articles of the UDHR in a different light; the document was not meant for the entire humankind, but rather the white, heteronormative, “civilized”, and educated human that has the capacity and discipline to enjoy such rights. The international human rights project necessitates the existence of civilization and human development in exchange for the enjoyment of rights. Reading article 2 of the UDHR and other various documents that succeeded it, one gets lost in the poeticism and equity in which the documents are eloquently drafted. However, the reality of such documents is that they negate the existence of oppressive political structures, by merely making blanket statements about rights but not ensuring that there are hard mechanisms in place to keep governments in check and bind them to such promises. Furthermore, negating the presence of cultural and social differences that affect their applicability and reliability. Accordingly, one must realize the difference between the existence and the validity of the law, a law may exist but not be enforced, but it only becomes valid once it is enforced; in that sense international human rights law exists but is it valid?

This thesis attempts to answer the aforementioned questions pertaining the scope and effectiveness of international human rights law through a queer lens. One might wonder why this is the chosen mode of analysis; simply put, the queer discourse offers interesting and insightful truths towards understanding the reality of international human rights law, international relations, and neo imperialism. As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, international human rights law has been built
on rigid foundations that are rooted in a Western-centric perspectives of the world. The UN is made up of six organs that are granted rights and responsibilities in the form of mandates; the charter of the UN, which established the mechanism, outlines the entitlements and duties of each. Out of the six organs of the UN only two organs’ decisions are legally binding, the Security Council (SC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), however the ICJ’s rulings are not always legally binding, meaning that in reality the only organ that can enforce within the UN is the SC. Nevertheless, this thesis does not focus on the various mechanisms with the UN’s framework, but rather on the failure of the UN to inspire change and aims to elucidate the reasons behind this failure. Noting that the UDHR was established under the GA, which is a non-binding organ of the UN, one can argue that the failure to comply lies within those bounds; however, challenging this opinion the UN claims that all signatories and ratifiers of any document shall and must abide by its clauses. In other words, if a country decides to sign and ratify a convention, resolution, or treaty it vows to carry out the agreements set within them. Following this trail of thought, and the effect of international relations and pressure, it seems that this system would work, but if the element of interest is added to this equation all the outcomes begin to change. Interest is the main driver of international relations, and as will be conferred in the next couple of chapters, is facilitated and at times masked under the guise of international law, and more specifically, more times than not, under the pretense of human rights.

Bearing in mind, the element of interest and the binding and non-binding nature of UN documents, a question arises, how does this arrangement affect the realization of laws, and more specifically human rights? The SC, which is a legally binding organ of the UN, has the ability to impose sanctions and facilitate the use of force in the name of “countering security threats”, other organs within the UN do not
enjoy such liberties, their power is limited to notions of encouragement and proposals; however, they do not possess the power to enforce. Thus, the SC becomes the only organ that can incite change due to its ability to take action. Hans Morgenthau, who is known as the father of realism in international relations puts it succinctly in his article “Positivism, Functionalism, and International Law”, he emphasizes that:

*All the scheme and devices by which great humanitarians and shrewd politicians endeavored to organize the relations between states on the basis of law, have failed to stand the trial of history. Instead of asking whether the devices were adequate to the problems, which they were supposed to solve, the internationalists take the appropriateness of the devices for granted and blame the facts for the failure* (Morgenthau, 1940, p. 260).

Out of this analysis two important points can be derived. The first is that according to the realist paradigm, the existence of the law in a state of vacuum i.e., without a mixture of hard and soft deterrence (Morgenthau, 1940, p. 275), like the system that exists in the SC, change will not occur. While the second refers to the integral hypothesis of this thesis, which is that the mechanisms put in place are unable to deal with the issues in the first place and thus prove to be useless. The introductory chapter of this paper discussed the concept of an “international gay” that has been propagated and championed throughout the international arena, this “international gay” has certain characteristics that all must aspire to possess in order to realize their rights and potential. The law and all human rights are represented within this “international gay” prototype, in that to be rewarded by the law and gain one’s rights, one must assimilate and become synonymous with the championed model of how things should be. Any failure to assimilate shall result in the shunning of said state, because like Morgenthau explained the drafters and orchestrators of the law and
human rights do not take issue with the documents, but rather with the ones that cannot fit within its bounds. This is similar to Foucault’s depiction of the “perverse homosexual” that is not entitled to rights due to their difference.

Following this trail of thought it becomes clear that human rights are in no way holistic nor inclusive, but rather exist on the basis of a certain image that has been carefully curated by the West and exists for the benefit of the West; then what about the rest? Where does the rest of the international arena fit in this model? And why does human rights law claim to be universal and holistic? The hypothesis of this thesis is that human rights are weaponized to aid in the securing of interests and as a form of neo imperialism. Throughout history it has been apparent that nation states and empires utilize tools to safeguard, exploit, and secure interests. Over time those tools have underwent changes to conform to the everchanging order; nonetheless, the interests and exploitation mechanisms remain somewhat the same they just take different forms.

During the research phase of this project various sources referenced two UN documents besides the UDHR that are integral to the human rights paradigm and queer discourse. The first is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the second is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. While the UDHR emphasized the essentiality of recognizing human rights, the ICCPR spelled out the rights and entitlements that humankind should enjoy. The document was drafted in 1966 and entered into force in 1967 and was signed by the USSR in 1968 and ratified in 1973 (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). On the other hand, the second document which was adopted in Beijing, China in 1995 focused on the empowerment of women and girls and the importance of equality in all aspects of life. Those two documents have been central
to Western criticism of the USSR and Russia. However, taking into account Lukina’s interpretation of collective and social versus individual and political helps elucidate a couple of points. While it is constantly argued by the West that the USSR or thereafter Russia have not upheld their duty towards human rights as outlined in the UN documents they ratified, a different interpretation sheds light on the discrepancy between such documents and the reality of cultural experiences that do not want or cannot assimilate to the rights enshrined in such documents. This is not to say that the USSR and Russia are not at fault or have allowed for rights and freedoms to prevail. On the contrary, this highlights the inability and neglect of the international arena to realize the uniqueness and differences among nation states and cultures, emphasizing the system’s cultural blindness and biased adoption of Western ideals that do not account for such concepts. Furthermore, the West basing queer discourse on documents that do not even account for queerness proves to be pointless as it can be easily refuted and does not actually highlight the existence of queerness all along but rather treats it as a new concept attempting to retroactively insert it in old texts.

The question then becomes, how does queer discourse fit into this picture? Queer discourse is one of the contemporary fundamental mechanisms employed to secure Western interests within the international arena. While the human rights project never mentions queer individuals, or later what it would label as sexual orientation, in its early stages it claims to have set the tone for queer rights through its condemnation of discrimination in general. The first use of the term sexual orientation occurs in 2003 in GA A/RES/57/214 and was signed by Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan and it reads as:

Reaffirms the obligation of Governments to ensure the protection of the right to life of all persons under their jurisdiction, and calls upon Governments
concerned to investigate promptly and thoroughly all cases of killings committed in the name of passion or in the name of honour, all killings committed for any discriminatory reason, including sexual orientation, racially motivated violence leading to the death of the victim, killings of persons for reasons related to their peaceful activities as human rights defenders or as journalists, as well as other cases where a person’s right to life has been violated, and to bring those responsible to justice before a competent, independent and impartial judiciary and ensure that such killings, including killings committed by security forces, paramilitary groups or private forces, are neither condoned nor sanctioned by government officials or personnel (General Assembly, 2003).

This specific clause has been emphasized in six other GA resolutions the latest of which is A/RES/69/182, which Lithuania was in favor of while Russia and Kyrgyzstan abstained, that passed in 2015. That being said, it is not until 2011 where the UN decided to actually discuss discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender subject formation in the Human Rights Council (HRC). Resolution A/HRC/RES/17/19, which Russia voted against, titled Human rights, sexual orientation and gender subject formation, passed around the same time, and to no one’s surprise, as discussed in the introductory chapter of this project, when back then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that “...Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights.”

The aforementioned documents initially read as a promise to reform, yet when closely analyzed it becomes palpable that rather than reform the documents seek to enforce the propagated models of progression. As discussed in the introductory chapter and in the abovementioned paragraphs those models are Western-centric and do not apply to
all individuals; moreover, they are rooted in heteronormative structures, whereby layers are added to an already existing hierarchy. How can problematic and exclusive rights claim to be universal? “Human rights need to be relevant for individuals in their everyday lives…The need for localization implies (1) that international human rights law needs to be interpreted in a locally relevant manner (contextualized), and (2) that the daily realities or local human practice must inform any human rights standard-setting.” (Vandenbogaerde, 2018, p.58) Looking at the human rights project from a queer lens highlights the existence of inequity in a cultural, racial, and social manner. The assumption that all queer individuals have the same calls just goes to prove the ineffectiveness of the system. In claiming to be universal the human rights project has lost its call for actual rights, if history and culture have proven anything different groups derive different meanings and understanding based on their environment, subject formation, status etc. Portraying the human rights project as universal might as well be the same as when empires decided to lump different pieces of land and tribes together in the east and called it the Middle East, whilst expecting them to not rebel and live peacefully.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to set the tone for the chapters to follow. In this chapter the historical narrative of homosexuals living under the USSR was analyzed in an attempt to expound on the reality of their day-to-day lives and at the same time assess the shifts that occurred. This was done for two reasons; the first is to see the effects of this historical narrative on the contemporary reality of queer individuals living in post-Soviet nation states, namely, Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan. While the second relates to the historical narrative of the USSR in relation to the international arena in order to shed light on the evolution and translation of this narrative in the
same post-Soviet nation states in present-day. On the other hand, the second sub-
section focused on the analysis of the international human rights project and the 
USSR and thereafter Russia’s involvement or lack thereof in an effort to decipher the 
underpinnings of the project and better understand the universality it claims to 
comprehend. In the chapters that follow the claims that have been made in this chapter 
are put to the test, relying on contemporary case studies the human rights mechanisms 
failure and the deeply entrenched Soviet dogmas are assessed to examine the validity 
of such claims. As notions such as interest, exploitation, and neo imperialism remain 
at the center of the conversation.
Chapter 4: The Cultural War: Russia versus US

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters discussed some of the historical narratives that have aided in the shaping of contemporary understandings and perceptions of freedom, rights, and queer. Through a discussion of various social movements that have instigated changes to the “normative” order, certain patterns have come to light that have helped in explaining the underpinnings of queer movements and its interlinkage with international relations and policy. Furthermore, a discussion of the human rights project paved a way to further expound on and enunciate those international freedoms, which have supposedly supplemented the success of such movements, allowing an in-depth analysis into the universality of queerness vis-à-vis international relations. While the previous chapter dealt with homosexual subjects under the USSR, this chapter focuses on contemporary politics and subjectivities of the queer community in Russia, while also looking at USSR diaspora queer communities.

To many the collapse of the USSR signaled the beginning of a new world order, rather than the existing bipolar (US vs. USSR) international structure (Layne, 1993, p. 5) this collapse left the US as the triumphant “democratic” hegemon. Staying true to its role and aim, the US vowed to ensure the protection of individuals and their rights and to rid the world of tyranny for democracy to prevail. Democracy, which literally translates to rule of the people; the US and Western states pride themselves on being democratic to an extent where they embody it, one might go so far as to say that the US and democracy are synonymous. Delving further into this “democratic” system, it becomes clear that international relations, law, and organizations have been established and guided by this very same system, where everyone gets a seat at the
table, free to voice their concerns, oppose ideas and make an impact. The question then becomes in the presence of such a system why have rights and freedoms not been realized and why do inequalities persist and increase? The answer lies within the word and concept of the ‘individual’. Historically speaking, the word individual assumes a generalized and universal tone and has been used to mask interests which helps in eliminating accountability and creating loopholes. International human rights documents usually use a generalized tone, arguing that a generalized tone is universal and culturally sensitive; however, is that the actual and only reason? Through a discussion of post-soviet queer subject formations, this chapter attempts to answer those questions and offer a nuanced analysis of international human rights law and the West’s push for LGBTQ+ rights spearheaded by the US.

4.2 The US and EU versus Russia

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, an examination of post-Soviet sexualities and more specifically queer Russian subjectivities warrants a comprehensive assessment of the validity and applicability of those claims. Furthermore, the role the USSR and Russia have played in shaping post-USSR queer subjectivities and the Russia vs. US subject formation politics dichotomy offer crucial insights in understanding where the problem lies. As noted by Essig and Kondakov (2019, p.79) “…Alexander Dugin, a nationalist thinker and a man described as Vladimir Putin’s ‘brain’, marks homosexualism as a Western form of corruption that puts emphasis on the individual and undermines collective belongings such as national, religious or gender subject formations.” Various vital themes can be deduced from this quote that are worth investigating. The first is Dugin’s emphasis on the notion of “Western corruption”; the portrayal of homosexuality as a form of corruption negates the existence of individuals out of the bounds of the heteronormative hierarchy, reducing
them to a mere political conspiracy deployed by Russia’s enemies to ensure its demise. Second is the individual vs. collective dichotomy that both parties (US and Russia) are guilty of accentuating as a necessity for political success; as will become clear in the coming paragraphs, individualism and collectivism do not manifest in a state of vacuum, where the existence of one eradicates the presence of the other, and as such must not be seen in polarity but rather as harmonizing mechanisms that complement one another. And finally, Dugin’s discussion of the hindering of national, religious, and gender subject formations reaffirms and solidifies the USSR’s rhetoric, which is succinctly explained by Foucault’s four pillars of problematization that constitute fear, ideal of conduct, image, and model of abstention.

Indeed, the current Sexual Cold War is the result of colonising impulses, whereby both political and religious leaders in the US and Russia can imagine themselves as exceptionally good and ready to lead the rest of the world. It is this colonising impulse that seduces Russian politicians into adopting American Christian conservative rhetoric, American conservative leaders into praising their Russian counterparts and a global gay rights movement into limiting its demands to state recognition in the form of marriage (Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.82).

Contextualizing the US and Russia’s opposing claims on sexuality and liberation as forms of colonialism sheds light on the reality and nature of multiple international efforts, while asserting the insignificance of actual queer individuals, their rights, and needs. In that it emphasizes a struggle for power while negating the actual needs of individuals and groups; in essence the US and Russia attempt to impose their models on cultures by claiming superiority rather than assessing said cultures’ needs and demands. A great example of that was when: “…US. Former
President Barack Obama said in his second inaugural address that: Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like everyone else under the law. For if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well” (Tumulty, 2013, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.83). While Obama’s speech exudes tolerance and promises of liberation, a closer inspection of the text and language used illustrates the problematic reality of this “liberation project”. The fact that Obama limits his address to homosexual men and women, not only excludes the rest of queer community, but also reinforces the gender binary. Moreover, expanding the bounds of heteronormativity to include homosexual “men and women” under the preexisting laws that have been specifically tailored for the benefit of heterosexuals rather than erasing it does not remedy the issue nor does it allow for the realization of equal rights. And finally, Obama’s statement about the “right to love” demonstrates a grave fallacy that has been committed by many yet has not been tackled enough; that is, limiting queer subject formation to emotional and sexual/physical attraction, which reduces gender subject formation to the material and external world. As discussed in previous chapters and later in this chapter, queer individuals do not necessarily define their queerness through emotional or sexual/physical attraction, but rather through self-perception and social contexts. In 2016, Joe Biden (former VP and current US President) declared that: “…gay rights are the civil rights issue of our time” (Lambert, 2016, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.83), further elucidating the US’s intention to mainstream the “gay rights project” not only within the domestic sphere, but also within the international arena.

2013 marked the legal formalization of Russian homophobia in the form of the gay propaganda law. “Although the first ‘propaganda law’ was adopted back in 2006 on regional level, it was the passage of federal legislation in 2013 that attracted
greater attention both in Russia and abroad” (Pronkina, 2016, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.84). Provoking both national and international debate, political leaders in the Western hemisphere were quick to respond and condemn. “According to an article in the UK’s Sunday Times, the leader of Germany Angela Merkel was able to negotiate with an Imperialist Russia but not a homophobic one. Putin had annexed Crimea and sent his forces into Eastern Ukraine but the moment when Angela Merkel finally became convinced that there could be no reconciliation with Vladimir Putin was when she was treated to his hardline views on gay rights” (Pancevski, 2014, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.84).

British Prime Minister David Cameron pushed Putin at a G20 meeting in September of 2013 to recognise full equality for LGBT citizens. Foreign Secretary William Hague said that Britain must challenge Russia on its anti-gay laws since the treatment of homosexuality is wedded to democracy: Britain is most comfortable with itself when we are saving lives, standing up for human rights overseas. So, we should do that in conversation with Russia and other countries. It would say something terrible about Britain if we were reluctant to do that. We are one of the world’s oldest democracies. We are clear about our values. We must not retreat (Charleton, 2013, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.84).

Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer wrote a letter to Putin to write that: As the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee dedicated to the protection of human rights, I urge you to work to repeal recent laws and policies that severely infringe upon the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in Russia. These efforts – including legislation you recently signed banning ‘homosexual propaganda’ – are not
only an affront to fundamental principles of equality, but also contradict the
rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
to which Russia is a party (Boxer, 2013, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019,
p.85).

Further exploring and deconstructing the language used by political officials
in the West reaffirms various processes that have shaped international human rights
law and illustrates its ineffectiveness. For instance, Hauge’s remark about
homosexuality being wedded to democracy is what Puar has referred to as “US
exceptionalism”, while this statement came from a British official, the sentiment of
exceptionalism and the process of othering is one of the main ideals and values that
Western nations thrive upon. Moreover, his claim that “Britain is most comfortable
when saving lives” connotes the West’s white savior complex, further explained when
he goes on to say that it would look bad if Britain, being one of the oldest
democracies, did not get into “conversation” with other countries. Similarly in her
letter, senator Boxer “urged” Putin to repeal the law as it infringes on human rights
and ICCPR. The past few pages portray how the West was quick to judge and callout
Russia, but that was it, the West called out Russia yet did not seem to act in any way
unlike many other times where the West, namely the US, felt the need to invade
countries under the pretense of “human rights” violations.

...anti-- gay campaigner and Head of the Legal Committee of the Legislative
Assembly of Saint Petersburg, Vitaly Milonov said: If a person tries a same--
sex relationship as an experiment, there’s nothing upsetting about that. But
only ONE time. As the criminologists who study maniacs and homosexual
criminality say, after the second or third contact with the [same-- sex]
partner, something in the gender psyche of the person changes and he
consciously becomes gay (Balagurova, 2012, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.86).

Russia’s gay propaganda law and its emphasis on child safety is rooted in the words of Paul Cameron, a discredited American psychologist; according to Essig and Kondakov (2019, p.86) most of the document’s statistics came from Cameron; his work focused on the notion of child recruitment, claiming that during pride parades homosexuals would call for child recruitment. “2 Russian politicians used this claim that homosexuals recruit children over and over again in the lead up to the passage of a federal law ‘for the purpose of protecting children from information propagandizing non– traditional sexual relations to minors’” (Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.86). The passing of the gay propaganda law in 2013 was sort of an open call encouraging Russian scholars and politicians to condone and justify the essentiality of such a law. “In Russia’s premier university, Moscow State, sociologist Elena Novoselova analysed the ‘homosexual movement’ and confirmed that same– sex marriages are a ‘dead– end for humanity’ (Novoselova, 2013, p. 85). Her analysis is driven by the fear of children finding themselves in a society of the future where homosexuality is promoted while heterosexuality is violently oppressed” (ibid., p. 102, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.87). “According to the Levada Centre polling, 84% of Russians are opposed to same– sex marriages and 77% of Russians felt positive about the law banning ‘homosexual propaganda’” (Levada Centre, 2015, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.87).

Bearing in mind the aforementioned a trajectory begins to unfold, like the USSR the Russian government employed the media and the court of public opinion to portray a homophobic image; an image that does not represent the government but rather the Russian collective population, which not only diminishes the government’s
involvement in lobbying for the passing of this law, but also demonstrates a “democratic” Russia. In the previous chapters the USSR’s tactics were discussed, and one of their most important and influential tactics was the use of media and public opinion to depict a certain narrative that might not actually be true but garner the necessary support to secure interests. Thus, the involvement of academics and scholars that have access to a wider audience that is predominantly made up of adolescents in the process of shaping their opinions and worldly outlook, coupled with remarkable percentages of Russian individuals against homosexual marriage that approve of the ban was vital to the Russian government’s narrative. Simply put, the Russian government claimed that the community disapproved of homosexuals and their unions. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation heavily relies on censorship and the promotion of “traditional family values”, which begs the following question: do these percentages represent the actual public opinion? Without a sample size to backup those percentages and with the knowledge of the different mechanisms used to employ fear, one must be critical when looking at such numbers as they probably do not represent the reality, but rather an image that the government favors.

_Yelena Mizulina, the author of the anti-- gay propaganda law, former head of the Duma’s Committee on Family, Women and Children and now a member of the Upper House, the Federation Council, rationalises discrimination as a necessary step in increasing the birthrate in Russia: if we want to resolve the demographic crisis, then we need stricter policies in relation to moral values and information for some years, in order to provide for full childbirth and childrearing. In this regard Russian traditions are very important. And what are same-- sex marriages? We shall see if the French will be happier after legalization of same-- sex marriage and whether they will have such a high_
birthrate for one woman as they have now (they have a very high birthrate). Because same-- sex marriages.... What influence does this phenomenon have? A family is supposed to be complete, they want to bring up children. But where would they get children from? They cannot produce them themselves. So, there are orphans. Are they [same-- sex families] interested in orphans? Yes (Pervy Kanal, 2013, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.88).

This negation of any discrimination despite evidence to the contrary as well as the connection of homosexuality to the ‘inability’ to reproduce is Putin’s mantra, a stance he always repeats when asked about the ban on homosexual propaganda: We do not have a ban ... of non-- traditional forms of sexual interaction between people. We have a ban against propaganda of homosexuality and paedophilia among minors.... These are absolutely different things: one is a ban of certain relations, and another one is a ban against propaganda of these relations.... We do not prohibit anyone ... anything, we do not grab people on the streets, we do not have any sort of criminal consequences for such relationships, contrary to other countries in the world [meaning some states of the US].... So you can feel yourself peaceful and comfortable here – but just leave the kids alone, please! (RT na Russkom, 2014, as cited in Essig & Kondakov, 2019, p.89).

Reiterating and solidifying previous claims, Mizulina and Putin’s words echo a hybrid model that is based on Soviet principles yet hides under the guise of “democracy” and “tolerance”. Mizulina’s emphasis on the essentiality of reproduction as a vital contributor to the sustainability of Russia, justifying the ban as a required measure to ensure the resolution of the “demographic crisis” highlights a phenomenon that has been deployed by many states in the past. Linguistically, the use of the term
crisis insinuates a matter of urgency and national security, which in turn inspires fear and allows the government to act on behalf of the population in the name of safety and security. Furthermore, both Mizulina and Putin’s use of the term “traditional”, which denotes heteronormative structures, not only reinforces homophobia and mechanisms of othering, but also asserts Russia’s collectivist ideology that leaves very little room for the individual. To further perplex the issue, Putin equates homosexuality to pedophilia a narrative that has been stigmatized in Russian culture throughout the Soviet era. As discussed in previous chapters the historical term “pederast” and its contemporary equivalent “pedophile” have been used to describe homosexuals in an attempt dogmatize the abnormality of homosexuals and the threat they pose to the safety and security of society.

Adding to the already existing discriminatory law and the flawed concepts it attempts to convey; in late 2022 the Duma passed amendments to the gay propaganda law that have ignited Western scrutiny whilst endeavoring to further oppress queer voices and rights. According to Human Rights Watch (2022), this ban imposes harsher fines on individuals and legal entities discussing or spreading information on alternative models of sexuality, other than heteronormative, and it asserts that such kinds of “information harmful to children’s health and development”. Furthermore, the amendment also outlines the fact that online sources propagating such information are eligible for blocking and uses language that associates homosexuality with pedophilia (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Although the amendments have not yet passed all approval stages, those changes reverberate the abovementioned mantras that have been continuously asserted by Putin, Russian officials, scholars, and American conservatives. As Essig and Kondakov (2019, p.90) put it: “This is where both colonising and anti--colonialist discourses rather perversely get into bed
together. Russia fights against Western sexual imperialism by adopting the language of America’s populist and highly conservative Christian movement, while American conservatives attempt to model US sexual citizenship on Russia.”

That being said, it is important to note that the production, reproduction and dissemination of information has always been an important element in the spread of ideas and knowledge sharing. Beginning with the historical invention of the printing press and up to the contemporary platforms found on the internet, the world has stood witness to innovation in various fields, technological advancements, and transfer of ideas and theories. Furthermore, the advent of the internet and the diverse social media platforms it houses have not only intensified the notion of globalization, but also allowed individuals to share their thoughts, concerns, and call for action. Throughout this project the role of the media in catalyzing social movements, change in attitudes or even policy has been central to the discussion. In recent years it has become increasingly common for individuals to not only share bits and pieces of their lives on social media, but to also to share their thoughts on domestic and international social, political, and economic issues. Taking into account the West, USSR, and Russia’s utilization of media to curate certain “realities” and spread them throughout local and international communities and cultures; it is vital to assess and analyze those “realities”. Thus, it is vital to deconstruct the contemporary “realities” that have been carefully assembled by governments, while also looking at movements and protests that attempt to counteract such “realities” on social media, namely twitter.

In mid-2020 a Russian government led channel released an ad prior to the amendment of a law that would “consolidate the concept of marriage as a union between a man and a woman” (Solarnaris, 2020). The video begins by showing a child in an orphanage packing as he had just been adopted; the boy is accompanied by two
women from the orphanage and his new father. In the shot one of the women is taking a video of the joyous affair and telling the boy that he will now go live with his new “mother and father”. The following shot displays all four of them going out to meet the “mother” who turns out to be a man; thus, the boy starts asking where his new “mother” is, and one woman leaves as the other stops recording abruptly. The final shot reveals that the woman and child are sad and confused, while the other man, aka the “mother”, takes a dress out of the car to appease the child, insinuating that they are feminine (Solanaris, 2020). Solanaris (2020) emphasizes the fact that they base the ad on certain inherited homophobic dogmas depicted in the colors and shots used to make the ad; also pointing out that near the end of the ad it says, “is this Russia that you’ll choose? choose the future for the country! vote for amendments!” Noting the fundamental premise of the ad, which is to reinforce and further stigmatize preexisting homophobic structures, solidifying the regimes power through the irrefutable superiority of the nuclear family, sheds light on the Russian regime’s propagation of USSR ideals that have become deeply embedded in Russian culture and further asserted and championed by the current government.

The video introduces various elements that have been correlated with homophobic predispositions throughout the country’s historical narrative. Obviously the first is the setting of the ad, an orphanage where a child is being adopted, tying to the gay propaganda law and the country’s longstanding conception of homosexuality.
and pedophilia as synonymous. The second point, instead relates to the Russian community’s disapproval of homosexuality. Moreover, the third aspect is the portrayal of homosexuals as feminine and from the rich bourgeoisie class; the last shot not only shows the other man holding a dress, but also coming out of a somewhat expensive German car, connoting that the couple have money. In this chapter and previous chapters, the important role that the media plays in promulgating the government’s ideals locally and internationally have been discussed; this ad highlights the Russian regime’s utilization of the medium to spread ideas just like their USSR predecessor. Furthermore, the emphasis on femininity and homosexualism as a manifestation of the bourgeoisie class accentuates the modus operandi employed by the USSR to promote heterosexual ideals and condemn homosexuality.

In December 2018 Paul Whelan, a white ex-marine Canadian, British, Irish, and American citizen, was detained in Moscow under the allegation of international espionage and sentenced to 16 years of imprisonment in a high security facility (Rainsford, 2020). Rainsford (2020) explains that Whelan had picked up an interest in Russian culture since the mid-200s and would visit often making a lot of friends; speculating that the FSB, Russian intelligence agency, had been monitoring him as “he chose only to befriend men and not "pretty Russian girls"," leading them to believe that he was attempting to get Russian intelligence for the CIA. One can only ponder if perhaps those speculations merely arose from the fixed heterosexual structures within Russian society that dictate and limit interactions between men in the friendship department; in other words, were the FSB’s speculations based on the abnormality of Whelan’s interest in making male friends in relation to the predisposed norm? Three years later, in February 2022 another US citizen was detained in Russia
under the allegation of drug smuggling. Brittney Grinner, a queer African American basketball player, had allegedly smuggled hash oil from the US and brought it back with her to Russia (Yan, 2022). Grinner had been playing for a Russian basketball team during her offseason for a couple of years and had returned to Russia for a game when they found in her carry-on a vape and cannabis oil that she claimed had been a mistake (Kirby, 2022). Prior to their arrests, in 2010 Viktor Bout, a Russian arms dealer, known as the “merchant of death” was extradited from Thailand to the US and sentenced to 25 years in a US prison facility in 2012 (BBC, 2022). According to Kirby (2022) Bout has supplied arms to warlords and terrorists since the collapse of the USSR and is one of the most dangerous men in the world. Yet in December 2022 the US and Russia agreed on a swap of prisoners, where Grinner would return to the US and Bout to Russia, commuting Bout’s sentence to nothing (Kirby, 2022). This exchange has raised several questions and concerns in the international arena and locally in the US, hundreds of American citizens began to troll the US government on twitter agreeing to the swap. But taking in stock the previous VP, now President’s stance on “human rights” offers a compelling explanation to this swap. The Biden administration thrives on the notion of “human rights and liberty”; why would it exchange an arms dealer for a white single man when it can liberate and bring back home a queer black woman? While many have said that this swap has weakened the US’s position in the international arena, the aforementioned question asserts the US’s exceptionalism, the liberator staying true to its aim of being the land of the free.

The question then becomes how do these two instances (Russian ad and prisoner swap) tie together and what do they say? While on the one hand the abovementioned ad sheds light further on Russia’s homophobia and their emphasis on media as an integral medium to the reinforcement of government power and
legislation; and on the other the prisoner swap speaks volumes to the US’s exceptionalism. The dynamics at play are of particular interest, in the paragraphs that have preceded the ongoing cultural war manifests itself in various forms, beginning with the ad which urged Russians to solidify homophobia in opposition to the US’s homosexual tolerance in the form of homosexual couples adopting; up until Russia’s conviction of a queer US citizen to protest the US’s “liberation” and “tolerance” claims. What is more interesting is the US’s agreement to free an international threat to appear true to its claims. In line with that, it becomes strikingly clear that this issue is not about human rights or liberties but rather a competition between the US and Russia, leaving the human rights project devoid of meaning and deeming the human unimportant or even a ploy used to reach a goal. This understanding is one of the reasons why social movements and individuals mobilize for a cause, to make sure that they are heard and apply pressure within the local and global paradigms.

In recent years several physical and online Russian queer associations have been established to protest Russian legislations and communal heterosexual norms, while simultaneously shedding light on the differences between queer understanding and perceptions within the LGBTQ+ Russian community and that of the West. As discussed in the previous sub-section the “international gay” model that has been propagated by the West does not apply to all individuals and cultures; hence, migrants living in the “liberal” West have felt the need to mobilize and create associations of their own; not only to protest Russian legislations, but also to counteract the enforcement of Western models that they do not identify with. However, in light of the recent amendments to the gay propaganda law, associations such as Quarteera, Russian LGBT Network, and Russian-speaking American (RUSA) LGBTQ+ Association are under attack. On the 9th of February 2023 RUSA LGBTQ+ reported
that they “…received a request from the Russian censorship agency, Roskomnadzor, demanding we delete a page titled "Why We Need Brighton Beach Pride".” Furthermore, it has become noticeable that the Russian LGBT Network an NGO operating in Russia has been on a social media hiatus since late 2022. Signaling fear of the new amendments to the already existing legislation which attempts to further silence and police queer politics and individuals.

### 4.3 Russian Queer Diaspora

While the previous sub-section discussed West-Russia relations and attitudes on the matter, this sub-section delves into the Russian queer diaspora in order to elucidate why post-Soviet queer individuals migrated. This sub-section does not only assess the motives behind their migration, but also their lives as queer migrants and what it entails. “In the years between Putin’s first and third presidencies, the percentage of Russians relating towards gays and lesbians kindly, calmly or with interest has fallen from 47% to 29%, while those relating to homosexuals with apprehension, annoyance or disgust has increased from 48% to 65%” (Levada Center, 2015, as cited by Mole, 2019, p.134). Further to that, research conducted before the arrival of the gay propaganda law suggests that there was never a sense of queer subject formation in the country (Essig, 1999, as cited by Mole, 2019, p.134).

According to Mole (2019, p.135), many queer individuals sought refuge in gay and lesbian bars, yet those bars rarely existed out of the big cities and those that did were at times forced to close by the church. “Even if there were bars and clubs, access was often mediated by the economic capital of the clientele, making them out of reach for many. As Alyosha commented: ‘Gay establishments – the gay industry in general – are usually for well-- off people, not for the poor.’ Yet, even well-- off respondents from major cities, such as St Petersburg, reported that going to gay and
lesbian clubs ran the risk of violence at the hands of both criminals and the police…” (Mole, 2019, p.135). “As Alyosha explained: ‘I can’t be seen on the street with a gay man. Although I can see that he’s gay, I can’t make friends with him or chat to him, because people would start to look at me. They would start to talk” (Mole, 2019, p.135). Consequently, Mole (2019, p.136) explains that many Russian queer individuals have chosen to migrate due to the oppressive nature of the Russian regime and community, connoting that: “…‘exit’ and ‘voice’ must not be understood as mutually exclusive responses; rather, the former often leads to the latter. Indeed, it was as a result of migration to Berlin that many LGBQ Russians took part in co-ordinated protest activity against the government in Russia for the first time.” However, it is important to note that the cause of queer migration does not solely rest on the expression of sexuality, as will become clear in the following pages, just like all other individuals, queer individuals are complex beings and reducing their needs, motives, and subject formations to the expression of sexuality and realization of “freedom” proves insufficient in this project’s analysis and the grander schematic theme.

*As Boris recounts: When I was in Russia, I had my own firm and earned enough to go travelling. I saw many countries and saw how people lived and how other societies treat gay people ... Therefore I set myself the goal of living in a city, in a country, where you don’t have to hide your orientation, you don’t have to be afraid of anything and where you can be who you want to be. That’s why I moved here [Berlin] (Mole, 2019, p.137).

For Ivan...My family is important to me, so I couldn’t [come out at home], that wasn’t possible. It was only after I moved to Cologne [before then moving
that I started to live for myself, that I started to live (Mole, 2019, p.138).

For individuals like Boris, Ivan, and Alyosha the motive for migration was rooted in their need to be visible, to openly express their sexuality without fear or shame. More importantly taking a closer look at the respondents’ responses shows that their concerns were not only related to legislations made by the government and police crackdown, but also on their families and communities’ attitudes and perception of queerness. This indicates that queerness and queer rights cannot be reconciled by merely a change in legislation or a shift in the attitude of the government; and highlights that homophobia has been deeply entrenched and dogmatized within Russian society. On the other hand, Vladimir and Olga explain that while their sexuality is an important factor in terms of subject formation, it was not the only or main reason for their migration.

Vladimir explains: There were a number of reasons at that time why I wanted to move abroad, not necessarily to Germany, but abroad. Of course, one reason was my sexual subject formation. There were also other reasons that were also important. So my sexual subject formation and my coming out weren’t the main reasons...Olga: ‘I would say that [my sexuality] played perhaps a subconscious role in my decision to migrate, but in my decision to stay here – absolutely’ (Mole, 2019, p.138 & 139).

As Zoya explained...We were feeling pressure from society, on the one side, and pressure from our families, acquaintances, colleagues, friends of our parents. There was a lot of pressure from the family. In a large city, you can simply move to another part of town. But living in a small town – that’s difficult. We wanted to live together. So our idea was simply to move to St.
Petersburg…However, it is important to point out that not all respondents intended to stay away from Russia permanently, as was the case with Zoya…Polina N, who linked this sense of freedom to greater legal rights, acknowledging that it was in Berlin that she first understood she, as a lesbian, had rights, just like everyone else… (Mole, 2019, p.138 & 139).

Others such as Zoya Polina N did not intend on leaving the entirety of Russia, or not leave for good at least. Nonetheless, when they were made aware of how life for queer individuals was easier outside the bounds of Russia they decided to stay. Up until this point it may seem that life in the “liberal” West is what it claims to be, i.e., exceptional; however, to reiterate communities, societies, and individuals are multifaceted that cannot be confined to or explained by a singular phenomenon that avows to be all encompassing and universal. As Mole (2019, p.140) illustrates based on the conducted interviews, homosexuality and Russian national subject formation cannot be viewed in an either-or binary, but rather the author uses the term “Russian-ness” to showcase the interviewees’ sense of subject formation and their ties to Russian culture and language. Furthermore, the author emphasizes that this sense of “Russian-ness” did not only apply to natives, but also to other queer individuals from post-Soviet territories; as was the case for Olga where she mentioned that: “It does not matter if you are from Uzbekistan or Russia, you all had the same two TV channels and sang the same songs” (Mole, 2019, p.140). Yet he explains that they saw their “Russian-ness” as one of many elements that make up their subject formation (Mole, 2019, p.140). For instance, Zoya moved to Berlin because it included tones from both “Eastern and Western character… there was this huge rift between two worlds. And in Berlin I have somehow been able to bring these two worlds together, so that they are no longer in opposition” (Mole, 2019, p.137).
Galina...: ‘Initially, I tried really hard to integrate into this society but, for some reason, it was difficult. I found them [Germans] not as warm--hearted as Russians. Perhaps, that is just a stereotype but I found it to be true.’ For Olga, the fear that the freedom that Berlin offered to LGBQ migrants could potentially be offset by a sense of loneliness were she to leave behind her Russian--speaking friends and family weighed on her decision as to whether she should migrate at all: I must admit that there was a thought somewhere in the back of my mind: when I am in Berlin, I will be free for the first time in my life to do whatever I want ... if I go. Because I had the feeling that I would be completely alone. I am the only one like this – especially among Russian--speakers (Mole, 2019, p.141).

For queer individuals such as Galina and Olga, their sense subject formation did not only depend on their sexuality and its expression and realization, but also on the ability to live in an accepting and tolerant collectivist community. In the first subsection of this chapter the topic of individualism versus collectivism was discussed, in the sense that both should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather in a complementary manner. The respondents’ feelings resonate with this view, in that while the West calls for individualism and Russia calls for collectivism, Galina and Olga call for the realization of both, not in a dichotomous manner but rather as mutually constitutive elements that allow for the enjoyment of rights without the absence of a community or sense of belonging. Yet, the complexity of Russian culture and homophobia expands outside the bounds of Russia; “Katya...When she came out to her family, the attitudes towards homosexuality they had imported from the former Soviet Union resulted in their cutting off all contact with her” (Mole, 2019, p.142). Similarly, “Alyosha...: I wasn’t afraid of foreigners, I wasn’t afraid of people from
Ethiopia or from Iran, because they have their culture and I have mine … I was very afraid of Russian-- speakers, that they would come up to me and ask me: who are you, what are you, are you gay or not gay, what are you doing here?” (Mole, 2019, p.142).

...Darya, objected to the very traditional and fixed understanding of Russian--ness propagated by the Russian Embassy and Russia House, which failed to take account of more alternative cultural perspectives: What the Embassy and Russia House do in terms of culture is so absolute. This is authentic Russian culture.... It’s true that there are Goethe Institutes in other countries and they propagate German culture but it’s not just Goethe and Schiller but much more. It is more varied (Mole, 2019, p.143).

In Mole’s (2019, p.143) words: “It was recognition of the fact that being ‘a migrant and LGBT’ could lead to ‘double discrimination’ that prompted the establishment of Quarteera, an association of LGBT Russian-- speakers and their friends.” Noting the notion of double discrimination and coupling it with the West’s savior complex explains “…the experience of one Quarteera member’s co-- operation with a German LGBT organisation, which attempted to teach him how to do activism, despite his many years of fighting for LGBT rights in Russia” (Mole, 2019, p.144).

The West’s obscene obsession with being exceptional that promulgates an us versus them, progressed versus backwards, or right versus wrong way of doing things speaks in magnitudes to the reality of their neo-imperialist “LGBT” conquest. The West’s protest against the reimagination of queer subjectivities as diverse beings that cannot be lumped together and their assertion of a “right way to be gay”, is exactly why a German queer association would decide to teach another queer activist “how to do activism.” Automatically assuming that a Russian person does not have prior experience in activism, and basing their judgement on Western perceptions of Russian
culture, where the Russian queer person’s experiences become irrelevant in the face of their exceptionalism. Due to all the aforementioned reasons Quarteera is an integral part of the queer diaspora community in Berlin.

As Leonid reminisced: ‘Only in the past two years, thanks to the people who organised Quarteera, do I have Russian friendships that are stable. And in part this has to do with the ability to be open [about my sexuality].’ For Katya, Quarteera offered the psychological support of community she needed after her family disowned her after she came out to them. Having gone through this experience, she felt a sense of responsibility to others in the same situation. While there are various German organisations and support networks aimed at LGBTQ individuals, they lack the affective appeal of Quarteera. As Olga explained, Russian-speaking ‘individuals and their families can go and receive support’ from people who not only speak Russian but also understand the socio-cultural factors underlying the conflict; due to the linguistic and cultural specificities of the Russian-speaking community, ‘these people cannot be helped in a “normal” German-speaking association’ (Mole, 2019, p.144).

Several vital notions have been discussed in this sub-section that offer a nuanced and under-researched analysis of the West’s “gay liberation” project, which focuses on the propagation of a model “international gay” that all queer individuals aspire to be and relate to. Throughout this sub-section it has become clearer that queer subjectivities are diverse and cannot be defined by their sexuality alone. As is the case with the queer Russian diaspora, and with many other queer individuals in different geographical spaces, sexuality is but one of the ways in which individuals identify and express themselves. The “Russian-ness” that the queer diaspora in Berlin sought
and the establishment of Quarteera attest to that, and to the claim that there is a mutually inclusive duality in individuality and collectivity. While life in a homophobic Russia proved to be hard and oppressive, life in liberal Berlin also had its challenges due to the unavailability of ethnic and cultural ties.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter various themes have been discussed that aid in deconstructing the US-Russian relations and understandings of queer politics and has allowed for the deriving of the essential elements and meanings of queer politics for the state (i.e., Russia and the US) and the individual or ethnic group. Several focal points can be drawn out of the previous discussion; the first is that the USSR’s perception of homosexuality and queerness has remained the same and might even be intensifying, while the second relates to the Russian regime’s reorientation and reimagination of USSR tactics in dealing with and oppressing the queer community. Moreover, the third is the West, and mainly, the US’s portrayal and embodiment of exceptionalism which allows for the widespread of ideas and influence under the guise of “human rights”. Finally, and most importantly, this chapter highlights that the gap between the understanding of the state and the individual or group as emphasized in terms of the queer diaspora community in Berlin and how they did not identify with German queer individuals. This leads us to the conclusion that sexual orientation does not and cannot be the sole contributor to self-subject formation and rights, and furthermore, elucidates that the international queer community cannot be lumped together and given one voice, the voice of the exceptional West. Which begs a final question, why does the human rights system remain intact?
Chapter 5: Queer Subject formation and Activism in Kyrgyzstan

5.1 Introduction

The collapse of the USSR ushered the beginning of a new era, where post-Soviet territories sought independence as sovereign nation states. This new era brought about a glimpse of hope for a more “equitable” world, where mechanisms of oppression would cease to exist. As discussed in previous chapters, the USSR employed various mechanisms to police political, social, and economic realms which had grave effects on subject formations and self-perception, especially that of queer individuals. Building on the case of Russia and taking note of the USSR’s engraved dogmas rooted in Russian culture and society; this chapter attempts to assess the USSR’s effect on post-Soviet territories beyond Russia. Furthermore, contextualizing other post-Soviet territories’ place in the human rights project and the West’s queer “liberation” movement.

The general claim of this project situates the US’s promotion of the Human Rights project as a form of cultural hegemony, which enables the categorizing of nation states as either “good” or “bad” depending on the human rights laws they adopt, as a mere ploy that aids in the securing of interests. The Soviet/post-Soviet trajectory further emphasizes this claim; in this chapter contemporary Kyrgyz queer subject formation and government reactions and interactions are assessed for several reasons: 1) evaluate whether the cultural differences argument (i.e., “International gay” model propagated by the West does not fit other cultures) holds up; 2) inquiry into the international arena, namely the West’s claim to “liberate” and its failure to discuss/alleviate queer grievances in Kyrgyzstan; and finally 3) assess to which
degree the USSR’s mechanisms and policies have shaped that of Kyrgyzstan’s. To achieve the aforementioned the following sub-sections, focus on mainly Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, and thus the most “liberal” and Osh, the biggest city in the country that also has a Muslim majority.

5.2 “Political Tolerance” versus Traditional Values

5.2.1 Bishkek

Since the collapse of the USSR, Kyrgyzstan has undergone various changes in terms of the political, social, and economic climate that have shaped and gave meaning to contemporary queer understandings. In 1998 Kyrgyzstan saw the removal of the USSR’s sodomy ban under its first democratically elected president, which gave room for queer activism and NGOs’ participation in the public realm (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 18). Nonetheless, in 2005 the president was deposed and replaced with a traditionalist that stayed true to USSR’s aims and championed heteronormative patriarchal structures; he was then deposed as well in 2010, and ever since the political climate in Kyrgyzstan has been characterized as unstable (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 19). As a result, “[i]n contemporary Kyrgyzstan, any deviation from sexual norms is dangerous. In many cases LGBT people have to hide their subject formations and mimic heteronormative appearances and behaviours in order to avoid abuse or violence” (Von Boemcken et al. 2018, as cited in Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 23).

While the aforementioned quote illustrates the similarities between Russian and Kyrgyz perceptions of queer subject formation and its ties to the Soviet understandings and reaction to the notion of queer, the Kyrgyz case proves to be more complex. In Russia the state has always employed oppressive measures, as
extensively discussed in the previous chapter; however, in the case of Kyrgyzstan it seems that state has withdrawn from any formal mechanisms of queer oppression. Nonetheless, the government’s withdrawal does not indicate their tolerance but rather their a primarily reactive but still oppressive attitude towards the Kyrgyz community. While on the other hand, Kyrgyz societal perceptions of queer individuals remain intolerant and homophobic, which constantly situates queer individuals in emotional and physical risks of violence.

As Bagdasarova (2018, p.23) explains, even official LGBT gatherings in Kyrgyzstan are dangerous. While LGBT activism and NGOs are politically recognized in the state, societal disapproval and governmental corruption increase the incidence of aggression and intolerance. As outlined by one of the respondents:

*We always warn all our participants that there are strict rules of behaviour for living in the hotel and attending sessions in the conference hall. We ask them not to be “too visible”, if you understand what I am talking about […] the dress code and all these things […] Also [they should] keep quiet in the rooms in the nights. That kind of thing. Like this is “just a seminar”. It is of course, just a seminar, but still […] Well, you know what I mean”* (Arstan, 32 years, NGO activist, Bishkek, May 2017) (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 24).

The respondent then proceeded to explain how once “…seminar participants were spotted in the hotel corridor “cross-dressed” (it was guys in girls’ clothes)”, and hotel management asked the organizers to cancel the seminar due to guests’ complaints (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 24). “They wanted us to move out as we cause trouble to other customers. […] It was so difficult to solve the conflict and stay at this place. And do you know how hard it is to tell people not do certain things when they are gathered together? They do not have a lot of opportunities to spend open it for
several reasons” (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 24). Two points can be drawn from Arstan’s account of organized seminars; firstly, the fact that they ask queer individuals to “note be too visible” alludes to the ineffectiveness of the government to create change in order to protect Kyrgyz individuals. While the second relates to the respondent’s explanation of cross-dressing as “guys in girls’ clothes” which emphasizes a link to heteronormative understandings that have been rooted in the USSR’s mechanisms employed to distort queer self-perceptions.

The author then moves to the discussion of queer safe spaces in Bishkek, focusing on a queer club co-owned by a lesbian couple and discussing the motives behind their decision and the challenges they faced (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 26), as follows: “Though we tried to start a business it was never [meant to be] a commercial project [only]. It is still not very commercial. It was like: To gather all! To be together! And this would be great! Something like that. We were daring and impudent in a way, we called the place “Outreach” (Sasha, night club co-owner, Bishkek, December 2017)” (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 26). Sasha explicates the couple’s decision to pursue a communal project rather than the commercial one they intended on pursuing, highlighting the importance of the collective Kyrgyz queer community. The couple intended on providing a queer sanctuary where the community could enjoy each other’s company in a safe environment. This sense of community alluded to by Sasha is very similar to that of the Russian diaspora in Berlin and their establishment of Quarteera, in that post-Soviet queer individuals do not ascribe to the individualistic nature of Western queer politics, but rather derive meaning from their communal and collective settings.

The couple also mention that they have had to change locations a couple of times due to physical and emotional aggression by individuals from the neighborhood
“Usually the landlords [owners of the premises] ask us to vacate the venue. They provide different reasons, like that the residents in the houses nearby are complaining […] but to me it seems more like […] you know […] I believe it is about their own homophobia that they do not want to admit it openly. They hold these fears and just don’t want us to be around (Oksana, night club co-owner, Bishkek, December 2017)” (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 26). Furthermore, on police encounters Sasha explains that:

\begin{quote}
You know, in general we try to minimise our contacts with the police, as do all our people. There is usually nothing pleasant in it. For many of us it is just dangerous. I myself am in a much better position than others. First I know my rights. I know that they cannot do anything against me if I do not break a law. Second, I am not afraid to defend my rights: I am an open lesbian, I am not afraid of being exposed and they can’t force me to do anything. But I am also aware of how difficult it is for many of us to contact the police. The threat of being exposed or even detained, you know […] “until things are clarified”. […] Prison is not a good place for our people. That’s why LGBT is a permanent source of bribes or pay-offs. (Sasha, night club co-owner, Bishkek, December 2017) (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 28).
\end{quote}

In the aforementioned quote, Sasha makes a couple of remarks that are worth deconstructing and further facilitate the comprehension of queer life and subject formation in Kyrgyzstan. The first is the respondent’s us of the phrase “our people” that connotes a sense of belonging to a certain group and translates into a communal subject formation. While the second is the use of the term “dangerous” to describe queer-police relations, connoting brutality and the use of force and aggression. Furthermore, the respondent claims that they know their rights, alluding to the fact
that not all queer Kyrgyz individuals understand their rights, which points to the state’s failure to ensure the group’s realization of rights and entitlements that they vow to uphold and protect. Moreover, Sasha’s emphasis on being an open lesbian reads as a form of weapon that can be used in the face of police corruption, explaining that they usually blackmail closeted queer individuals to extort them for money. And finally, highlighting that prison is not a good place for them, illustrating the fact that queer individuals are mistreated and tortured in prisons. Combining all the abovementioned factors sheds light on a rhetoric that is similar to that of the USSR, in that the mechanisms employed by state forces under the USSR are mimicked by Kyrgyz police forces. Furthermore, the communal representation of Kyrgyz queer subject formations is analogous with that of Russian queer subject formation, asserting that queer subject formation and collectivism are not dichotomous but rather two sides of the same coin in the case of post-Soviet states. This helps in illustrating the fact that a “deviation” from soviet cultural norms does not translate into the absolute adoption of Western ones; but rather it incorporates a hybrid where multitudes of subject formation and self-perception collide making a unique experience.

5.2.2 Osh

As mentioned in this chapter’s introduction Osh is the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan and is comprised of a Muslim majority, which may signal a difference in the level of openness of queer subject formations and settings due to the religious conservatism of the city. According to In Kandiyoti’s (2007, p. 601):

*Post-Soviet gender ideologies do not represent a simple return to national traditions, interrupted by Soviet policies, but constitute a strategic redeployment of notions of cultural authenticity in the service of new*
ideological goals... signaling both a break from the Soviet past and in creating new imaginaries of the nation that enhance social solidarity in increasingly fractured post-Soviet societies. The official endorsement of Islam, as a central tenet of national identity and the simultaneous rejection and policing of its more radical expressions contributes further to the politicization of gender.

Kandiyoti’s reference to the endorsement of Islam but rejection of its radicalization proves to be vital in understanding Kyrgyz queer politics. As will be clear throughout the rest of the sub-section’s discussion Kyrgyz queer subjects do not discuss Islam or religion yet it can be deduced that religion and Islam play a role in their cultural invisibility. However, this notion also helps in shedding light on the religion’s assumption of a secondary role in governmental practices as highlighted by the government’s indifference in regard to queer subject formation in the previous sub-section. Further to that, Faranda and Noelle (2019, p.115) explain that in the case of Kyrgyzstan Islam and Muslim practices cannot be unified under one umbrella due to the existence of many different practices and expression of the religion. Bearing that in mind, one interpretation to the queer subjects’ lack of religious discussion may be because there are various sects and practices in the country which in turn my discount the relevance of a religious or Islamic discussion within their queer narratives as it is not a on sizes fits all scenario. Another could be that as Kandiyoti discussed the rejection of Islamic radicalization within politics could have lessened the importance of religion as a vital element of their narrative. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research on the matter of Islam and queer subject formations in Kyrgyzstan; and thus it is important to note that it is impossible to make an imperative claim about the relationship between both as will be shown in the coming paragraphs it is unclear
whether the respondents do not think a discussion of the matter is important or the scholar fails to account for the religious element.

According to Bagdasarova (2018, p.30) the number of “men having sex with men” who are married, and part of a heterosexual relationship is significantly higher than in Bishkek. Explicating that in Osh unmarried males over the age of 25 are a sight of suspicion; in the words of one of the respondents: (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 30)

*I am like a damned actor who performs at various stages. I have to behave differently and even speak in different voices. I have one voice at home talking to my wife and children, but I use another voice towards my employees at work as a state official, and sometimes I need a third one for my colleagues in the NGO [he is also working with a NGO that is not connected to LGBT issues]. I only stop controlling my voice and behaviour when dating [other men] or at private parties with close friends (Erik, 47 years, Osh, December 2017).

Erik’s recount of the different personas he must uphold in different Kyrgyz societal settings proves to be similar to some of the remarks made by Nika Polyakov in chapter three and by several respondents from the Russian diaspora community in chapter four. Highlighting the USSR’s dogmatization of heteronormativity to the point where decades later the same modes of societal interactions and reactions are reproduced, further perplexing the formulation of subject formation. Referring back to Haraway’s figuration, which is composed of tropes, temporalities, gender performativity, and worlding, it becomes clear that queer subjects in Russia and Kyrgyzstan have been conditioned in a manner where they constantly produce meanings of the world that are tied to Soviet understandings that have been propagated by the state and championed by society.
More interestingly, contrary to Bishkek in Osh queer individuals, namely men, have informal structures and networks that have leaders “…persons who are older and usually well-secured in terms of income and social connections” (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 31). Bagdasarova (2018, p.32) explains that those circles are well established, which might mean that they have existed under the USSR as well; where the “circle or Krug” is usually composed of 40 to 50 individuals per leader and maintains constant connections. As explained by one of the leaders:

*There are some groups within the whole circle, like “sub-circles”. [...] These groups are separated by certain interests or age or other reasons. The people in the groups contact [each other] more often and are close to each other. So I know what is going on in each of these groups. If I have not heard from somebody for several days I start looking for that person, trying to get to know what’s happened. Maybe something is wrong and some help is needed. [...] They all are so different! There are differences in interests, education, income, social status. [...] There is an age, you know. [...] And some of them may have nothing in common besides alcohol, for example. If you have some money you can go to a café, to a sauna, [or] rent an apartment or house. The poorer people have dates just at home, or if it is impossible then in parks, at the countryside, like picnics. [...] Something like that. [...] Of course this is possible only from March to October. Winter is difficult for them. There are a lot of encounters, changing partners, no relationships at all. This is not good for the development of the young people. And it could even be dangerous after all [both because of the risk of exposure and sexually transmitted infections, NB] (Rustam, 53 years, Osh, December 2017) (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 32).*
Ultimately Rustam’s claims resonate with the overall theme discussed in this chapter, that is the security and safety of the Kyrgyz queer community. Yet security does not relate only to state oppression and the formal use of force, but also to societal aggression and intolerance. This leads to three focal issues as outlined by Rustam: instability, differences, and social class as drivers of queer interaction in Osh. While at first glance the three issues may not seem problematic and can be characterized as symptoms of any social order within a given society or nation state, a closer look accentuates the existence of engraved dogmas that hinder the realization of queer safety, security, and subject formation networks. In this regards, the existence of instability in terms of forming genuine connections and relationships emphasizes the crackdown, whether societal or state administered, on the queer community and more specifically gay men. While the differences issue suggests that queer communities are lumped together irrespective of the various aspects that define and shape their subject formation. This makes the issue twofold, on the one side this specific issue can be characterized as a symptom of an intolerant community where Kyrgyz queer individuals are not allowed to express themselves; and the on other hand, it may also be characterized as a symptom of the international systemic lumping of groups, where the international arena and more specifically the West establishes social orders based on Western-centric approaches and belief systems regardless of whether individuals actually and genuinely ascribe to them. And finally, the notion of social class stresses the effects of Soviet thought on societies and structures; in reference to Lenin’s claim that homosexuality is a symptom of the bourgeoise class several links can be drawn: 1) being poor increases the probability of getting caught; 2) meaningful connections are harder to formulate; 3) rich individuals enjoy better and safer access to queer platforms allowing them the chance to establish meaningful relationships. The
formulation of Rustam’s argument around social class as one of the drivers of queer life in Osh is unrefutably true, yet it underlines a Soviet way of thought that has been adopted by the Kyrgyz society.

On a different note, Aibek a volunteer at an LGBT NGO explains that:

We are struggling to involve people in our activities. We are interested in raising awareness within the community about many things. It is not only HIV and health issues, though many donors are working mostly in this area. [...] We watch movies together, conduct discussions, provide psychological support. [...] It is important to let young people know that they are normal, that nothing is wrong with them in spite of people’s opinions. [...] This really helps. And we always have free condoms here, and express tests for HIV. People get used to trusting us. For me it seems that many leaders are just jealous. Some of them prevent people from coming here. They are afraid of losing their audience, it seems (Aibek, 19 years, Osh, October 2016) (Bagdasarova, 2018, p. 34).

The inability of the NGO to reach its targeted audience suggests that queer individuals fear the societal consequences of being associated with such an organization, at the same time it highlights the rivalry between the Krugs and LGBT NGO. In the article Bagdasarova (2018, p.34) explains that the NGO’s work is more “democratic” than that of the Krugs. That being said, the activities held in the NGO resonate with the support and activities provided to the queer Russian community in Berlin by Quarteera leading to the conclusion that, unlike the West’s claim that queer communities seek individuality and independence, post-Soviet queer subject formations have complex and multifaceted subject formations that are not completely dependent on their sexual orientation. Furthermore, integral to this make-up is their
sense of collective subject formation which does not take away from their gender performativity and their individual subject formation but rather grant them a safe space to further realize and shape their subject formations in the communal setting they constantly strive and seek to have. Finally, Aibek’s remark about how international donors mostly focus on HIV and health issues highlights a Western agenda where certain entitlements are given according to the donor’s interests rather than the Kyrgyz queer community’s needs.

5.2.3 Kyrgyzstan’s Attempt at a Gay Propaganda Law

Following in the footsteps of the historical USSR’s homeland and contemporary Russian Federation, in March 2014 the Kyrgyz parliament drafted a gay propaganda bill similar to that of Russia in an attempt to suppress calls for queer rights and protect “traditional” USSR values (Human Rights Watch, 2014). However, the Kyrgyz bill proposed harsher changes than the Russian; it outlined three main areas:

“Limit dissemination of information in the media, information, photo, video, and written materials, including materials that have an open or hidden call toward non-traditional sexual relations”;
“Restrict organizing and participating in peaceful assemblies that aim to make publicly available any information regarding any forms of non-traditional sexual relations”;
and “Define the criminal and administrative liability of legal entities and individuals for disseminating information containing hidden or open propaganda about non-traditional forms of sexual relations, including toward minor.” (Human Rights Watch, 2014).
While this bill attempted to mimic Russia’s 2013 gay propaganda law, it looks closer to the amendments that are currently underway in Russia that further oppress Russian queer individuals and queer activism. The bill mentions four interesting points that are worth discussing. The first is in reference to their use of the phrase “non-traditional sexual relations”, which not only explicitly outlines heterosexuality as the only traditional form of sexual relations, but also sheds light on the USSR’s lasting effect on the Kyrgyz society and government. While the second is the fact that the bill mentions the restriction of peaceful assemblies, explicating the Kyrgyz government’s unwillingness to even entertain the notion of public peaceful assemblies on queer matters and demands. Moreover, the third point relates to the bill’s reference to “legal entities”, which proves to be problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the phrase itself reads as a blanket statement and can be interpreted in several manners, legal entities encompass all governmental and non-governmental formal entities within a nation state. Secondly, as briefly highlighted in the previous paragraphs and will be further illustrated in the sub-section to follow, LGBT activism in the form of NGOs is widespread in Kyrgyzstan and especially in Bishkek; thus, the Kyrgyz government’s clause reads as a call for their closure, furthermore it becomes increasingly confusing that the same government that granted them access to become legal entities is the one trying to take that away. And lastly, it is worth mentioning that while Russia hid its queerphobia under the pretense of child protection, Kyrgyzstan blatantly highlighted its queerphobia and referenced the protection of minors as an additional bonus.

Subsequently, while the bill began its course within the bureaucratic system of approvals various sources have revealed that it ignited a form of societal hunt or attack against Kyrgyz queer individuals. “Some people have been savagely assaulted,
including one gay man we interviewed who was beaten unconscious and gang-raped this year. Several sources told us of lesbians being subjected to so-called ‘corrective rapes’, and many attacks go unreported. LGBTQ activists have gone underground after the Bishkek office of one advocacy group was firebombed” (North, 2016). Explaining that attacks on queer individuals increased to a near 300% and that respondents have outlined that being queer in a patriarchal Muslim-majority country has always been challenging but never to this extent (North, 2016). What becomes increasingly interesting is the Kyrgyz president’s remark during a visit from Putin to the country, he announced that: “We cannot have a separate future” illustrating his ties to Russia and his former Soviet home and denouncing any connection to the West (North, 2016). Kyrgyz officials like their Russian counterparts also constantly make public queerphobic remarks; for instance, parliamentarians from the dominant coalition asserted that the bill was integral to “protect the rights of the majority rather than of the minority… We cannot tolerate gay propaganda” (North, 2016). North (2016) explains that in Kyrgyzstan statues and streets named after Soviet leaders still exist. This coupled with the fact that in one of the interviews conducted the interview explained that the police would call him a pederast (in Russian) sheds light on the USSR’s engraved ideology in Kyrgyzstan. In conclusion, while the bill has not passed till this day due to the mounting international pressure and Russia’s inability to adhere to agreed upon arrangements the effect it would have had has taken place regardless of its formalizing.

5.3 Queer Activism and International Donors

In light of the aforementioned, this sub-section focuses on the role of women and queer NGOs in Bishkek and the role of international donors. Relying on Hoare’s analysis of two NGOs in Bishkek, this sub-section attempts to deconstruct the role of
such NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, their interplay, and how international donors fit in this picture. During her time in Bishkek, Hoare (2019) conducted interviews and shadowed an LGBT NGO and a Woman crisis center and concluded that, while the LGBT NGO was vibrant, progressive, and mostly run by youth, the crisis center seemed to promote conservative heteronormative ideals and was run by old women “...with a traditional ‘Soviet’ view of who was a woman and how her problems should be solved” (Moldosheva, 2007, as cited in ibid, p. 172). Nonetheless, both groups were under constant attack as they threatened “traditional Kyrgyz values” even with the knowledge that LGBT group maintained a “narrative of exclusion”, and “events and campaigns where the organisation and its members had attempted to participate and contribute but had been ignored, silenced, ‘thrown out’ or never invited in the first place” (Hoare, 2019, p.172).

Furthermore, Hoare (2019, p.172) expounds upon the increase in the active participation of international development organization post the collapse of the USSR, illustrating how such organizations that follow a neo-liberal model brought certain notions on “development, gender equality, and civil society.”. He continues that “[t]hey also brought funding for ‘civil society’ – in the form of NGOs – that would help to cement these new values, ensure ‘good governance’ by holding governments to account and act as vehicles for citizen participation... NGOs were also tasked with replacing the state as provider of targeted social welfare... on the grounds that they could do so more efficiently than bureaucratic and corruption-- ridden states” (Hoare, 2019, p. 173). Increasingly, international donors emphasized the role of gender equality as a main development marker, and consequently more funding went to NGOs that promoted such ideas; “in the form of gender focal points and other advisory positions, gender training courses and toolkits and dedicated funding streams
for work to promote gender equality… training programmes run by international NGOs and donors introduced concepts of ‘gender’, ‘gender equality’, ‘rights’ and ‘empowerment’” (Hoare, 2019, p.174). Furthermore Kyrgyz NGOs were encouraged by international donors to draft proposals on programs that promote gender equality (Hoare, 2019, p.174).

However, the increased involvement of international donors, while may seem noble, in actuality reproduced Western-centric approaches and labelling systems that the Kyrgyz community did not necessarily identify with but were forced to use to make ends meet (Hoare, 2019, p.178). For instance, “a Russian woman […] adopted the label ‘lesbian’ because that was what American LGBT activists had told her do if she wanted material and moral support. This woman had previously described herself as ‘non--heterosexual’ but also specifically as ‘not lesbian’” (Heller, 2007, as cited in Hoare, 2019, p. 178). This example shows how this Western-centric approach has been applied to different areas regardless of whether queer individuals identify with it or not. Just like all other formal and informal organizations discussed in this research project the LGBT NGO provides various types of support to queer individuals, is part of a wider international network, and has a stable and secure Dutch fund yet it did not gain much recognition within Kyrgyz society (Hoar, 2019, p. 179). Contrary to the LGBT NGO, the crisis center is old and formal “Other staff members always used the formal Vy form (in Russian) to address the director and also used her patronymic when speaking to her in Russian or the suffix - eje (used to address an older or higher status woman) when speaking to her in Kyrgyz” (Hoare, 2019, p.179).

During the submission of the CEDAW report in 2008, four shadow reports were submitted, whereas original relevant Kyrgyz NGOs had agreed to submit one comprehensive and consolidated report (Hoare, 2019, p.181). According to Hoare,
“[t]he director of the LGBT rights organisation had this explanation: The main reason why we wrote the stand alone [...] shadow report [...] was exactly because the mainstream women’s movement didn’t want to include us in their mainstream report. Because our research was too radical for them. And they didn’t want to [...] lose what they have already achieved by including us, I guess” (Hoare, 2019, p.181).

Introducing the notion of “sexuality baiting”, which Hoare (2019, p.181) explains as the fear of being associated with a form of sexual deviance or gender nonconformity, he continues:

A Kyrgyz independent gender expert and women’s rights activist whom I interviewed was more explicit in her account of what had happened and the hostility underlying it: As maybe you know there was a CEDAW shadow report committee of various groups, [the LGBT rights group] wanted to be part of the shadow reporting process, there was some discussion of this and the committee decided it didn’t want [them] to be part of the report because it didn’t think the report should include information on ‘sexual minorities’ (Hoare, 2019, p.181).

Emphasizing the idea of NGO tribalism pertinent to the focus of the NGOs mandate (women’s issues and-or gender equality), Moldosheva (2007, as cited in Hoare, 2019, p.182) asserts that there is a divide between “mainstream and alternative NGOs.”. The competitive nature of funding creates rivalries between organizations that persists unless their interests align: “[This] has blown up into a big myth that [the LGBT rights group] was somehow chucked out of ‘the feminist movement’ in Kyrgyzstan. Which is ridiculous, it was just a CEDAW shadow report committee, they have no power. There’s no ‘us’, no movement for [them] to be excluded from. They keep saying they want to be included but there is nothing for them to be
included in” (Hoare, 2019, p.183). Building on that us versus them narrative, Sergei a volunteer at the LGBT NGO commented on the organization’s attendance of the CEDAW event in protest of their involvement or lack of; however, according to Hoare (2019, p.184) the organization had friends that it worked with and called upon, such as youth and human rights’ groups. “Many of the young people involved with the LGBT group relied on it for a sense of belonging and also for the practical assistance and support that an extended family might otherwise have provided, in regard, for instance, to finding somewhere to live or gaining access to the right medical care” (Hoare, 2019, p.184).

In attempting to decipher the groups narrative of exclusion, Hoare (2019) poses two explanations that must be addressed. The first is that this narrative may help convince their international donors and networks that they stand firmly and separately from the mainstream groups (Hoare, 2019, p.184). The second is that the neo-liberal model promotes ideals of creating partnerships and coalitions, hence this narrative of exclusion allowed them to secure their funding yet work alone (Hoare, 2019, p.185). In the words of one of the respondents: “At the moment we are trying to establish links with [and] relations with some other organisations. But so far, well it’s only temporary; other organisations are just giving the impression that they want to work with us. For them, it’s if the donors have asked them to work with us” (Hoare, 2019, p.185).

Throughout this sub-section important ideas and claims have been introduced that are worth discussing. Firstly, the fact that both NGOs have been attacked several times shows the unwillingness of the Kyrgyz society to accept any form of deviation from “traditional” USSR norms, not just in relation to queerness but also to that of heteronormative women. Secondly, Hoare’s progressive versus conservative narrative
assumes a Western-centric approach as it adopts certain measures of progression; nonetheless it is important to note that the crisis center paralleled a Soviet model where even the director was referred to in formal Russian and-or Kyrgyz pronouns, which again highlights the USSR’s persistent ties to modern day Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, the advent of international organizations that follow a neo-liberal model and Western-centric approaches imposed certain personas and way of thought, propagating Western-centric labels and conditionalities for funding that did not necessarily fit the Kyrgyz community but was imbued within society as it is the only form of support that can be reached. Moreover, the notion of tribalism in NGOs resonates with the USSR’s usual collective model where similar groups entertain working together but reproduce modes of exclusion due to the fear of the “other” and being associated with it. Finally, and most importantly, the narrative of exclusion further perplexes the situation where the international donors’ conditionalities stipulate the establishment of partnerships and coalitions, while mainstream groups are afraid of being associated with queer groups and queer groups want to safeguard their separateness. Leading to the conclusion that the international arena’s involvement in Kyrgyzstan produces new challenges rather than alleviating old ones due to the mere fact that they attempt to force a Western-centric model that does not apply to the community and queer individuals do not ascribe to.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed a wide array of phenomena in an attempt to answer three essential questions that were posed in the beginning and are integral to this research project. Those questions are as follows: are there cultural differences that complicate the realization of the notion of “International gay”; whether the USSR had a lasting effect on Kyrgyz policy and society; and finally, did the West aid in
liberating the queer community in Kyrgyzstan. Before answering the questions, it is important to note that while Kyrgyzstan has no law prohibiting queer relations or interactions police and societal brutality persist and continue to increase. Drawing on the evidence presented in the previous paragraphs, it becomes clear that the cultural differences argument holds up. For instance, the queer community in Bishkek and Osh like their Russian counterparts had informal networks and discussed the vitality of a sense of community and togetherness. This sense of community may very well be due to the USSR’s centralization, as mentioned by one of the respondents in the previous chapter it did not matter which territory you lived in, they all had the same TV channels. There are various signs that connote the USSR’s lasting effect on Kyrgyzstan, like the statues and street names or the fact they still assume that queer women are sick and the conduct “rape conversion therapy” if you will, to make queer women “heterosexual”. Furthermore, it can be illustrated in the Kyrgyz government’s need to mimic Russia and its policies or taking its side in the grander scheme of international relations; this is just to name a few.

Coupling this with advent of international donors and Western ideals sets the tone for the complex nature and subject formation make up of Kyrgyz queer individuals. As explained in different parts of this chapter, the Western involvement in the form of donors attempted to impose a rigid Western-centric model on non-Western nation states, which led to a schism in subject formation and modes of understanding; where the non-Western Kyrgyz queer individual found themself forced to adopt new formulations of subject formation and meaning that they do not necessarily attribute to or at times even understand. Rather than the creation of a hybrid model that is culturally informed and sensitive, the Kyrgyz community got a standardized soulless approach and were forced to adhere to it just so they can secure
funds and make donors happy. This relates to the use of a global matrix to assess development and progression that has been originally designed by the West and for the West and is culturally blind. Adding to that the West’s failure to respond to or discuss Kyrgyzstan’s queer community, except in very few instances, further expounds on the nature of the human rights project. Succinctly put, when Russia fails to uphold queer rights, it is repeatedly condemned within the international arena, yet when Kyrgyzstan does the same the world is silent. This trajectory becomes even clearer when looking at literature and sources on the matter or lack thereof.
Chapter 6: Eastern Queer Subject formation: Lithuanian Queer Perceptions under Western Laws

6.1 Introduction:

In previous chapters, various themes were discussed that relate to the evolution of queer understandings and perceptions. Drawing upon experiences of Soviet and post-Soviet queer sexualities, this project has attempted to shed light on the hegemonic nature of the supposedly cosmopolitan human rights project or lack thereof. Throughout the chapters several notions that are integral to deconstructing the discourse at hand have persisted; thus, it is vital that they be further examined under a different light. While chapter four and five focused on post-Soviet nation states that are out of the bounds of the geopolitical Western hemisphere. this chapter will focus on Lithuania, which is a post-Soviet state that is also within the aforementioned geopolitical space. The juxtaposition of Lithuania to Russia and Kyrgyzstan will allow for the true formulation of an idea around the themes that have been discussed due to the country’s unique stance as both a post-Soviet state and a current member of the European Union (EU). Thus, this chapter will address the validity of a post-Soviet legacy, the West’s involvement in Lithuania and Lithuanian policymaking, and experiences of Lithuanian queer subjects.

6.2 Queer Perceptions and Soviet Legacies

For Lithuania the collapse of the USSR marked the end of an oppressive epoch and the beginning of a new order, consummated with the state’s entry to the EU in 2004 which further strengthened the hope for a better and fairer future (Miazhevich, 2019, p.192). Miazhevich (2019, p.193) explains that while Lithuania
decriminalized homosexuality in 1993, homophobia and queerphobia still persist even with regards to government officials and policymakers. At this point it is important to note that while this chapter relies heavily on Miazhevich’s ethnographic field work in Lithuania, it also accounts for her Western-centric approach in analysis and uses other sources to supplement and expound upon queer Lithuanian experiences and discourse. In 2009 the EU government passed the “Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.195). This law, which was condemned by the EU initially outlined the prohibition of information that promoted “homosexual, bisexual, and polygamous relationships” and was vetoed by the president and rewritten as “which expresses contempt for family values, encourages the concept of entry into a marriage and creation of a family other than stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania and the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania” (Kuktoraitė, 2018).

Interestingly, this law was put in effect years before Russia’s gay propaganda law and years after Lithuania’s entry to the EU, accentuating the persistence of queerphobia in the post-Soviet state even years after its acceptance into the “developed” world. However, just like in the case of Kyrgyzstan, the advent of the Russian gay propaganda law further exacerbated matters for the queer community in Lithuania (Miazhevich, 2019, p.195). Furthermore, in Lithuania as in Kyrgyzstan, queer groups and NGOs such as “…the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL) and the Tolerant Youth Association (Tolerantiško Jaunimo Asociacija) …” are recognized as formal legal entities (Miazhevich, 2019, p.195). From the aforementioned elements a clear connection can be made between all three countries; they all adopted or attempted to adopt similar policies, and – as discussed in the case of Kyrgyzstan – the
formalization of queer groups within the legal framework does not equate queer acceptance and the erasure of queerphobia.

Recalling attitudes towards queerness under the USSR, all respondents discussed the fact that they doubted their sexual subject formation and sense of belonging due to intolerance, oppression, and harassment (Miazhevich, 2019, p.197). Even in the post-Soviet climate respondents found it hard to express themselves: “There was nobody I could talk to and discuss life, about being homosexual, I thought they don’t exist here, because they were absent from the media [or] only shown in a negative light (Andreas, Lt)” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.198). Due to queerphobia and mechanisms of exclusion respondents used several methods to manage, such as migration, expression through art, and most importantly online and on ground activism (Miazhevich, 2019, p.198). Adding to the mix the parental factor of acceptance further complicates the issue due to the parents’ Soviet ideology and emphasis on the vitality of the nuclear family:

Laura (Lt) explained: ‘She [my mother] thinks that it’s a sin ... she’s not young ... and she’s listening to those religious radio [programmes]’... Andreas... ‘huge pressure of having such a child, because nobody else has a gay child... came out’, their parents still hoped that ‘this phase’ would pass, their child would marry and have children (Lukas, Lt)... Jokubas (Lt) explained: ‘My brother found some gay videos and heouted me to my mother [and] my mother stopped using the word pederast in her vocabulary.’ Lukas (Lt) said: ‘My brother, he’s quite homophobic ... but he doesn’t feel any danger when I am with his children ... when people know you ... you are not perceived as a threat’ (Miazhevich, 2019, p.198-199).
While most of the respondents’ parents had initial hostile reactions to their children’s coming out, over time their perceptions have shifted; nonetheless the subliminal disapproval in the form of comments remained a common and frequently recurring theme – as made clear in some of the cases reported by Miazhevich (2019, p.199):

‘Sometimes when she [my mother] gets angry [with me], she says you are doing that because you are a faggot [laughs]’ (Lukas, Lt). Jokubas (Lt) reported: ‘When we argue, she [my mother] says [something] like I forgive you many things and I think that she is thinking about me being gay.’... More extreme family reactions included: ‘Why [expletive] did you go there [to gay pride], what are you thinking ... what is wrong with you? ... you should ... shoot those paedophiles’ (Laura, Lt)

Moreover, respondents asserted that homophobia and queerphobia were still an intrinsic part of Lithuanian culture; one the respondents even argued that: “LGBT people should be hidden ‘in the basement – do whatever you want but don’t show it to society’” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.199). While another respondent illustrated the level of queerphobia by shedding light on an instance where “‘teachers ... spreading homophobia in the university.... Students were even invited to ... join an internet hate group.’” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.199). Others discussed how people who were not homophobic were still ignorant and insensitive as the culture nor government set a precedent to educate the public on gender issues; as one lesbian respondent recalled she was previously referred to as an “it” due to the Russian language’s cis-gendered nature (Miazhevich, 2019, p.200). Several respondents mentioned that the lasting effect of the Soviet legacy will take generations to change (Miazhevich, 2019, p.200), which connotes a deep sense of persistent Soviet thought on modern day Lithuania.
Compounding the aforementioned with the respondents’ different views on Soviet policy and climate further illustrates the internal divides between the Lithuanian queer community:

Laura (Lt) praised the ‘Soviet [time when] the position of women was different ... more independent’, while Andreas (Lt) was more negative: Being homo sovieticus is, as I mentioned before, having those masks, so many different characters, not sure if people know how to behave, which mask to use, whether to use those masks, if they fully understand that they are not required to wear those masks, afraid of being somehow different (Miazhevich, 2019, p.200).

Building on the aforementioned rhetoric, almost all respondents claimed that Lithuanian policymakers have maintained an anti-queer approach to capitalize on their interests (Miazhevich, 2019, p. 200). All respondents explained that: “Right-wing politicians and maybe [their] ticket to join the European Parliament, … I see how readily some candidates use this homophobic rhetoric to try to get … votes … Lithuania being quite a conservative country, while … at the same time part of Europe, which is supposed to be tolerant, politically correct” (Miazhevich, 2019, p. 201). In addition, the respondents also outlined a divide between gay and lesbian communities: “Laura (Lt)... ‘I would say lesbians are quite active in arts and literature [and] prefer to have cute parties [at home]’... ‘It’s like once you’re “out” there, there is no way back [laughs], and for girls it’s more fluid’ (Edita, Lt)” (Miazhevich, 2019, p. 201). Drawing on Laura’s praise for the USSR’s empowerment of women and their essential role in society and juxtaposing it to her remarks on the modern day Lithuanian lesbian culture offers fundamental insights into understanding the various layers and categories of subject formation politics. Referring back to
chapter two of this research project, where it discussed the USSR’s portrayal of increased women empowerment and number in the labor force but did not in actuality translate on the ground highlights the effect of Soviet legacy on modern day Lithuanian perceptions. Additionally, the treatment of lesbians as second-class citizens in contrast to their gay counterparts reproduces patriarchal and heteronormative hierarchical structures where women are confined to the private realm (Miazhevich, 2019, p. 201).

Compounding the abovementioned concepts, points, and perceptions on Soviet legacy and queer subject formation with the Lithuanian queer communities conflicting views on representation and activism helps illustrate a narrative of incongruency between the Lithuanian queer community itself (Miazhevich, 2019, p. 201). Furthermore, “This prompted more individualistic and non- coordinated actions (e.g., a ‘coming out’ YouTube video), as they strove to show that ‘the gay community can be different’ and do different things to promote their rights (Andreas, Lt)” (Miazhevich, 2019, p. 202). Miazhevich (2019) explains that while Lithuania respondents formed their ideas and perceptions on queerness around “human rights discourse” from a Western standpoint, it did not translate into active civic participation demanding change (p. 202). But rather respondents concluded that: “Even in the community sometimes people don’t understand that they have no rights, they think everything is fine’ (Vladimir, Lt). Jokubas (Lt): … ‘Why show ourselves when we can live like ordinary people sitting in … the background [laughs]… ‘I don’t see the need, nobody is violating my rights you know and so maybe it’s a safe bubble and they live in it, imagine that everything is OK’ (Laura, Lt)” (Miazhevich, 2019, p. 202). Claiming that most of the Lithuanian queer community wanted to “‘have a very
good life’, ignoring the fact that their ‘rights and … abilities are being taken away’ (Andreas, Lt)” (Miazhevič, 2019, p. 203).

Tereškinas (2019) discusses the Lithuanian culture’s promotion of queerphobia, giving two examples that highlight some of the mechanisms employed to achieve just that. The first is about a schoolteacher that claimed “that almost every person that had ever been convicted of homicide and cannibalism was gay” during a religious lecture (Dombrovskytė, 2017, as cited in Tereškinas, 2019, p.12). While the second relates to Lithuanian conservative NGOs and parliamentarians’ justifications of queerphobia (Tereškinas, 2019, p.15). “These NGOs claim that there is a sinister agenda behind the goal of same-sex marriage, i. e. to destroy the institution of marriage altogether. Along with these organizations, the conservative Parliament members do not keep away from calling LGBTQ+ people deviants and AIDS, the God’s judgment against homosexuals” (Jackevičius, 2016, as cited in Tereškinas, 2019, p.12). As a conservative group leader commented: “The problem is LGBT+ propaganda starting from kindergartens, schools and universities up to TV shows and corporate marketing” (Viktoras Jasinskas as cited in Savage, 2021). Those two specific examples provide a nuanced understanding of the Soviet legacy as a concept, whereas the collapse of the Soviet Union did not entail the erasure of Soviet perceptions or mechanisms of oppression and internalized homophobia. Contrary to popular belief the Soviet legacy does not only remain in the form of queerphobia, but also in the methods employed to mobilize cultural support and further stigmatize queer sexualities. In Lithuania just as in Russia the use of the phrase “nontraditional sexual orientation” connotes the exclusion of queer individuals from the public realm due to their inferiority, denoting the motto “We tolerate you as long as you stay out of public eye. Do whatever you want in your bedroom” (Tereškinas, 2019, p.17).
6.3 Perceptions around the EU, “Democratic” West, and Russian Effects

The European Union is one of the leading international institutions known for ideals such as human rights promotion and overall individual and nation state well-being. Yet, Harboe Knudsen (2012, p.167) explains that, while before its membership in the EU many promises were made, they did not manifest after Lithuania’s entry in the Union. In his paper, as he stressed that he “was very interested in the changes in people’s lives that came about with the EU” but his respondent “laughed to himself, shook his head and said to me, “What changes? Nothing has changed.” He took a sip of his beer and continued, “They said we would be getting up on the high mountain. Well, I am still sitting here!” (Harboe Knudsen, 2012, p.163). Thus, this sub-section aims at deconstructing Lithuanian queer perspectives of the EU and its involvement in the country, while also assessing the applicability of EU gendered politics in the context of Lithuania.

Miazhevich (2019, p.203) emphasizes how respondents usually compared Lithuania to other European countries, aspiring to be more like them:

‘[In the] West you feel more free ... and you don’t see [it] in Eastern Europe’ (Jokubas). Lukas noted that: ‘Trying to survive in Lithuania ... those who return back to Lithuania are more pro- human rights.... If they start living in Lithuania, usually the routine starts to get to them again.’ This view was shared by Vladimir: ‘People are so happy until they are on the plane.... Everybody understands that they are coming back to reality in Vilnius. [It is] already 2014, but we still don’t have any openly gay cafés.’ (Miazhevich, 2019, p.203).
Noting the Lithuanian queer community’s infatuation with Western nation states helps in illustrating their frustration with the EU:

‘[I thought that] the European Union was like a lottery ticket, everything would be totally fine. [I] believed that this was a kind of guarantee that human rights would be automatically aligned with European Union’ (Vladimir).

Andreas: ... ‘It scares me to see how easy it is to manipulate people nowadays, because we’ve been in the EU for ten years now so you’d think society would be tolerant, but ...’ Edita agreed that ‘homophobic rhetoric [had] intensified’ and that EU membership was linked to reduced freedom and control, as people realised ‘[that they] agreed to all those legal changes, anti-discrimination ... and now Brussels is gonna dictate us how to live, let’s protest against that’ (Miazhevich, 2019, p.203).

Explicating that while the process of joining the EU brought about drastic changes in policies that the Lithuanian community did not necessarily condone, it was viewed at the time as a necessary evil. Nonetheless, respondents found the EU passive in terms of taking active action towards securing and protecting queer rights in Lithuania (Miazhevich, 2019, p.203). This further complicated the matter, as the EU’s passiveness compounded with Lithuanian cultural intolerance signaled a retreat of queer subject formations to the private sphere. Vladimir agreed that Lithuania had been active in the preparatory stage but then ‘[people] started to be more relaxed and they are not so into the fighting for gay rights because they think that somebody else will do that for them’” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.203). Vladimir’s response resonates with Pelz’s (2016, p.2) assertion that “the EU’s ability to achieve policy convergence in the sphere of LGBT rights across all 28 member states is limited by a lack ‘hard tools’ at the EU’s disposal.” Which helps explain that Lithuania’s accession to the EU gave the
government a sense of safety and was coupled with soft sanctions from the EU in the form of condemnations resulting in a lack of change. While Laura on the other hand said: “I’m happy being in the European Union because … I’ve seen that there has been a huge amount of help from the, you know, all the international organisations [on] homophobic or transphobic law….“ (Miazhevic, 2019, p.203-204). Shedding light on the different elements that come into play when formulating perceptions about the EU and its adoption of Lithuania it becomes increasingly clear that rather than alleviating queer suffering the EU disengaged from the queerscape in Lithuania. This in turn intensified queer grievances in the country which my have very well led to an subject formation schism; whereas they identify as European country yet do not enjoy the same gender benefits and rights exercised by other nation states in the union. Ultimately, Laura’s optimism in terms of the involvement of international organizations on queerphobic laws does not seem to relate to the EU as much as it should as discussed in the case of Kyrgyzstan the dismantling of the USSR brought about the increased involvement of international organizations. Hence, it can be argued that regardless of whether Lithuania had joined the EU or not international organizations would still have embarked on such a journey.

Interestingly enough, Lithuania’s inclusion in the EU did not erase nor supplant Russia’s effects on the country, the Soviet and Russian ideals remain dominant in Lithuanian culture and modes of understanding. Furthermore, Soviet and Russian mechanisms of societal oppression remained active in Lithuania. For instance, Various respondents explained how Russian media affected Lithuanian perceptions: “Homophobia … in Russia, … really easily spreading to Lithuania, … via cable TV … I understand it’s a kind of freedom of speech, … but at least people should be given some positive information about LGBT and our state doesn’t have
this … a lot of negative disinformation coming” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.204). As briefly explained in the previous pages and now mentioned by the respondents, Russian influence on Lithuanian queer politics persists, which emphasizes the lingering Soviet legacy and the cultural ties between both nation states in terms of language and access to same information and marketing mechanisms.

Finally, during their discussion on subject formation, respondents usually found it difficult to define it in terms of Western labels and on a more so as their leading subject formation feature: “Laura (Lt): ‘I don’t know, maybe I would say queer but now politically I’m lesbian, because it’s important to be [a] lesbian.’… Edita (Lt) also wanted to avoid categorisation but, when probed, mentioned the Western European context where lesbians are ‘absolutely mainstream women rarely [with] short hair or anything’” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.205). “‘I didn’t come out as a lesbian, I’m coming out as educator … I think I never had this clear- cut line (on sexual subject formation), because for me it was not so important’ (Laura, Lt)” (Miazhevich, 2019, p.205). Revealing a trajectory that is similar to that of Kyrgyzstan, where queer bodies do not necessarily attribute to Western “LGBT” labels but are subconsciously forced to abide by them in hopes of gaining rights and entitlements. Furthermore, Laura’s remark regarding “coming out as an educator” displays the difference between the subject formations of post-Soviet queer communities and the expectation of Western queer politics which necessitates the use of sexual orientation as the leading subject formation feature. While there is a lack of evidence tying the existence of Western cultural hegemony directly to Lithuania as is the case in Kyrgyzstan through IOs and INGOs or Russia through mounting international pressure, it can be deduced that the same exists in Lithuania; this is due to the fact that Lithuanian queer individuals find themselves at the same crossroads
that their Russian and Kyrgyz counterparts arrived at, that is they are told to define themselves and act in a manner that fits the mode of Western queerness rather than embrace their own understanding of queer subject formation. Furthermore, one conclusion could be that Lithuanian queer individuals do not fully identify with the not only due to its passiveness and their cultural difference, but also because of the government’s failure to take action in terms of legislation and enforcement and the unwillingness of the general society to accept queerness in contrast to other EU states. This creates a drift between Lithuanian queer subject formations and that of others in the region that enjoy such entitlements making them unable to fully integrate in the EU.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the multiple facets of Lithuanian queer culture and perceptions as both a post-Soviet state and a member of the EU, in an attempt to test the validity of this thesis’s claim of US as empire using the human rights project to guarantee the security of interests. While this chapter and the one before did not explicitly discuss Lithuanian-US or Kyrgyz-US relations, this thesis assumes that as the hegemon the US leads the human rights project and by virtue outlines the bounds in which the rest of the Western world, i.e., the EU in the case of Lithuania, operates in. Relying on three main themes: post-Soviet legacy, experiences of Lithuanian queer subjects, and the West’s involvement in Lithuania several conclusions based on the narrative of this chapter can be drawn which also correspond to narratives discussed in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. While there are three main themes discussed it is important to note that at times they overlap; more so, Lithuanian queer experience have a significant overlap with Soviet legacy which sheds light on the USSR’s lasting effect.
On the topic of Soviet legacy, several elements discussed in the chapter stand out. First and foremost, the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information highlights the Soviet rhetoric of ‘homosexuality as a perverse and decadent act that is acquired and thus protecting children from the knowledge enable them to lead “normal” heterosexual lives.’ Moreover, Lithuanian culture and politics’ emphasis on “traditional family values and/or orientation” has been deeply engraved in all three post-Soviet states and constantly used to mask and justify queerphobia. Furthermore, the reproduction of a modern-day Soviet public/private realm where lesbians are expected to remain in the private adds an extra layer of discrimination. And finally, the continuing effect of Russian queer politics on that of the Lithuanian illustrates the unbreakable bond that the Soviet Union has formed. Combined, the aforementioned elements have aided in creating a sense of shared queer belief as expressed by the respondents that enticed them to stay hidden from the public realm.

This brings the discussion to the second main point, which is queer experiences. Succinctly put, Lithuanian queer subjects did not necessarily ascribe to Western norms and self-perceptions or representations and, just like queer individuals and communities in Kyrgyzstan and Russia, they longed for a collective and communal activism. Nonetheless, due to their EU membership, Lithuanian queer communities did not have the space to create collective bonds and meanings as a Western model that promoted individuality was quickly imposed upon them. While Lithuanian queer individuals admired Western nation states and their “freedom” they also found themselves unable to associate to their labels and understandings of sexuality, nor the West’s demand to define subject formation through sexual orientation.
Turning to the third main theme, which is the Western involvement in Lithuania in correlation with queer experiences, it becomes increasingly clear that Lithuanian queer subjects resented the EU’s passiveness and unwillingness to take actions and instigate change. It rather becomes clear that the admission of Lithuania into the EU was a calculated move in the grander scheme of international relations and US-Russian rivalry.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

This project has attempted to deconstruct the relationship between international human rights law and international relations that is based on the subordination of the prior in relation to the latter through making the assertion that the US promotes “LGBT” rights as a form of cultural neo-imperialism i.e., that emulates historical empires, such as the British and French, with the overarching aim of emancipating subjugated minorities, formerly women and presently LGBTQ+ individuals from their national oppressive regimes. Throughout the chapters of this project concepts relating to queer theory have been applied to the chosen case studies, i.e., Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan, in juxtaposition to the West, headed by the US, in order to shed light on said relationship. The broad argument is that the emphasis of the US and the West at large on liberating subjugated minorities actually is a covert operation aimed at securing their international interests. At this point it is important to note that this thesis does not attempt to “orientalize” those post-Soviet states or indulge in processes of othering, what it aims to illustrate is why the human rights project has failed to alleviate their invisibility and grant them their rights. In this work, the use of the concept of “queer” thus represents the rejection of the “International Gay” prototype propagated by the US and exemplifies the discrepancies of the human rights project throughout the various chapters of this dissertation. Moreover, this thesis assumes that the US is the hegemon, hence asserting that Western interactions on human rights are synonymous with US politics on the matter.

To achieve the aforementioned this project has been divided into six chapters that discuss different yet fundamental elements pertinent to the topic at hand. While the first chapter focused on previous queer literature to set the tone and mode of
analysis for the rest of this research project the remaining five chapters offered a historical and current narrative of various movements, events, and geographical settings that aided in the deconstruction of the multiple layers of queer political discourse. For instance, while chapter two had the overt intentionality of showcasing how social movements constituted one another and attempted to shed light on the irrelevance of conservative religious arguments by offering alternative interpretations, it also highlighted the discrepancies between the US’s politics in the domestic and international spheres and the methods employed by both the USSR and US to secure interests through the realization of conditional freedom. On the other hand, chapters three, four, five, and six dive into the historical and current narratives of Soviet and post-Soviet queer communities and governments vis-à-vis the West and US.

In chapter two the overarching conclusions highlight the narratives that are then discussed in the chapters that follow. The notion of conditional freedom discussed in the chapter two sheds light on queer narratives under the Soviet Union and post-Soviet countries where the US imposes an “International Gay” that non-Western queer communities must assimilate to in order to be recognized. Additionally, the discussion of Black emancipation emphasized the hypocrisy of the US in terms of domestic versus international politics in the sense that with the international arena the US promotes “holistic ideals” that are based on domestic ones where in reality those ideals have not been met within the domestic sphere. And finally, it becomes clear that the queer social movement narrative that stemmed out of the US adopts the same mode of women emancipation movement in USSR and black emancipation in that it was conditional and applied within the bounds of heteronormativity with a specific understanding of sexual orientation and labels.
associated with sexual subject formation. Thus, aiding in the propagation of new hierarchical structures of oppression that are based on gender, race, and ethnicity.

After laying down the basis of Western perceptions and politics in chapter two and the different elements at play, the following chapter focused on USSR politics and patterns utilized to alienate and annihilate queer subjects and male homosexuals. Such patterns included the criminalization of sodomy, instilling a sense of perversion in the self-subject formation of queer individuals, and the portrayal of homosexualism as a symptom of bourgeoisie class. Furthermore, the USSR employed mechanisms like mass media campaigning, policing, and a play on linguistic terms to ensure that queer individuals felt “perverse” and in need of “fixing”. Combined with a rise in nationalism, that emphasized procreation and the essentiality of the nuclear family; ensured that the “perverse bourgeoisie homosexual” had no place in Soviet culture. Further to that, an assessment of the international human rights projects revealed an imposition of Western models of “progression” on cultures that are in actuality rooted in heteronormativity and individuality that do not necessarily align with the needs and demands of different cultures and communities. It also claims to be universal but does not account for differences, like for instance the USSR’s focus oncollectivism and social issues, but accounts for the US’s individualism and focus on political rights. Thus, it becomes clear that in claiming to be universal the human rights project has neglected the needs of groups and becomes complicit in the generation of oppressive hierarchical structures. And finally, the USSR and thereafter Russia, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan’s involvement in the UN and ratification of the outlined documents highlights the ineffectiveness of the system in terms of enforcement and applicability to different individuals and communities.
Following the same theme, chapter four illustrates how Russian politics has been shaped by its Soviet predecessors and analysis the perceptions and lived experiences of Russian queer subjects. Concluding that Russia adopted Soviet queer perceptions and employed the same mechanisms of oppression through academic institutions, state policies, media campaigns etc. Furthermore, the chapter also highlights how the West has used Russia’s queerphobia attitude to strengthen its image of exceptionalism and promote and impose their Western-centric ideals within the international arena. This is made increasingly clear in the Russian queer diaspora’s inability to conform to Western “LGBT” ideals and their restoring to the creation of Russian queer groups to remedy this issue.

Bearing the Russian narrative in mind proves useful when deconstructing that of the Kyrgyz and Lithuanian as Russia has embodied the USSR since its collapse and by virtue assumed its cultural position and significance in the region. Chapter five focused on three main themes relating to the cultural difference argument, the USSR’s effect, and the West’s involvement. The findings revealed that Kyrgyz queer individuals, like their Russian counterparts, also discuss the importance of queer communal settings. Additionally, Kyrgyzstan’s perseverance of Soviet subject formation in the form of street names and statues, their association of queer women with sickness, their attempt to pass a gay propaganda law like Russia and mimic their policies attests to the USSR’s engraved persona in Kyrgyz culture and politics. On the other hand, the West’s involvement in terms of donors that imposed certain conditionalities for funds and understandings of “LGBT” resonates with Russian queer diaspora’s lived experiences. While the latter left the country to flee oppression and were forced to conform to a model they do not identify with, the former were expected to do the same within their territory. As a result, Kyrgyz queer individuals
were forced to identify themselves in Western terms to be granted any form of rights as their country did not offer an alternative. Nonetheless, due to the nonexistence of Western interests in the country Kyrgyz queer atrocities are rarely addressed in international relations and academia.

Chapter six introduces the final piece of the puzzle necessary to test the hypothesis of this research project; a nation state that has a Soviet past and a Western present. In analyzing Lithuanian politics and queer lived experiences and drawing on its Soviet past and Western present it becomes clear that the country is going through a schism in subject formation and politics, unable to rid of its past or join its present. In the case of Lithuania, Soviet legacy manifests in its Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information, the emphasis on “traditional family values and/or orientation”, the reproduction of a modern-day Soviet public/private realm, and the continuing effect of Russian queer politics on that of the Lithuanian in terms of media and policies. Furthermore, Lithuania queer individuals did not assimilate to Western perceptions of “LGBT” and like in Russia and Kyrgyzstan hoped for a collective queer community. Yet, their EU membership forced Western ideals and perceptions of “LGBT” on their subject formation and necessitated that their sexual orientation be their main subject formation feature. Finally, while Lithuania’s admission to the EU held so many promises it resulted in none which highlights the fact that its admission was more of power move rather than a promise for a better future.

Drawing on the different conclusions derived from each chapter two elements become clear. The first is that while in all three countries international pressure has not changed domestic legislations there are international actors in the form of NGOs and IOs that propagate the “international gay” prototype and accompanying
understandings of rights and how to achieve them physically or through online platforms. While the second relates to the fact that Western culture has transcended from the domestic sphere to the international paradigm with an overarching claim of “exceptionalism”, inducing a process of cultural imperialism that necessitates the conformity of all cultures to this model of the “International Gay” where the notion of human rights loses its meaning and becomes a mere ploy in the grander scheme of international relations. This creates a schism in queer subjects’ psyches and their struggle for rights as it does not account for their perceptions and demands. In the case of the Russian, Kyrgyz, and Lithuanian queer communities they find themselves between two worlds, that is Russia and the US. One with its focus on progression and individualism (US) and the other on its focus on collectivism and traditional values (Russia), unable to reconcile with one another and leaving such communities in a state of loss and confusion. This process helps lead us to the conclusion that the human rights project is a mechanism deployed by the US as a form of cultural imperialism allowing it to maintain its hegemonic stance within the international arena. And at the same time helps in drawing several likely conclusions relating to the post-Soviet states failure to enforce; 1) noting Pitkin’s notion of representation, it is clear that the human rights project and its deployers do not leave space for adaptability to the context and have rigid understandings and methods, such as was the case in donor funding and conditionalities to Kyrgyz NGOs. 2) a failure to provide effective change and support through governmental legislation that could be attributed to the non-alignment of government agenda with said rights, as is the case in Lithuania and the passiveness of the EU. And 3) it may very well be an anti-colonial response to the universalization of US domestic values that are forced upon individuals as the right and only truth.
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