

Women's Work: Human Rights Journalism in Chechnya, a Case Study of Anna Politkovskaya

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

This thesis develops an understanding of current trends and difficulties in female-driven human rights reporting through the lens of feminist political theory. The primary case study centers on Anna Politkovskaya's work in Chechnya, and a thorough discussion of the essentialism of gender in relation to journalism and human rights is provided. A forecast of future trends in this area is included, using example of some of Politkovskaya's counterparts to showcase the continued influence of patriarchal trends in public and private spheres as related to human rights advocacy in Chechnya. The results of this thesis show that there is a correlating trend between increased gender essentialism within Russia and the ineffectiveness of human rights resistance against authoritarianism, though causality is not proven. In addition, there is a minimal likelihood that human rights reporting done by females will result in tangible results, though they are effective at addressing the ethos of their society.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to evaluate and consider the topic of human rights journalism conducted by women in Chechnya. The primary research question that will be supported by this research, is whether or not Anna Politkovskaya's gender impacted her work, the reception of her work, and her overall experience as a human rights advocate in Chechnya. Anna Politkovskaya is being used as a primary case study due to the volume and breadth of the reports that she produced, and because she was the most well-known reporter in Chechnya during the Second Chechen War, giving her a wider audience. The work of other female journalists will be covered, but those works will serve a secondary purpose of aiding in looking at how Politkovskaya's journalistic legacy impacted other female journalists within Chechnya.

The current state of affairs within the Chechen Republic is one of limited civil liberties and increasing violence on behalf of the authoritarian state government towards advocacy groups and opposition parties. The environment for human rights has not notably improved since the official conclusion of the Second Chechen War, but the level of media attention dedicated to issues there has dramatically decreased. Chechnya is currently lacking a voice of passionate reason, and as a result lacks an effective advocate for civilian interests, which was the role previously filled by Politkovskaya.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to develop an understanding of how gender norms and human rights reporting in Chechnya intersect and act upon each other. This is done through the thorough examination of the reporting of female journalists and human rights advocates in Chechnya, particularly during the Second Chechen War. A large amount of the research is centered on a case study of Anna Politkovskaya and her work before her murder in 2006. This thesis contains an overview of the key concepts in Russian gender relations discourse and human rights discourse, and is a scholarly body of work that will add to the overall understanding of how journalism, human rights, and gender intersect within modern Russian society. The specific research question that is tackled here, is to what extent did Anna Politkovskaya's gender impact her writing, the reception to her writing, and her role within the human rights reporting community at large? The layout of this question justifies in-depth examinations of the concepts of human rights, gender, and journalism, which this thesis aims to provide within the framework of feminist political theory, and while using the life and work of Politkovskaya as a case study. The larger scholarly contribution that this thesis provides, is a starting point from which to look at the role of women within human rights in Russia today, as well as the changing nature of journalism under President Vladimir Putin's regime. These broader topics are broached in an introductory manner within this research, and the conclusions that this thesis draws provide strong support to the argument that these are valuable avenues of research to pursue in the future.

In order to fully appreciate the significance of this research question, one must have an understanding of background of the origin and subsequent stages of the conflict in Chechnya. The following introductory guide to the conflict will enable the reader to better comprehend the

stakes involved in Politkovskaya's work, as well as the difficulties that are continually mounted against human rights reporters and activists in that region today.

Chechnya was incorporated into the USSR in 1922, becoming the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1934. Originally intended in the 1800s to be an Islamic state, the majority of Chechens are Muslim, a contrast to the rest of Russia. Of course during the Soviet times religion was abolished, but the underlying Islamic beliefs in Chechnya were still present, much like how the cultural practices and superstitions of the Russian Orthodox Church were not entirely eliminated throughout most of Russia.¹ Instead of being wholeheartedly incorporated into the Soviet Union though, Chechens were seemingly used as political scapegoats on a regular basis, perhaps due to their "other-ness" in comparison to the rather homogenous (and Caucasian) population of much of the rest of the USSR. This culminated in Stalin deporting close to the entire population of Chechnya, as well as the synonymous Ingush population, to Siberia and Central Asia, under the guise of claiming that the Chechens had collaborated with Nazi Germany.² Once Nikita Khrushchev came to power after Stalin's death, he initiated a period often referred to as "the Thaw," which was defined by small increases in civil liberties within the Soviet bloc, as well as an easing of tensions between the USSR and the United States. During the Thaw, Khrushchev allowed Chechens to return to Chechnya, as well as the Caucasus in general, and the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was restored in 1957. Those who grew up during the period of exile then grew into adulthood in a Chechnya that was part of the Soviet system. Although they continued to have much in common with their Russian counterparts, such as having the same language requirements and education system, the pain of the exile never truly vanished from the Chechen

¹ Sakwa, R. (2008). *Russian Politics and Society* (4th ed.). New York, New York.

² Conley, B. (2004). For the women of Chechnya, hope dies last, *3*(3), 331–342.

consciousness. For example, February 23rd, which is a day to celebrate the army throughout Russia, is commonly referred to as “Deportation Day” in Chechnya, in remembrance of that painful aspect of their past.³

After the collapse of the USSR, the communist leader of Chechnya, Doku Zavagayev, was overthrown and Dzhokhar Dudayev was elected president, following which he immediately proclaimed Chechnya as being independent of Russia. This gave Russia the pretext for the First Chechen War.⁴ In December of 1994, Russia instigated a 20-month war in Chechnya, the goal of which was to destroy the Chechen independence movement. The casualties, both military and civilian, were higher than anyone had anticipated. The massive number of casualties was a large contributing factor to the deep feelings of disapproval and resentment that many Russians had towards the war.

In November 1996, Russian military leaders and Chechen rebels signed ceasefire accords, and in 1997 Russia recognized Aslan Maskhadov’s government following Chechen elections. However, despite a peace treaty that was signed by Yeltsin and Maskhadov in May 1997, the issue of Chechen independence was never firmly addressed and resolved. As a result, an uncertain peace remained between Russia and Chechnya from 1997 to 1999.⁵

The initial presidency of Vladimir Putin began on December 31, 1999, and marked a change in policy towards Chechnya. A few months earlier, there had been a series of apartment block bombings which killed approximately 300 people and was blamed on Chechen rebels, which launched the beginning of the Second Chechen War. Upon Putin’s ascension to power, Russian troops were sent into Chechnya, whereupon they captured and bombed out the Chechen

³ Conley, B. (2004)

⁴ Sakwa, R. (2008).

⁵ Sakwa, R. (2008)

capital of Grozny. The period of 2000-2005 was characterized by brutal attacks on civilian populations by both the Russian military and Chechen rebels. Although Putin denied that there was an “official” war taking place, often referring to it as an “anti-terrorism campaign,” independent journalists played a large role in telling the truth of the brutality of life that was now the norm in Chechnya. Such reports and advocacy revealed excessive human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, corruption, and disregard for the approximately 300,000 people displaced by the conflict.⁶ It was this environment in which journalists and advocates like Anna Politkovskaya attempted to relay to the average Russian citizen, with often tragic consequences.

⁶ Sakwa, R. (2008)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Since the primary topic of discussion of this thesis is the work of Anna Politkovskaya, it would be in excess to deeply examine the works of many other journalists. While the reactions to and critiques of her work will be reviewed as part of the “literature” regarding her style of journalism, Politkovskaya’s own work can easily speak for itself. Her voice and style is easily examined and does not require a lot of outside sources to make sense of it, except to give events and trends in both the journalistic world and the political world, context. Therefore, the general topic being discussed in this literature review will be Politkovskaya’s style of writing. By conducting a literary review of her work itself, there will be produced a stronger foundation for examining the question of how her gender, specifically, impacted her writing, the reception to her writing, as well as the world of other women like her.

Most of the external evaluations of Politkovskaya’s work fall into a dichotomous categorization: Western reviews which paint her as a hero, and Russian reviews which paint her as someone without any allegiance to her country, and a personal, unprofessional, vendetta against Vladimir Putin. Both of these narratives simplify Politkovskaya and deliver a neat and tidy judgment of her worth to their audiences. The enthusiasm of Westerners to glorify Politkovskaya as a person is reflected in the many awards that she was nominated for, and won, including but not limited to, the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights journalism, the International Journalism Award, and the National Press Club Award. Being a recipient of just one prestigious award, such as these, is a notable accomplishment; Anna was awarded 18 such awards and honors (some posthumously).⁷ Several awards were also created in

⁷ International, O. (n.d.). Anna Politkovskaya. Retrieved from http://research.omicsgroup.org/index.php/Anna_Politkovskaya

memory of Politkovskaya following her death. The high regard that the West had for her can also be seen in the forwards that were written for her books, “A Dirty War,” and “A Russian Diary, both of which were written by Westerners.

Although there were many different critics of Politkovskaya, those close to the Kremlin were the most notable. Whilst Putin himself rarely debased himself by addressing her accusations personally, several spokespersons for the government often refuted her claims. It is interesting, though, that much of Politkovskaya’s writing in Russia was met, not with publicized outrage, but with stony silence. After her murder, one of Russia’s most prominent newspapers, *Pravda*, ran a story theorizing that she was murdered as part of an effort to destabilize the Putin regime, even running the headline, “Anna Politkovskaya Killed to Discredit Putin’s Administration.”⁸ This was only one of many articles published on Politkovskaya after her death that was tinged with various conspiracy theories, few of which laid the blame at the feet of the Kremlin. The fact is, for many, her murder held more significance than the work she produced while she was alive. Even in scholarly circles today, she is examined more in light of the role that her death had on civil and political society, rather than on the unique style and content of her journalism.

The principle item of investigation for this literature review is the style in which Anna Politkovskaya writes, which will include her tone, the structure of her writing, and her intended audience, amongst other things. This literature review will focus primarily on the compilations, “A Dirty War,” and “A Russian Diary,” as these are the primary sources which will be examined throughout this research.

In “A Dirty War,” Politkovskaya refrains from building upon preconceived notions of

⁸ Vysotskaya, N. (2006, August 10). Anna Politkovskaya Killed to Discredit Putin’s Administration. *Pravda*. Retrieved from <http://www.pravdareport.com/russia/politics/09-10-2006/84949-anna-0/>

both Russians and Chechens. When describing aspects of the two communities, she does not fall back onto stereotypes, and when describing specific individuals from these communities, she tends to focus more on their singular stories, rather than lumping them together with other like them. A defining aspect of her writing is her effort to show Russians and Chechens that, at their core, they are not irreconcilably different. She writes that “*we are no better and no worse than they are.*”⁹ By saying this, she is not creating an excuse for the actions of either group; instead, she is equating them each other, putting them on a level playing field of morality. This act of “leveling” both sides is something is an important part of Politkovskaya’s style. The lack of assumptions is noticeable, in part because of the assumption of the other side’s implicit, and almost natural, guilt that was prevalent on both sides of the conflict. Most of the mainstream Russian media painted the Chechens as villains and as the assumed perpetrators of any act of violence that occurred in Russia, a sentiment that formulated along the lines of the ethnic and racial profiling that occurs in many other areas of the world. This is shown in an interview that Politkovskaya conducts with a government official, Mikhail Nazarkin, whereupon the official states “*...the way I see things, one Chechen is a Chechen, two Chechens are two Chechens, but three Chechens – and it’s already a gang. And there are no exceptions to the rule.*”¹⁰ This is a sentiment that was echoed through most media platforms, including the Kremlin’s press statements, and countered by very few other than Politkovskaya.

Another aspect that is present in “A Dirty War” is Politkovskaya’s habit of shortening her sentences when making a strong point. She does not describe emotions, in general, in great detail, and when describing the sentiments of others, she does so without great detail; she does

⁹ Politkovskaya, A. (2001). *A Dirty War*. London: The Harvill Press.

¹⁰ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

not try to dig deep into a person's emotions or give into a style of writing that resembles psychoanalysis. In another one of her interviews, there is a point wherein she is met with silence from her interviewee. She writes, "...*he does not reply. He is offended,*" no more, and no less.¹¹ Many journalists would have taken this opportunity to try and infer more about the interviewee's attitude and emotional outlook. Politkovskaya says what she can easily see, and infers no more than that. Whether or not this is simply a reflection of her personal style, or whether she views deep inference based on limited emotional cues as bad journalism, is not clear. What is clear, though, is that this refusal to give into the type of observant psychoanalysis, when it is not appropriate, is a consistent aspect of her work. This is not to say that she is not descriptive, though; she is observant of her surroundings, and her work is inherently investigative by nature. What differentiates her style of investigating, though, is her insistence on backing everything up with facts, even those hard to uncover, instead of simply relying on the deciphering of her subjects' emotions to prove her point.

In her writing, Politkovskaya is self-aware to a fault. She is aware that her presence as a Moscow-based journalist radiates a sense of privilege to others, just as she is aware that her unintimidating appearance makes people react to her differently than they might have to another person. This self-awareness often takes the form of self-deprecation. For example, while investigating one story about Russian soldiers only having contaminated meat for their rations, she takes a moment to look at herself from the perspective of her audience:

"At this point, someone will certainly say to himself: What a green creature this Politkovskaya is! Just imagine, the tinned meat was off, and the colonel got emotional like some delicate college girl. Well, if you're sitting comfortably and safely in Moscow, then

¹¹ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

indeed there is little need to become overexcited.”¹²

This example shows that Politkovskaya is well-aware of how many Muscovites, and Russians in general, view her and her work. The concluding sentence of her example shows her reaction to those views of her. With her self-awareness also comes an inherent ability to chide her audience. As a result of her willingness to look at herself through the lens of the opinion of others, she is endowed with the facility to scold her fellow countrymen, as a mother would scold her children. A more detailed instance of this comes later on in “A Dirty War,” whereupon she writes:

“My fellow citizens have indeed proved a hard-hearted lot. You sit enjoying your breakfast, listening to stirring reports about the war in the North Caucasus, in which the most terrible and disturbing facts are sanitised so that the voters don’t choke on their food.”¹³

However, Politkovskaya’s capacity for such rhetoric is not endowed upon her because of any motherly-characteristics, but as the result of the moral high-ground which she maintains, a characteristic which will be further discussed later. The issue of self-awareness is something that can be linked to the feminist theory which will be used when examining her work.

Politkovskaya’s awareness of her various privileges, as well as the various ways in which her characteristics, physical and otherwise, can work against her, means that aspects of her work where she is actually aware of the plights of specific aspects of society will be easy to identify. Politkovskaya’s ability to look at her own self and her own emotions and separate herself from them in an analytical way may mean that her writing will be able to do the same thing in regards to Russian society. Instead of taking the overall picture of Russian society and human rights as face value, Politkovskaya may be able to compartmentalize the different individual

¹² Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

¹³ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

parts that all interact together, and examine them on their own merits, including but not limited to the role and treatment of women and “women’s issues” in that society.

Another distinctive aspect of Politkovskaya’s writing style is her general unwillingness to expand on her own emotions in great detail. While she does not neglect to relay to the readers how she feels about certain events or subjects, she rarely inserts herself into the narrative. However, when she does reference her own emotions in relation to a story, she is effortlessly effective. When interviewing her subjects, she sticks to facts and straightforward questions, while staying away from emotional manipulation on her part. It is important to her that her journalism does not transform into a story where she is the main character. The moments where she does share how she is impacted by the events around her become more touching and meaningful because of their rarity and earnestness.

The characteristics that are essential to the Politkovskaya’s style of writing in “A Dirty War” are present in both similar and dissimilar senses in her compilation of writings on the political environment in Russia, “A Russian Diary.” As in “A Dirty War,” one-on-one interviews make up a large portion of the writing. In both of these works, the interviews Politkovskaya conducts are straightforward and avoid any type of sugarcoating. In some cases, they border on irreverent. During one of her interviews with Ramzan Kadyrov, she appears to taunt him by calling him a “boy,” saying it is unlikely that he will be able to achieve the capture of a Chechen rebel leader since Ramzan is “a boy compared to him.”¹⁴ In a culture when a man’s manhood is of the utmost importance, Politkovskaya’s dry and truthful observation differentiated her interview with Ramzan Kadyrov from others. Many Russian and Chechen journalists took pains to paint their subjects, particularly those belonging to the political or

¹⁴Politkovskaya, A. (2007). *A Russian Diary* (Harvill Se.). London.

military elite, in a positive light. This was a necessity for many journalists, as their jobs could easily be terminated, or their papers shut down if they were deemed too critical of either the Russian or Chechen regimes.

Another signature and recognizable element of Politkovskaya's writing style was the way in which she was able to simplify complex ideas to make them understandable to the average reader, particularly political concepts and events. Anna reportedly hated euphemisms and associated them with sly politicians who did not say what they meant.¹⁵ This extended to journalists and media representatives who did not cut through the difficult political jargon in order to facilitate a greater understanding of the situation in their audience. Of course, much of the time this obfuscating and lack of clear language was done on purpose in order to keep people in the dark about the true nature of issues. In "A Russian Diary," Politkovskaya excels at explaining the truth of events and trends. For example, when describing the state of dissidence in Russia, she does not enter into a long rambling discussion, but instead says that "*dissidence has been reduced to just two varieties: that of the very rich and that of the very poor.*"¹⁶ While this might not be the most effusive description, it is one that translated the most important, main idea to the readers, and thus gave the readers the best idea of the true nature of the dissidence movements in Russia at the time. Politkovskaya was a master of the practice that detail is not always in the reader's best interests, especially when it is being used to cloud the truth.

An interesting aspect that is present in "A Russian Diary," but less present in some of Politkovskaya's other works, is her use of traditional Russian mythology and literature when describing current events. This takes several forms, from comparing people to dragons and serfs,

¹⁵ Gould, R. (2007). *The Engaged Outsider : Politkovskaya and the Politics of Representing War. Spaces of Identity.*

¹⁶Politkovskaya, A. (2007)

to drawing on beloved Russian authors such as Pushkin and Chekhov to provide illustrations. She often uses these literary devices to give a physical form or identity to emotional issues. At one point she visualizes fear as “*a dragon that looks down on everybody from above,*” creating a powerful visual that displayed the intensity of the fear being felt by the refugees and the general populace in Ingushetia.¹⁷ She continually refers to the war in Chechnya as a baby dragon that the Kremlin has created that needs to be fed in order not to attack its owners. Metaphors such as these appeal to the readers by reminding them of the common folklore they all share; by referencing myths and classic Russian stories that are known by everyone, Politkovskaya makes an effort to reach out to all readers, no matter their understanding of the issues at hand.

While employing many of the same writing techniques in “A Russian Diary” and “A Dirty War,” Politkovskaya does favor some techniques in each book that she then does not use as much in the other. While this could simply be evidence of a maturing, or changing, writing style over the six-year gap between the books being published, it could also be a reflection of the differing content of the compilations. “A Russian Diary” focuses on the political environment in Russia at the time of its writing, with the conflict in Chechnya being a component, but not the center of the narrative. This results in the language and style used there being a different source and variety than in “A Dirty War,” which deals with issues that are not as subtle as political intrigue, and therefore needs descriptive language that adequately conveys the horrors and injustices of war. While all of the issues that Politkovskaya focuses on have merit and importance in both the Russian domestic sphere and the international sphere, they are viewed in different ways by the Russian people, so it makes sense to write about the topics with a slightly differing style. What is similar in both compilations, though, is the author’s deep capacity for

¹⁷Politkovskaya, A. (2007)

empathy, and her refusal to turn a blind eye to the tragedy around her; in many ways, this is the foundation of all other aspects of her style of journalism.

The relationship between the topic of review and the larger area of study is one which can be reviewed through the style of Anna Politkovskaya's writing style. As a result of the intersection of her unique writing style and the content which she wrote about, a not necessarily new, but certainly individual type of journalism for that period, emerged. Politkovskaya was a journalist that was able to invoke empathy and rage in her readers, and diverged from the muted, weak, politically correct journalism that was commonplace in Russia. While this alienated her from many of her colleagues and fellow Russians, it also cracked open a door for other human rights activists to write and act in a similar manner. Other human rights activists were at work long before Politkovskaya burst onto the scene with her reports from Chechnya, and they continued their work after her tragic death. Politkovskaya was crucial to them, though because she provided a mouthpiece that would be heard in Moscow and in the West when most of the local activists in Chechnya had no wider audience they could reach out to for support. She also created an example format of writing that was effective in bringing outside attention to the human rights atrocities being committed, which provided a type of blueprint for other aspiring writers to spread information and stories about what was happening. This connection between Anna and other human rights activists in Chechnya creates a portal to a larger area of study, wherein there can be an examination of how one woman's work in Chechnya paved the way for others to follow, as well as research on whether or not the fact that she was a woman instead of a man influenced the creation of that influence.

Despite being a journalist of international renown, little beyond the immediately obvious is known about Anna Politkovskaya. What defined her in life is the same as what defines her legacy after her death – her writing. Politkovskaya’s material life – her employment, accolades, and even her personal life, are typically mentioned only as an afterthought, as a way to situate her life in some sort of temporal reality that connects her to her readers. Vast numbers of post-mortem biographies and obituaries all mention the same details about her life, the most basic of which are disputed to this date. It is commonly held that Politkovskaya was born in New York in 1958, to Soviet diplomats.¹⁸ However, there are those that claim she was originally born in Ukraine. Various theories such as these have circulated around the journalist since her rise to the international spotlight, the purpose behind them unclear. While there were certainly attempts, some of which are still ongoing, to discredit her, there is also a general lack of information on the origins and lives of many former Soviet citizens who were born at that time.

Anna Politkovskaya started her journalism career at the bottom. Once completing her studies in journalism at Moscow State University, she wrote briefly for the state airline “Aeroflot’s” in-flight magazine.¹⁹ This position enabled her to travel throughout the entirety of Russia, something that few Russians, including journalists and members of the media, are able or have the desire to do.²⁰ Following this, she worked at a few other papers before making her permanent mark as a founding member of *Novaya Gazeta* (The New Paper). As a high-ranking member of the paper’s staff, she was routinely able to take assignments to areas that other reporters and media outlets were reluctant to report from. Her position at *Novaya Gazeta* sent

¹⁸ Rodgers, J. (2014). From Stalingrad to Grozny: Patriotism, political pressure, and literature in the war reporting of Vassily Grossman and Anna Politkovskaya. *Media, War & Conflict*, 7(1)

¹⁹ Politkovskaya, A. (2007). *A Russian Diary* (Harvill Se.). London.

²⁰ Politkovskaya, A. (2007).

her to Chechnya forty times, making her one of the most experienced journalists in the field there.²¹ On top of her obvious experiences, Politkovskaya possessed a unique writing style that set her apart from her colleagues, at least from the few that ever made it a priority to report from the wreckage of Chechnya as well as from the Russian metropolises of political intrigue and corruption. Her writing style contained an ethos not seen elsewhere. Some pin her style on her gender – a female correspondent in a war zone was a distinctive fixture in that area, and at times that is reflected in her writing when her subjects comment on her gender and at times react differently to her than they might have to a male correspondent. However, it would be an enormous disservice to Politkovskaya to credit the style of her work solely to the chance of her being born a woman. Although her reaction to some of her subjects was at times influenced by her being a mother and a woman, Anna Politkovskaya was first and foremost a patriot. Her concern for human suffering extended beyond the Russian border, but she felt that it was her duty to help her fellow countrymen and women before focusing her efforts elsewhere. This is supported by the fact that, although she had U.S. citizenship, she rarely left Russia, and chose to live her life as a true Russian citizen despite her many more convenient alternatives.²²

A summary of Anna Politkovskaya's individual journalistic pieces would be overwhelming. Instead, there are a few compilations of her work that serve the purpose of providing a detailed outline of her writing. "A Dirty War" and "A Small Corner of Hell," published in 2001 and 2003 respectively, focus on the Second Chechen War and the plight of those affected by it. Both of these books contain individual articles by Politkovskaya, some of which had never previously been published. "A Russian Diary," published in 2007 after Anna's murder, focuses on the irregularities of Russia's political system, with an emphasis on the

²¹ Politkovskaya, A. (2007).

²² Politkovskaya, A. (2007).

unravelling of Russia's fledgling democracy at the hands of President Vladimir Putin. It is presented in the format of a chronological diary, with each date being accompanied by Politkovskaya's thoughts on events that occurred on that day. While not exclusively focused on the Chechen conflict, there is enough information on the subject dispersed throughout the book to show that the conflict was never far from her mind.

It was not Anna Politkovskaya's writing style that shot her to fame though; it was her subject matter. Very few Russian journalists covered the Second Chechen War, due to the state trying to keep its inhumane and ineffective operations in the area away from public scrutiny. Much of the Russian media was already at least in part controlled by the government, and so did not push back against the expectant standards of self-censorship. It was difficult to fight against this, as in 2005 a poll conducted showed that 82% of the public was in varying degrees of favor of censorship in the media.²³ As a result, Politkovskaya was fighting not only against the political and military establishment when reporting on Chechnya, but also against popular public opinion. Although she gained fame amongst human rights activists and the West, Politkovskaya never reached that level of popularity at home. She was distrusted by the government for obvious reasons, and many Russians also felt that she depicted her countrymen in a biased and purposefully negative light. Anna's response to this accusation was,

*"People often tell me that I am a pessimist; that I do not believe in the strength of the Russian people; that I am obsessive in my opposition to Putin and see nothing beyond that. I see everything, and that is the whole problem. I see both what is good and what is bad."*²⁴

²³ Russian Public Opinion Research Center. (2005). Retrieved from <http://wciom.com/index.php?id=61>

²⁴ Politkovskaya, A. (2007).

It would be untruthful to say that her writing does not have a touch of obsession to it; she comes back to the same topics and events with a fervor and stubbornness that would leave other reporters burnt out. What distinguishes Politkovskaya is the fact that she did not burn out, but instead continued raising the same arguments and dissents until people started taking note.

On October 10, 2006, Anna Politkovskaya was shot in the hallway of her apartment. The day of her death coincided with Vladimir Putin's birthday, and is thought by some to have been a macabre present from Ramzan Kadyrov, the Head of the Chechen Republic, to the president. Politkovskaya's murder brought about a heightened sense of Western scrutiny regarding Russia's treatment of the media, and it sparked a limited amount of domestic protest as well.

Being a journalist in Russia is a deadly occupation. Since 1992, at least 56 journalists have been killed, many by contract hit-men sent to put an end to their reporting, similar to how Politkovskaya was killed. Another 24 journalists died in mysterious circumstances, wherein it has been impossible to prove if there was foul play involved.²⁵ Journalism was not always a dangerous occupation to aspire to though; the violence surrounding it only really began to surface in the early 1990s, with the fall of the USSR changing the landscape of news media. While under the USSR, journalists were seen as "co-participants" in the formation and governing processes of Soviet socialism, and were sometimes referred to as the "fourth-branch" of government.²⁶ The Soviet government relied on journalists to support the state, which they had little choice to do because of the level of censorship that existed, but they were also relied upon as the "repairmen" of socialism. Soviet journalists viewed their role in society as an in-between between the government and the average citizen; many people would send in written appeals

²⁵ 56 Journalists Killed in Russia Since 1992. (2016). Retrieved from <https://cpj.org/killed/europe/russia/>

²⁶ Roudakova, N. (2009). Journalism as "Prostitution": Understanding Russia's Reactions to Anna Politkovskaya's Murder. *Political Communication*, 26(4), 412–429.

regarding matters such as infrastructure, wages, and pardons, to the newspapers rather than to their local branch of the Communist Party.²⁷ In many cases, Soviet journalists were able to help with the requests by leveraging the reliance that the state had on them to spread its propaganda.

This resulted in the following phenomena:

*“...while journalists remained part of the Soviet state, they continued, and in most cases successfully, to lay claim to a separate source of authority—the moral authority of the intelligentsia, which included the authority to formulate society’s ideals and goals and the authority to shame those who fell short of upholding those ideals.”*²⁸

The view that the public had of journalists, and the view that journalists had of themselves, was altered when the Soviet Union collapsed. Initially, many were excited about the new lack of censorship. However, the financial practicalities of running privately-owned media organizations soon overpowered the enthusiasm for truthful investigative journalism. The number of private news organizations exploded in the early 1990s, but the owners soon found that few people in Russia had enough money to purchase the advertisements that typically keep media organizations afloat. Instead of running ads for various businesses, papers began to accept “donations” from newly rich oligarchs who wanted to enter politics, and needed positive press coverage.²⁹ In order to keep their financial futures secure, many papers “sold out” to these private interests and printed what was in the best interests of their patrons. In addition to this, many journalists genuinely felt that it was their duty to support specific candidates in their campaigns for Duma. However, with so many different parties running for office in the 1990s, politicians would often give directly to newspapers in order to gain more media time than their

²⁷ Roudakova, N. (2009).

²⁸ Roudakova, N. (2009).

²⁹ Roudakova, N. (2009).

opponents would. Despite this, there were some hold outs in the journalism community that disapproved of the patronage system that was building up around them. A split, albeit an uneven one, developed in the media concerning the standards of journalism that members of the media should be held to. This led to the dissolution of the very idea of a “community of journalists;” since there was no longer one standard to journalism as there had been in the Soviet days, there were disagreements between journalists over what “good” and “bad” journalism was, and journalistic ethics became a private, personal matter, instead of a collective matter.³⁰

Anna Politkovskaya’s entrance onto the journalism stage coincided with the transition from Soviet to Post-Soviet styled journalism. She helped to set up and support the *Novaya Gazeta*, which ended up as one of the only truly independent Russian newspapers throughout the early 2000s. By situating Anna’s writing within the context of what was occurring in the field of journalism at the time, it becomes clearer why some groups reacted to her work in the way which they did.

At the time of writing this, it has become clear to the international community that human rights are not a priority for the Russian state. Security and the consolidation of power under President Vladimir Putin are the main goals of the political administration, the military elite, and of many ordinary Russian citizens. The concept of human rights, while still given casual recognition by Putin’s regime, has been pushed aside in favor of “sovereign democracy.”³¹ Russia’s idea of sovereign democracy centers around a desire for no other state, particularly not the United States of America or any in Western Europe, to interfere in the domestic workings of Russia. Russia’s sovereignty does not just refer to its political and military systems; it

³⁰ Roudakova, N. (2009).

³¹ Averre, D. (2013). “Sovereign Democracy” and Russia’s Relations with the European Union. *Demokratizatsiya*, 277–296.

encompasses everything from how the state deals with its minority groups to its use of natural resources. In all these areas and more, Russia refuses to accept the input, often in the form of criticism, of the international community. This has had a devastating effect on human rights.

The receding acceptance of human rights took on several different faces during the time that Anna Politkovskaya was writing. The most obvious of these was the violence enacted against the Chechen population. However, the restriction of media freedom, free speech, and political freedom coincided, and in many cases aided and abetted, the violations occurring in Chechnya. Human rights is a constant theme in Politkovskaya's work. She recognized that the concept of human rights was simply a westernized double standard meant to cripple Russian security and sovereignty. For many reasons, some of which will be expanded upon later, human rights discourse is not indigenous to Russia. Human rights as a subject exists because it was built on the back of previous movements, such as the abolitionist movement and the women's rights movement.³² Although Russia has been impacted by movements such as these, very few originated there, leading to the perception of many social movements, and human rights in general, as being "foreign." Western human rights in Russia have largely been rejected in favor of a mixture of the theories of sovereign democracy and "Orthodox human rights," which are simply euphemisms for Putin's personal ambition and the agenda of the Russian Orthodox Church.³³

The violation of human rights in Chechnya was largely ignored by the media. This was not entirely the fault of the media though; when the Second Chechen War began in 1999, the Russian government enacted new measures to make sure that the media would not have the type

³² Wotipka, C. M., & Tsutsui, K. (2008). Global Human Rights and State Sovereignty : State Ratification of International Human Rights Treaties , 1965-2001. *Sociological Foun*, 23(4), 724–754.

³³ Politkovskaya, A. (2007)

of impact that it had during the First Chechen War, which had played a large role in turning the public against the war. In 2000, the Russian Security Council enacted the “Information Doctrine of the Russian Federation.” Two years later, the Duma passed “On Counteraction of Extremist Activities.”³⁴ These laws limited what the media could report on in regards to the opinions and actions of “extremists” and terrorists (terms used to describe anyone fighting against the Russian occupation of Chechnya), as well as gave the Kremlin a more important role in determining what could be reported on due to “national security.” These specifically had an impact on media and journalists who wanted to report on the war; there were not many who wished to do so to begin with due to pressure not to do so from the Kremlin as well as private patrons, but for like Politkovskaya, they were extra hurdles that had to be cleared.

The way in which human rights were addressed varied by those addressing them. As stated before, the media often chose to ignore the topic. The Russian government rotated through several strategies, including outright denial that human rights violations were occurring, the justification of violations as part of necessary counter-terrorism measures, and the creation of a state-sponsored human rights group to give the appearance of true concern about the issue.³⁵ Activists such as Politkovskaya saw through every strategy and lambasted the government in print. Unfortunately, many activists were more willing to have the wool pulled over their eyes than they were to attack Putin’s policies. The co-opting of activists was not unusual. In “A Russian Diary,” Politkovskaya often lamented the so-called opposition parties that all too soon joined forces with Putin. According to Politkovskaya, the state classified human rights defenders into “good” and “bad” categories. “Good” human rights defenders are, “*those who try to help*

³⁴ Askerov, A. (2015). The Chechen Wars, Media, and Democracy in Russia. *Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences*, 8(2). doi:10.12959/issn.1855-0541

³⁵ Politkovskaya, A. (2007)

*people by collaborating with the authorities rather than through constant confrontation.”*³⁶

“Bad” ones were those who refused to be co-opted into Kremlin mouth-pieces, and were therefore marginalized. The most active dissidents were those like Politkovskaya, who had a pre-fabricated audience due to *Novaya Gazeta*, and who were not afraid to sacrifice their lives.

This section serves as an introductory exploration of the background and context within which this research question is situated. In order to fully appreciate the significance of this research question, one must have an understanding of the origin and subsequent stages of the conflict in Chechnya. This introduction will present the key developments and events of the conflict.

Chechnya was incorporated into the USSR in 1922, becoming the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1934. Originally intended in the 1800s to be an Islamic state, the majority of Chechens are Muslim, a contrast to the rest of Russia. Of course during the Soviet times religion was abolished, but the underlying Islamic beliefs in Chechnya were still present, much like how the cultural practices and superstitions of the Russian Orthodox Church were not entirely eliminated throughout most of Russia.³⁷ Instead of being wholeheartedly incorporated into the Soviet Union though, Chechens were seemingly used as political scapegoats on a regular basis, perhaps due to their “other-ness” in comparison to the rather homogenous (and Caucasian) population of much of the rest of the USSR. This culminated in Stalin deporting close to the entire population of Chechnya, as well as the synonymous Ingush population, to Siberia and Central Asia, under the guise of claiming that the Chechens had collaborated with Nazi Germany.³⁸ Once Nikita Khrushchev came to power after

³⁶ Politkovskaya, A. (2007)

³⁷ Sakwa, R. (2008). *Russian Politics and Society* (4th ed.). New York, New York.

³⁸ Conley, B. (2004). For the women of Chechnya , hope dies last, 3(3), 331–342.

Stalin's death, he initiated a period often referred to as "the Thaw," which was defined by small increases in civil liberties within the Soviet bloc, as well as an easing of tensions between the USSR and the United States. During the Thaw, Khrushchev allowed Chechens to return to Chechnya, as well as the Caucasus in general, and the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was restored in 1957. Those who grew up during the period of exile then grew into adulthood in a Chechnya that was part of the Soviet system. Although they continued to have much in common with their Russian counterparts, such as having the same language requirements and education system, the pain of the exile never truly vanished from the Chechen consciousness. For example, February 23rd, which is a day to celebrate the army throughout Russia, is commonly referred to as "Deportation Day" in Chechnya, in remembrance of that painful aspect of their past.³⁹

After the collapse of the USSR, the communist leader of Chechnya, Doku Zavagayev, was overthrown and Dzhokhar Dudayev was elected president, following which he immediately proclaimed Chechnya as being independent of Russia. This gave Russia the pretext for the First Chechen War.⁴⁰ In December of 1994, Russia instigated a 20-month war in Chechnya, the goal of which was to destroy the Chechen independence movement. The casualties, both military and civilian, were higher than anyone had anticipated. The massive number of casualties was a large contributing factor to the deep feelings of disapproval and resentment that many Russians had towards the war.

In November 1996, Russian military leaders and Chechen rebels signed ceasefire accords, and in 1997 Russia recognized Aslan Maskhadov's government following Chechen elections. However, despite a peace treaty that was signed by Yeltsin and Maskhadov in May 1997, the

³⁹ Conley, B. (2004)

⁴⁰ Sakwa, R. (2008).

issue of Chechen independence was never firmly addressed and resolved. As a result, an uncertain peace remained between Russia and Chechnya from 1997 to 1999.⁴¹

The initial presidency of Vladimir Putin began on December 31, 1999, and marked a change in policy towards Chechnya. A few months earlier, there had been a series of apartment block bombings which killed approximately 300 people and was blamed on Chechen rebels, which launched the beginning of the Second Chechen War. Upon Putin's ascension to power, Russian troops were sent into Chechnya, whereupon they captured and bombed out the Chechen capital of Grozny. The period of 2000-2005 was characterized by brutal attacks on civilian populations by both the Russian military and Chechen rebels. Although Putin denied that there was an "official" war taking place, often referring to it as an "anti-terrorism campaign," independent journalists played a large role in telling the truth of the brutality of life that was now the norm in Chechnya. Such reports and advocacy revealed excessive human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, corruption, and disregard for the approximately 300,000 people displaced by the conflict.⁴² It was this environment in which journalists and advocated like Anna Politkovskaya attempted to relay to the average Russian citizen, with often tragic consequences.

The background that has been laid out serves as necessary context, in which to situate some of the primary research goals for this thesis. Anna Politkovskaya's role as a Russian woman, in addition to her role as a journalist, impacted the way in which her role was received by the Russian community, specifically the political and military elite, as well as the media. Those who continue her legacy in human rights advocacy in Chechnya face both similar limitations and surprising access due to their gender. The question that must be posed is, in what ways is gender

⁴¹ Sakwa, R. (2008)

⁴² Sakwa, R. (2008)

a pitfall or useful tool for female Russian journalists and advocates, and in what ways, if at all, does it impact the reception of the message that they try to relate to the public? In order to more fully examine this, a brief background in feminist political theory and philosophy is useful.

Feminist political theory and feminist political philosophy are theories which promote a renewed focus on understanding and critiquing the ways in which politics and philosophy are usually construed. The norm in both of these fields is to examine issues and theories from a perspective that is either overtly male-oriented or from a perspective that is simply lacking female representation. Feminist political theory, in particular, looks at the political world through this lens in an attempt to show how women's concerns are poorly understood, represented, and addressed.⁴³ By viewing the political world through this lens, scholars then aim to develop realizable change through the construction of new ideas and practices. At its core, feminist political theories are actionable theories, in that they aim to actually change the issues that they address, instead of simply analyzing and writing about them.

The background of feminist theories, like all broad theories, is complex and at times murky. There have been multiple "waves" of feminist thought, as well as different camps of feminist advocacy, ranging from Marxist feminism to liberal feminism. Each of these camps intersects with different time-periods, as well as with other political and social theories such as post-colonial theory and diversity theory. As a result, feminist theory tends to be, in and of itself, a theory based on inter-sectionality. One of the most popular forms of feminist thought today is a liberal feminist theory, the primary concern of which is to protect and improve the autonomy of women so that women can live the lives they choose to and also help decide the direction of the

⁴³ McAfee, N. (n.d.). Feminist Political Philosophy. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

political community as a reflection of that freedom.⁴⁴ There are numerous critiques of this theory, the main issues raised being that liberal feminism has too rigid a definition of who or what a “woman” is, as well as failing to understand that there are different challenges that women face in the private sphere as opposed to the public sphere, and primarily advocating for the advancement of women in the public sphere while ignoring the plight of women in the setting of the home. Although the concerns over liberal feminism are valid, it is arguably the form of feminist theory that has gained the most traction both domestically and abroad. As such, it provides the widest and perhaps most easily applicable lens through which to look at Politkovskaya and her work.

It makes sense then, why Anna Politkovskaya deserves to be looked at in a feminist manner; the goal of her work was not only to report on events in hope that people would become aware of them but to change the course and outcome of those events in and of themselves, thus aligning her life with the actionable goals of feminism. It should be noted that Politkovskaya never in any detail aligned herself with the feminist movement. Feminism as a concept is extremely unpopular in Russia, with most Russians preferring to view their society as one where women already have all the rights and voice they need, a post-feminist society without the actual achievements and opportunities that a successful feminist movement brings. However, the purpose of this research is not to determine whether or not Politkovskaya identified herself as a feminist advocate, but to look at her work while holding in mind the question of whether or not her writing and her life demonstrate a desire to forward equality for women in terms of human rights, as well as whether her writing style demonstrates an attention to concerns that primarily impact women.

⁴⁴ McAfee, N. (n.d.).

This thesis project will depend primarily on qualitative analysis for garnering results. Overall, it will concentrate on the synthesis and critical analysis of both gender and human rights discourse within Russia, and contrast the ways in which Russia interacts with human rights activists in the domestic sphere, as compared with external international human rights entities. Much of the information will be taken from the writings of female Russian journalists covering human rights violations in Chechnya, as well as information on the critiques of those writings and those journalists. In addition, this thesis will be conducted within the framework of feminist political philosophy. As such, the issues will be related and constructed within the idea of gender construction, as well as evaluated with an end goal of spreading awareness of the role and positionality of women in relations to human rights reporting.

Through the utilization of feminist political philosophy, this paper will be able to examine not only the outwardly apparent issues of gender and human rights but also dig beneath the surface to expose underlying themes in Russian and Chechen society that enable gender essentialism and human rights violations to take place. A feminist theory approach is the most suitable approach to this project, due to the research's focus on female journalists in an increasing hyper-masculine political and social environment.

The primary case study in this thesis will be on the conflicts in Chechnya, with an emphasis on the Second Chechen War, as well as the role and subsequent harassment and deaths of journalists who exposed what was happening there. The reason that only one case study was chosen for this project was to enable a select group of journalists to be chosen; only those who specifically wrote on human rights abuses in Chechnya. This enables a more valid analysis of how news of this specific conflict was disseminated to the public and allows for a more in-depth look at the writings, motivations, and receptions of those who covered the conflict. This case

study portrays a domestic instance in which Russia has had to most publically defend its violation of human rights from both internal and external criticism. A second reason for choosing this, single, case-study, is because it will allow the work of Anna Politkovskaya to be featured, front and center. Her writings are expansive and have become some of the most widely-read journalism on the Chechen conflict, and after her tragic murder on October 7, 2006, she became one of the most well-known female journalists of her time.

The research will be broken up into four separate chapters, each of which will tackle a certain facet of the research question.

Chapter 3: Anna Politkovskaya as a Journalist:

As was highlighted briefly in the chapter before, Russians have always had a unique relationship with journalism. This is in part due to the role that journalists played in the Soviet Union; recognized as a vital pillar of society, they both propped up the Communist Party and voiced the concerns of average citizens. With the collapse of the USSR, the role of most people in Russia was forever changed, and journalists could not escape this. In the early 1990s journalists struggled to carve out a role for themselves in society, and for a while, they succeeded. The years immediately following the collapse of the USSR were filled with enthusiastic reporters digging up the secrets of the Soviet past that had previously been hidden from them.⁴⁵ Investigative reporting became novel and popular, and some journalists gained mass popularity. Funerals for slain journalists (for the murder of members of the media was certainly not unique to the Putin regime) drew thousands upon thousands of mourners. However, this period of popularity and revival in the profession was short-lived. The conclusion of the Yeltsin years left Russians feeling disillusioned with Western governments as well as their own, and economic hardship was at a peak. The economic plans that had been pushed onto the Russian people had clearly failed to make a difference in the overall standard of living, while at the same time enabling the tenacious few to grab hold of a majority of the country's wealth and shoot to the top of both the economic and political ladders. Journalism was not immune to the feelings of disillusionment, and many journalists left the field as a result, while many who remained were co-opted by politicians and political groups in order to stay financially afloat.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Roudakova, N. (2009). Journalism as "Prostitution": Understanding Russia's Reactions to Anna Politkovskaya's Murder. *Political Communication*, 26(4), 412–429.

⁴⁶ Roudakova, N. (2009).

It cannot then be surprising that after a rather flagrant display of being openly courted by politicians, that many Russians distrust the media. While newspapers are still popular, television is making increased inroads in that area of the market, and the newspapers who have not yet “sold out” are under increasing financial pressure to do so. Journalism is given lip service by the population, but most readers have a severe distrust of the media.⁴⁷

Seeing the state of journalism in Russia, one would think that Politkovskaya’s work would immediately make her stand out in a positive way. However, from the perspective of many Russians, her work was simply a new version of the same mistrusted journalism that they were used to. While the West saw her as a daring writer who put her own life at risk to uncover the truth, others saw her as a self-promoting attention seeker. What was seen as being selfless in the eyes of the West was looked at through a heavy lens of skepticism by Russians, which is par for the course in many areas of Russian society. She was described as a journalist who “*saw harbingers of catastrophe in every story.*”⁴⁸ While Politkovskaya certainly does bring with her a high level of pessimism, her reporting is not a spin on the facts, or an exaggeration of the circumstances, which is how it was perceived by many readers. Her writing was pessimistic because there was no other way to write about the horrible acts of violence, neglect, and human rights violations that she was privy to.

⁴⁷ Roudakova, N. (2009).

⁴⁸ Applebaum, A. (2006). Russia’s Dirty War Against Journalists. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2006/10/anna_politkovskaya_19582006.html

In other countries, war correspondents are given a high level of respect and are often nominated for awards within their fields. This was, at one point in time, also true in Russia; Vassily Grossman was a Russian journalist during WWII who gained much acclaim during his time for his work (although he did fall out of favor for a period of time due to his critique of the Soviet regime), and is still studied today.⁴⁹ Grossman was similar to Politkovskaya in that he was able to extract deep, personal thoughts from his subjects and string them together to create a narrative that showcased the bigger picture of the conflict he was covering. Although his later writings ran afoul of Soviet authorities, his journalism during the war remained well-known. This is a direct contrast the Chechen Wars, in that people did not seem to want to read about them at all, let alone be lectured and scolded by a journalist insisting that Russian had lost it conscience.

The critiques of Politkovskaya's writing can, in a way, be considered uniquely Russian, in that these critiques were unlikely to be seen elsewhere. To begin with, her work was often viewed as "sensationalist," in that she was thought to be writing stories not because they were true or needed to be heard but to shock readers and drive up sales for the *Novaya Gazeta*. The concept and reality of sensationalist journalism certainly exist globally, but it is a label usually reserved for tabloid-esque articles, not for reporting on human rights issues. This comes back to the deep mistrust that Russians have for journalists; anything reporting that is done in direct opposition to the political norm is seen as manipulative and foreign-influenced. The issue of Politkovskaya being viewed as a foreign agent or highly suspect of foreign influence was one

⁴⁹ Rodgers, J. (2014). From Stalingrad to Grozny: Patriotism, political pressure, and literature in the war reporting of Vassily Grossman and Anna Politkovskaya. *Media, War & Conflict*, 7(1), 23–36.

that followed her throughout her career. In addition to this, accusations of mental instability were also lobbed at her, with some referencing as the “Madwoman of Moscow.”⁵⁰ In many interviews, she is labeled by her subjects as a willing member of a certain type of media that constantly “exaggerates” the conditions of people in Chechnya, as well as the conditions that the Russian troops were forced to live in.⁵¹

It seems that critics of Politkovskaya can be divided into three camps; the political and military elite, the average Russians living in the relative “comfort” of cities like Moscow, and the people on the ground in Chechnya and Ingushetia. The political and military elite stood to lose both face and power in light of their complicity in the atrocities that Politkovskaya was reporting on. The average Russian often found that they could not relate with what Politkovskaya was writing, and voiced feelings varying between resentment for the tone she directed towards them, and skeptic disbelief towards the events she was claiming had happened. The people on the ground whom Anna interacted with, most obviously those who she interviewed, at times viewed her as someone of privilege, for whom it was impossible to fully understand how life worked in a war-torn area. When interviewing General Vladimir Shamanov, she accused him of targeting the families of Chechen bandits as a form of retribution, to which he replied,

*“It’s all very well for you to discuss things sitting clean and comfortable here in Moscow, gazing at the TV screen. But for me, down there...”*⁵²

By saying this, he implied that there were two different realities in Russia: the reality in Moscow and large cities, and the reality in Chechnya and areas where there was still internal conflict.

When there is a conflicting view of what reality is in the national dialogue of a country, there

⁵⁰ Politkovskaya, A. (2006). A Condemned Woman. *The Guardian*.

⁵¹ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

⁵² Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

emerges a disconnect between the believers in those different views. People living “comfortably” in Moscow were convinced about certain characteristics of the conflict in Chechnya and were unable to adjust that reality they were living in when confronted with Politkovskaya’s reporting.

Despite her numerous critics, Politkovskaya’s journalism was at times able to produce tangible outcomes in the areas of Chechnya and Ingushetia. Perhaps the most well-known example of this involved the old people’s home in Grozny. In November 1999, Politkovskaya and several other advocates discovered that the elderly, and often sickly, inhabitants of the old people’s home in Grozny had not been evacuated prior to the bombardment of the city. This was due to a cruel game of political football, alongside a general acceptance of negligence, being played by the Russian government, the Chechen government, and the Chechen rebels.⁵³ After several false starts and broken promises, Politkovskaya and her compatriots managed to organize an independently-funded evacuation of the residents. Although less than a year later, the residents were unwisely returned home to the home in bombed-out Grozny, it cannot be denied that their initial evacuation may have saved their lives. Much of the lobbying of government officials was done through Politkovskaya’s writing at the *Novaya Gazeta*. At one point, after several failed attempts to evacuate the elderly, she wrote a report containing the following excerpt, criticizing Putin:

“I want a Putin who will defend the weak- according to the Constitution our State exists, first and foremost, for the good of the people. Give me a Putin who at least can control his ministries. Let’s have a Putin who does not kow-tow to the army, police and security

⁵³ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

service, but instead appeals to ordinary citizens: to the people who are suffering and dying under bombardment, as though they are at the mercy of blood-crazed terrorists! I want a different Putin. Not the man who, in front of the TV cameras, climbed into the cockpit of a bomber wearing a pilot's helmet that was evidently the wrong size, but someone who will go to the Staropromyslovsky district and visit the Grozny old people's home.”⁵⁴

Although things like this did happen occasionally, they were always locally focused. Despite her efforts, Anna was never able to truly alter policy on a national level. That was not for her lack of trying, though.

As can be seen in the previously mentioned excerpt, Politkovskaya had several tactics she commonly turned to when trying to accelerate the rate of change. One of them was the use of public shame, which is often thought of as a feminine, at times motherly, tactic. Public shame is something commonly used by mothers; when a child misbehaves, provoking embarrassment or “calling them out” in front of their peers is a common form of punishment. This tactic seems to work better when employed by a female than by a male, especially when the subject being critiqued is a male. When Politkovskaya “called out” Vladimir Putin in her article, she attacked him in ways which specifically hurt because the attack was coming from a woman. She criticized his patriotism and dedication to the state – had this argument come from a man it might have bounced off. However, because it came from a woman it carried extra weight. This is because, as long as countries have existed, there has been the idea that men have the duty to protect their country, in part to ensure the safety of their wives and children. Although it is

⁵⁴ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

doubtful that Politkovskaya believed in this patriarchal standard, she was wise enough to know that many of her readers did. By implying that Putin was not strong enough to do his duty and stand up for Russia, she was in a way, attacking his manhood.

Although attacking Putin in and of itself did not necessarily produce tangible effects on human rights issues, the ways in which she attacked him were important due to them being in direct opposition to the popular culture narrative that surrounded the Russian president. Popular culture, both inside and outside of Russia, seemed to be enthralled with Putin's manly physique (relative to other world leaders), and aggressive, straight-talking attitude towards important issues such as terrorism. In the U.S., news organizations have had field days with photos of Putin riding horseback while shirtless, or competing in martial arts competitions. There was a similar, if more intensified atmosphere in Russia, which at times bordered on the erotic. For example, in 2012 a group of young women from the Moscow State University created and published a calendar as a "gift" for the then, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, which featured "*pin-up photographs of themselves looking as if they had walked out of a Victoria's Secret catalog.*"⁵⁵ The photographs were accompanied by suggestive quotes. In addition, there was a popular music video entitled "My Putin," in which an attractive female singer expressed a desire for more men to model themselves after Putin, with a chorus consisting of her appeal to Putin to engage in a romantic and physical relationship with her.⁵⁶ In her article entitled "Putin's Macho Personal Cult," feminist and political scholar Valerie Sperling accurately described the video as

⁵⁵Sperling, V. (2014). *The Power of Sex: Culture, Gender, and Political Legitimacy. Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Vol. 15).

⁵⁶ Sperling, V. (2015). Putin's macho personality cult. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 49(1), 13–23

an artistic rendering in which, “*female sexuality was marshaled to illustrate Putin desirability as a man and as a state leader.*”⁵⁷

This unusual level of obsession over Vladimir Putin often went unchecked and uncriticized by Russian media. Politkovskaya was one of the only journalists to publically mock the level of personal idolatry and infatuation that she saw taking place around her. The ways in which she did this often involved, as previously described, arguments which took on a gender-specific tone. As feminist theory notes, the use of gender in politics, and the rhetoric surrounding gender identities and gender roles is most often employed against women, not men. While it is unclear whether or not Politkovskaya consciously intended to reverse this scenario, the end result was that she was able to utilize her own gender to attack Putin, and the Russian establishment in general, in a way that men could not.

So, what was the role of a “female journalist” in a time of media dishonesty and a general mistrust of journalists by the public? There is little indication that there *was* a unified front that women put on in the face of this climate. Female journalists and reporters were active participants of the Kremlin’s perpetration of lies, and many mad public comments as to the fact that women and minorities already had all the rights they needed, and were not, in fact, oppressed. What makes Anna Politkovskaya unique is not that she was a woman, but that she was a woman who used her gender as a type of agency to improve and sharpen her activism and her writing wherever possible.

⁵⁷ Sperling, V. (2015).

The professional culture that Politkovskaya found herself in was not one that particularly valued women. Following the collapse of the USSR, the news business increasingly pivoted towards television news. According to many sources, there was an increase in the hiring of female television reporters, not because of their professional merits, but because of their attractiveness.⁵⁸ With the increased importance of television news, media companies had realized and unfortunately were not incorrect in their ideas, that having attractive female reporters on camera boosted their audience numbers. As a result, there was, and continues to be, an increasing level of fear amongst men in journalism (television journalism as well as written) that women's incursion into journalism would drive salaries down and drive out men.⁵⁹ Looking at these issues alone, it is apparent that women in journalism are judged more based on physical appearance than men are, and are viewed with bitterness and suspicion by many of their colleagues. In addition to this, there is the ever-present assumption that there is an inherent difference between "men's journalism" and "women's journalism." This assumption predicts that women will be less interested in, and less capable of writing, "hard news," which covers issues such as politics, and that they are naturally better suited to writing on women's issues, such as parenting, culture, fashion, and advice columns.⁶⁰ This ties into an old-fashioned, but never dispelled, theory of journalism which dictates that men are more subjective journalists, while women spend too much time highlighting background information, context, and ethical dilemmas.⁶¹ In other words, "serious news" is a man's job.

⁵⁸ Steiner, L. (2012). Failed Theories: Explaining Gender Difference in Journalism. *Review of Communication*, 12(3), 201–223.

⁵⁹ Steiner, L. (2012).

⁶⁰ Steiner, L. (2012).

⁶¹ Steiner, L. (2012).

This professional culture was the antithesis to everything that Politkovskaya achieved. She became one of the most respected journalists from Russia, defying the belief that coverage of the Chechen conflict, while discouraged in all forms by the government, was not a job for a woman. Politkovskaya, notably, did not achieve her success by trying to conform to the standards of the men in her field. Instead, she embraced the characteristics of typical “female journalism.” Her reporting focused heavily on detail, context, and the raising of ethical questions, and this is what led to her success. By embracing her own style, without accepting the theory of gender essentialism that circulated around it, Politkovskaya took steps towards turning the gender hierarchy of her profession on its head. The idea of gender socialization predicts that, in journalism, men and women will produce different stories in general.⁶² Politkovskaya refusal to report only on certain issues worked in defiance of this theory. She did not defer to the men in her field; she just did their job better than them.

Feminist political theory aims to transform institutions and theories that support and contribute to the subordination of women. While journalism may only be considered an institution in the sense that it is a profession supported by certain frameworks and norms, the theories of gender in journalism that have been discussed are ripe to be critiqued. The traditional standards of journalism are those that were developed by and instituted by males. Although under the USSR there was a higher level of workplace equality than elsewhere in the world, women were still rarely the ones at the helm of institutions and organizations, political or otherwise. Thus, the normative expectations of journalism are those typically created by, and for, men. Looking at Politkovskaya’s Russia, the presence of a hypermasculine political regime

⁶² Steiner, L. (2012).

added to, solidified, and compounded the already existing masculine superiority and essentialism. The subordination of women, and of the “women’s style” of journalism meant that important events were either being neglected in their totality, or were only being covered by a style of writing that put little value on creating an emotional connection with the reader, the importance of context, or the raising of ethical questions.

Perhaps the issue of human rights abuses would not have reached the severity they are currently at if, along with other factors, women’s voices and their chosen style of writing, whatever that may have been, had been more encouraged. Politkovskaya stands out because there are so few others, men *or* women, that chose to deliver news on events in a style that strays from the established norms of the profession. In her role as a journalist, Politkovskaya advocated for the rights of minorities and the rights of those opposed to Putin’s regime. As a woman, she advocated for example for a new style of journalism and a respect for women in her profession that was missing. Surely those combines efforts, intended or unintended, fulfill the concept of the critiquing of theories and institutions that feminist political theory ardently calls for.

Russia is in a unique situation regarding gender and the conceptions of it due to the success of Soviet propaganda in labeling men and women as equal. While it is true that gender relations in the USSR were much different than they were elsewhere, that does not mean that they were immune to change, and there were heavily affected by the harried transition to capitalism. In many ways, the new gender relations that are present in Russia, and which

surrounded Anna Politkovskaya, are a result of the gender order that existed in Soviet society.⁶³ Under communism, gender seemed to matter less, as,

*“Russia’s men (and women) were interpreted as belonging to a social group whose members shared a common experience and lived in comparable structural conditions regardless of social standing and of class, ethnic, or religious affiliation.”*⁶⁴

However, this all changed when the USSR dissolved. A “crisis of masculinity” emerged, wherein theorists suggest that men felt that they were victims, and that they were under threat. This feeling of being threatened was partially driven by demographics; due to skyrocketing rates of alcoholism, the life expectancy for men was considerably shorter than it was for women.⁶⁵ In addition to this, many men felt that they were being unfairly impacted by the perceived inefficient use of the male work force, as well as rising divorce rates.

In order to combat this, political and social programs, as well as hyperbolized, widespread rhetoric, was used to encourage women to fulfill more traditional roles as a type of solution for “male survival.”⁶⁶ The Russian Orthodox Church was particularly effective at promoting this, as can be seen through one well-known priest’s opinion that,

*“...a woman who had the best job in the world but no family was still only half a woman and that a businesswoman could show humility by attributing the success of her department or business not to her own abilities but to those of her subordinates.”*⁶⁷

⁶³ Zdravomyslova, E., & Temkina, A. (2013). The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse. *Russian Studies in History*, 54(2), 40–61.

⁶⁴ Zdravomyslova, E., & Temkina, A. (2013).

⁶⁵ Zdravomyslova, E., & Temkina, A. (2013).

⁶⁶ Zdravomyslova, E., & Temkina, A. (2013).

⁶⁷ Kizenko, N. (2013). Feminized Patriarchy? Orthodoxy and Gender in Post-Soviet Russia. *Signs*, 38(3), 258–275.

While there were some less-extreme opinions on the matter voiced by prominent members of society, Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin, in partnership with the Russian Orthodox Church, undeniably did their best to “remasculinize” Russia and Russian men.

Politkovskaya, therefore, was creating her reports in an environment that viewed the ideal Russian woman as someone who was, ultimately, supportive of the man/men in her life. As Putin was seen as the “*ultimate Russian man, capable of dealing with every eventuality,*” to criticize him and his way of governing meant that to many, Politkovskaya was not fulfilling her obligations as an ideal Russian woman.⁶⁸

There has been a trend in Russian society to believe and put forward the idea that after a long period of being trodden upon, “*the Russian man is getting up off all fours.*”⁶⁹ The resurgence of hypermasculinity, and the rebuilding and rebranding of the Russian man as a strong and authoritative figure has certainly had a role in Russia’s view of human rights in the past two decades. The series of attacks on Moscow in the early 2000s, as well as the Beslan school hostage crisis, were all linked to Chechen rebel groups (some more definitely than others). Putin’s rise to power closely coincided with an increasing level of fear within Russian society. His past as a KGB officer, and then the director of that intelligence agency, lent him the aura of someone who had the experience and tools to safeguard the country. However, most of the large attacks that took place, did so under his administration, not before. There is an argument to be made that these attacks were, in some cases, a boon to the Kremlin because they allowed Putin to put aside any façade of statesmanship and speak freely and violently about the Chechen issue. There are several well-known speeches that he made, wherein he made multiple references to having a zero-mercy policy towards the bandits. One of his more shocking remarks consisted of

⁶⁸ Sperling, V. (2015)

⁶⁹ Zdravomyslova, E., & Temkina, A. (2013).

a promise to “*waste the bandits in their shit-houses.*”⁷⁰ This type of rhetoric is not simply an example of “straight-talking” though. It is reliant on a sense of violent masculinity that rejects the ideas of tolerance, mercy, and negotiations as weak and in a way, feminine.

Anna Politkovskaya’s criticism of human rights violations was linked to her skepticism and rejection of the validity and potential for peace that Putin’s performance of machoism would bring. Her reporting on human rights was also not limited to the Chechens themselves; she published multiple reports on the abuses that young Red Army recruits suffered at the hands of their own comrades. What she found in both cases was the feeling that much of the violence that was being inflicted was done so by men who believed, or who were told to believe, that violence was a way in which they could prove their manhood to outsiders, even if that violence was unmerited. When interviewing a pair of soldiers stationed in Chechnya, she writes how one of the soldiers described to her why it was so easy for him to kill with impunity:

“He described more revolting scenes, watching to see how his listeners reacted. The FSB distributed videos among the soldiers in the North Caucasus, he said, and they watched them every evening to “get in the mood.”

“What do they show?”

“How to rape and kill. Don’t you know how they raped Shamil Basayev’s brother, Shrivani, in Nazran? A whole gang of them. Well, I saw it.” Yura is very pleased with the nauseating effect this has.”⁷¹

The use of sexual violence as an unofficial tactic by the military was not uncommon in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. It served a dual purpose of terrifying the occupied population and

⁷⁰ Gould, R. (2007). *The Engaged Outsider : Politkovskaya and the Politics of Representing War. Spaces of Identity.*

⁷¹ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

making the occupied male population feel as if they could not protect their families, while at the same time providing the perpetrators with a sense of power that was closely related to their feeling of masculinity.

Politkovskaya also points to masculinity as an issue, because it results in the fostering of a feeling of paternalism in society. Putin's carefully designed reputation made it so that all important decisions about the country were seen as being solely in his purview; the average citizen accepted that they had no right to be upset over things such as human rights abuses because Putin, as the "father" of the people, knew best. According to Politkovskaya,

*"Our society is sick. Most people are suffering from the disease of paternalism, which is why Putin gets away with everything, why he is possible in Russia."*⁷²

Not only was the increase in violence against civilians encouraged by the culture of machoism, but it also fostered a type of disconnect and resentment between those being "occupied", such as the Chechens and various groups of refugees, and those who were occupying them, on the topic of manhood. Both the people of Chechnya and the people living in nearby territories also impacted by the violence viewed the new construction of manhood being promoted by the military with disdain. At the beginning of the Second Chechen War, a music teacher in a refugee camp voiced to Politkovskaya her frustrations with the idea that to be in the army and to engage in violence was the epitome of manhood. She insisted that it would be more respected if the soldiers fought the battles they were supposed to fight instead of constantly harassing the refugees.⁷³ Real manhood could be reflected in the giving of aid to children, many of whom in the camp were starving. She concluded by saying that *"our men will die because yours weren't*

⁷² Politkovskaya, A. (2007). *A Russian Diary* (Harvill Se). London.

⁷³ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

worthy of the name.”⁷⁴ While her words still endorsed a normative, definable goal of “manhood” that men should attain, the differences in her definition and expectation of how “real men” should act may have been a small glimpse into how the idea of manhood contributed to the bitterness that both sides felt towards each other, resulting in the aggravation of abuse.

Personal attacks on Anna Politkovskaya tended to align themselves with the content of her work, not with her private life. Part of this is due to the fact that she was a notoriously private woman; although basic facts concerning her personal life are widely known (such as her marriage and subsequent divorce), anything deeper than that remains for the most part unknown. Politkovskaya’s role as a mother played a large part in her life, but she was aware that her reporting was part of a bigger picture that she needed to prioritize. She would often spend long weeks away from home, returning only to be sent back into the field again. Considering that this type of physically remote mothering is not the traditionally supported type of mothering that is expected in Russia, it is surprising to a certain extent that her critics did not latch onto it.

A report which came out in 2004 entitled “Mothers At War,” showcased the prejudices and difficulties that many female war correspondents faced as a result of also being mothers. A common theme was that, by being a female war reporter, these women felt as if they were shattering a glass ceiling, and they were right considering that the field is predominantly male.⁷⁵ While a few felt an external, cultural pressure to be at home with their children instead of engaged in a dangerous occupation, they said that the increasing acceptance of men being stay-at-home dads had eased that pressure to a degree. However, most of these reporters were from the U.S., the U.K., and France, where a more flexible definition of “motherhood” had been

⁷⁴ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

⁷⁵ Matloff, J. (2004). Mothers At War: Babies or Battle Zones? More Journalists These Days Are Choosing Both, and Facing the Consequences. *Colombia Journalism Review*, 10–12.

gaining ground for decades. Therefore, the stories and experiences of these women cannot really be applied to Russian women in that same field, such as Politkovskaya. Although Soviet ideology encouraged women to excel in both their careers and as home-makers, now both “official rhetoric and the media often promote images of the model housewife.”⁷⁶ The need of a woman to become a mother in order to fulfill at least part of her purpose is something that has been heavily pushed on Russian women by the Church and the Kremlin, due to both religious grounds and the declining population of Russia. There is often a view that the mother holds most of the responsibility to raise the children, while the father should take on the role of “helper,” pitching in only when he deems it necessary.⁷⁷

Although there were few criticisms published on Politkovskaya’s choice of maternal practice, it cannot be ignored that she was reporting on a culture wherein she probably often felt judged, simply for being a middle-aged woman in a dangerous field, and presumably one with children. Being a mother did impact her writing, though, even if she never referred to her family in her work. In the survey of female war correspondents who had children, the following revelation was made:

“Several mothers said they were better reporters now, with sharpened insight into human suffering. They say some of their best work has been about mothers wandering the streets calling for their dead children, or toddlers who witnessed their parent’s executions. “I have taken many incredible pictures of women and children in war and in hunger that made an impact on world opinion, “ says CNN’s Strand, “but I never really saw those

⁷⁶ White, A. (2005). Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia: Attitudes and Expectations among Women Students. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57(3), 429–455.

⁷⁷ White, A. (2005)

pictures until I had a child of my own."⁷⁸

Politkovskaya's empathy towards mothers and children is evident throughout her work. Though she may have been an untraditional, and perhaps non-ideal, version of a Russian mother, her parenting had a deep, emotional impact on her work and her conviction to pursue her reporting to make her country a better place for all citizens, including her child.

⁷⁸ Matloff, J. (2004).

Chapter 4: Anna Politkovskaya as a Patriot

Throughout history, the line between patriotism and nationalism has been a thin one, often one that is only revealed in hindsight. For the purposes of this discussion, patriotism can be defined as a pride in one's country, in its history and in what it stands for. Nationalism can then be defined as the view that one's country is inherently superior to other countries, and as such, is not held accountable to the same norms or rules of governance, both domestically and internationally.

As with many other things, patriotism in regards to Russia is complex. Are "true patriots" expected to look back with pride on the entirety of Russian history, or just certain time periods? The characteristics of the Russian nation were much different during the long pre-soviet era than they were under the USSR. The pendulum of patriotism swings back and forth between these two different Russian histories, and that split is reflected in society. Many look back at the Soviet times as a benchmark equality and human decency, especially in light of the constantly widening income gap that exists in Russia today, due to a number of oligarchs. On the other hand, many who were coming of age during the waning days of the USSR eagerly welcomed capitalism, and choose not to base their idea of patriotism on Communist ideology, but rather on the long history of Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution. Regardless of what time period is more closely linked to an individual's patriotism for Russia, the question remains, what does patriotism look like in the modern day? One part of the answer can be found in a passage that primarily devotes itself to defining what a real "muzhik" or "Russian man" in an ideal sense, is,

"Unlike the imagined man in the contemporary West, a "muzhik" is hardy, strong, and powerful; he doesn't say much, but always stands by his word. Finally, he is a patriot – he prefers the values of his own national culture, and expresses his readiness to defend

the Motherland.”⁷⁹

As seen in this quote, patriotism is closely linked with masculinity, as well as with violence. The “readiness to defend the Motherland” is an aspect of Russian patriotism that is very much in play today. Putin’s Kremlin has put an emphasis on the concept of “*militarized patriotism*,” in which pride in one’s country is inseparable from pride in the violence sometimes necessary to defend one’s country.⁸⁰

Religion is also currently making a strong appearance in the concept of patriotism in Russia today. The Russian Orthodox Church has made strong efforts to link patriotism with orthodoxy, proving it as an institution which is eager to look beyond the secular days of the Soviet Union, and reach farther back into Russia’s past for its inspiration.⁸¹ The linking of the Church to patriotism is especially important in the context of reading Politkovskaya’s reporting on Chechnya; as Chechnya has a majority Muslim population, the question of whether or not Chechens can really be “patriots” as a result, in part, of their religious beliefs, is something that many Russians asked themselves, and a question which Politkovskaya attempted to address in parts of her work.

In order to understand the differences in how Russian women are expected to support the state in comparison to men, one must fully understand the concepts of gender essentialism that hold sway in Russia. The concept that men and women are fundamentally different in all aspects creates a pseudo-logical reasoning that they cannot perform the same roles in society. Thus,

⁷⁹ Sperling, V. (2014). *Putin the Sex Back in Politics: Gender Norms, Sexualization, and Political Legitimation in Russia. Etica e Politica* (Vol. 15).

⁸⁰ Sperling, V. (2014).

⁸¹ Kizenko, N. (2013). Feminized Patriarchy? Orthodoxy and Gender in Post-Soviet Russia. *Signs*, 38(3), 258–275.

women are encouraged to keep primarily to the domestic sphere, leaving the public sphere to men. Although most Russian women do work, the idea of a career being their priority is something that is discouraged. As such, “patriotism” is something that is expected to manifest itself differently in men than in women.

The very term “patriotism” is derivative of the Latin word for “father.”⁸² The term, and the history behind it, is closely linked with a gender-influenced designating of “the other,” and “the other” is often identified by comparing them to the “real” patriotic women of that country. Patriotism, not entirely unlike nationalism, creates a dichotomy of exclusion, whereupon if you are not “with us,” then you are “against us.” This is especially true in an environment of militarized patriotism, where the military occupies the highest place of honor. The historical nature of patriotism manifests itself in gender relations once again, with Rousseau stating that patriotism could only be cultivated through the mother’s example at the family hearth, and that teaching loyalty to one’s family was the first step in teaching loyalty to a larger community, specifically one’s country.⁸³ Since the family was traditionally the responsibility of the woman, raising a family of patriots was an integral part of the woman’s duty to the state. As a result of this, there has been a historical trend of women only being seen as patriotic, insofar as they were able to give birth to, and raise, good citizens.⁸⁴

Circling back to the difference between nationalism and patriotism, it seems clear that nationalist sentiment has taken precedent in modern Russia. For a long time in Russia there has been the existence of, instead of a political nationalism, a cultural nationalism.⁸⁵ The traditional Russian way of life is painted as being under attack from foreign influences who wish to see the

⁸² Sluga, G. (2006). Identity , gender , and the history of European nations and nationalisms, 4(1).

⁸³ Sluga, G. (2006).

⁸⁴ Sluga, G. (2006).

⁸⁵ Sluga, G. (2006).

Motherland crumble. The constant build-up of of paranoid rhetoric leads to a suspicious and xenophobic outlook, which often manifests itself in a belief that one's own culture is inherently superior, and that superiority is why other, lesser, groups are trying to subvert it. Thus, outside groups are automatically seen as threatening, and those that criticize Russian are seen as subversive and dedicated to the destruction of the "best" society. This nationalism can be seen in the objectification and reification of the Chechens, who are described as thugs and criminals, and who are viewed as not being able to rise above their basest instincts. They are also demeaned and reduced to racial hatred. Although Chechens are, most often, of Caucasian descent, some Russians see them as being part of a different, inferior race. Politkovskaya interviews a teacher who describes the treatment that a group of young Chechen cadets received at a military academy in Omsk;

*"No one used our boys' names at the barracks but – if you'll forgive the expression – they called them "black-arsed..." – you know what I mean. No one even tried to wash away the offensive slogans in the toilet: NIGGERS OUT OF OMSK!"*⁸⁶

The widespread derision of entire groups of people based, in part, upon racial ideology is common in nationalistic environments. Identifying that such an environment is, in fact, in existence in Russia is important because it casts new light on Politkovskaya's work and reputation in regards to the concept of patriotism.

There can be no argument or equivocations against the fact that Anna Politkovskaya was a true Russian patriot. She cared deeply about the future of her country, and she stood for both traditional Russian ideals, as well as the universal ideals of human rights. The fact that she embraced the history and traditions of her homeland as well as the more western ideas of

⁸⁶ Politkovskaya, A. (2001). *A Dirty War*. London: The Harvill Press.

democracy and transparency, confused some. Many saw patriotism as a casting aside of all outside influences and perceptions; however, this is much more akin to nationalism. Being a patriot, Politkovskaya aimed to embrace any ideal, regardless of origin, so long as it could improve the lives of her fellow citizens. As such, she found it hard to believe that a disregard for human rights was in Russia's best interests. She lends herself to the critique that,

“A harsh and vengeful atmosphere predominates [...] Stupid and incompetent as always, because those it “pacified” did not cause the explosion. Others suffered merely because they happened to be nearby, and, the soldiers argue, it doesn’t matter, they’re all bandits. Such a war will be endless. The victims of pacification will inevitably thirst for revenge and the next armored train will fly skywards.”⁸⁷

Anna's patriotism can also be seen in the fact that all of her writing is Russia-centric. She could have easily had a successful career working in an overseas posting, reporting on conflict and human rights in other countries. In the early 2000's there were numerous hot-spots around the world where she could have played the role of a crusader for justice, without alienating herself from her community. Politkovskaya's conscious decision to report on Chechnya showed that her own country, and the fate of its citizens, were always in the forefront of her mind.

As mentioned previously, one of the defining attributes of patriotism in Russia is the willingness to give up one's life for the Motherland. Politkovskaya repeatedly put her life in danger to fulfill her vision of helping her country. She did not often draw attention to the severity of the threats against her life, but in one interview with “The Guardian”, she gave the following account,

⁸⁷ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

“On 5 August 2006, I was standing in the middle of a crowd of women in the little central square of Kurchaloy, a dusty village in Chechnya. I was wearing a headscarf folded and tied in the manner favoured by many women of my age in Chechnya, not covering the head completely, but not leaving it uncovered either. This was essential if I was not to be identified, in which case nobody could say what might happen.”

The women in the crowd tried to conceal me because they were sure the Kadyrov people would shoot me on the spot if they knew I was there. They reminded me that Kadyrov has publicly vowed to murder me. He actually said during a meeting of his government that he had had enough, and that Politkovskaya was a condemned woman. I was told about it by members of the government.” ⁸⁸

Politkovskaya often found support and solidarity amongst women in Chechnya and the surrounding regions, whom she described as *“strong-spirited women who are used to surviving in the most severe [...] conditions.”*⁸⁹ The support between women in Chechnya is a typical theme in her reports, and it is something that she is repeatedly impressed by. In many ways, these women share the same patriotic characteristics that she herself does, though those characteristics may not be seen as such by the Russian mainstream. Nevertheless, this support highlights the unique type of patriotism that was safeguarded within Politkovskaya and her writing; a patriotism borne of a woman who, in many ways, embodies the character of the “Russian mother,” but one whose care and protection extends far beyond her own children.

The concept of motherhood as an aspect of female identity and social construction has

⁸⁸ Politkovskaya, A. (2006). A Condemned Woman. *The Guardian*.

⁸⁹ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

important ties to the ideas of patriotism and nationalism, as well as human rights, in regards to the conflict in Chechnya. The most relevant group that embodies all of these considerations is the Committee of Russian Soldiers' Mothers movement, which is headquartered in St. Petersburg. The Committee of Russian Soldiers' Mothers was founded with the purpose of advocating for increased transparency on the part of the military as to the human rights abuses that went on within its ranks, better treatment of recruits, and for the civil rights of soldiers (alive and deceased) and their families.⁹⁰ The group has become well known worldwide as an opposition force to Putin's regime, based not on political ideology, but on an appeal to humanity and common decency. As one of the few home-grown organizations to take such a stance, and one led by women on-top of that, it is understandable why Politkovskaya took an interest in them.

The committee was originally founded in 1989, but took on new life in the late 1990s with the resurgence of the Chechen conflict resulting in "unexplainable" deaths of both soldiers and civilians. It was in 1999 that Politkovskaya began to report on the uses that soldiers' mothers faced, and when her relationship with the organization began. In the early days of the Second Chechen War, before the public was aware of the military's decision to do so, the Red Army began sending unprepared recruits to fight in the region of Daghestan.⁹¹ These recruits were untrained and mentally and physically unprepared. In many cases, they "*had only once [...] been shown how to use an automatic rifle.*"⁹² The secret deployment of green-recruits, without any forewarning, consent, or notification given to families, was illegal. Many of the men were plied with ominous amounts of liquor the night before they were sent to Daghestan,

⁹⁰ Lacassagne, A. (n.d.). Controlling the Russian Soldiers' Mothers and Chechen Mothers The Story of a Hidden War. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, 159–169.

⁹¹ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

⁹² Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

and were loaded into truck while they were still reeling from intoxications so that they would not realize that they were being sent to fight without their consent. This process was covered up by military and political figures, who stressed the voluntary nature of any and all deployments to the front.⁹³

As mothers of illegally deployed troops began to realize that they and their sons had been lied to, some mothers whose sons had not yet been deployed made last-minute attempts to rescue them. Politkovskaya recounts mothers who “*drove off with their children, transforming them into deserters and themselves into accessories to the crime.*”⁹⁴ In addition to this, many mothers were horrified to discover the general level of abuse that young recruits suffered at the hands of their superiors. That abuse, coupled with the atrocities that the young men were faced with (and sometimes forced to perform themselves) in the conflict zone, left long-lasting physical and mental damages. The fact that these soldiers faced only abuse and neglect at the hands of the administration, and received no support when they came home after a “successful” deployment, enraged Politkovskaya. She wrote that,

*“The regime stresses that it has taken a decision to begin the war, but takes no responsibility for the consequences [...] The only reliable support for those lads who return from the war will be their families and relatives. It is as if their fathers and mothers had sent them to fight in the first place.”*⁹⁵

It is within this climate of neglect and disillusionment that many Russian mothers were forced to revisit what it actually meant to be a patriot.

Mothers and women in general are key actors in a masculinist conception of

⁹³ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

⁹⁴ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

⁹⁵ Politkovskaya, A. (2001).

nationalism.⁹⁶ Women are portrayed as the heart and soul of a country, and are supposedly delicate enough to need constant protection by men. When men are sent to war, the state often employs the image of defenseless women being attacked by the enemy as motivation for men to fight. That image of a defenseless woman is one that is defined by its passiveness. The women in these “fantasies” have no agency of their own, and exist only to fuel soldiers’ desire to protect their country. Although this type of woman is a one-dimensional representation, the concept of the women taking care of the home and hearth while the men defend them is a typical idea of what it means to be a patriotic woman.

The Committee of Russian Soldiers’ Mothers defied this typical view of the female embodiment of patriotism. As one researcher notes, “*they have also been critical of the government’s scapegoating of Chechens and have suggested that “the source of evil might well be the Russian state itself.”*”⁹⁷ This perception of the Russian government and the Chechen conflict is very similar to Politkovskaya’s own views. The similarity does not stop there either; both Politkovskaya and these mothers defy the traditional female political passivity that defines “new Russian female roles.”⁹⁸ They also do not see their advocacy for civil rights and human rights solely through the lens of feminism or female-liberation. Instead, the feminist and female-centric undertones that exist throughout their advocacy take the form of a call for human decency, thus unintentionally linking the support for human rights with the “feminine.”

Politkovskaya’s Ties to the West:

Anna Politkovskaya was born in the United States, a fact that set her apart from many of

⁹⁶ Lacassagne, A. (n.d.).

⁹⁷ Eichler, M. (2006.). *Russia’s Post-Communist Transformation: A Gendered Analysis of the Chechen Wars*, (December 2006), 486–511.

⁹⁸ Eichler, M. (2006.).

her peers. While she never took advantage of her rightful American citizenship, the fact remained that she had a potential escape hatch where others had none. Her ties to the West were never mentioned in her work; in fact, she consistently refers to herself as a member of the Russian people, using the term “we” in a broad sense to point out that she is a member of the same society she is reporting on.⁹⁹ Her use of that identifier may not have been a conscious statement about where her loyalties lay, but to an outsider reading her work, it seems to be a reassurance to her Russian audience that her criticism of Putin’s regime did not translate to her showing a preference for a different, more Western, country.

At times, Politkovskaya’s writing contains a “performance” of her “Russianness,” in the form of drawing upon traditional literature, fairytales, and Russian history as a way to connect with her readers. It is not clear whether or not she believed infusing her writing with these illustrations was necessary to get her point across. What is clear though, is that the usage of these images exponentially clarifies the fact that Politkovskaya was not a Western agent working to undermine the state for the benefit of a foreign power. Her typically seamless transitions from political critique to ancient Russian idioms is something that no non-native would have been able to do. For example, in “A Russian Diary,” she writes,

“Putin is resuscitating our ancient stereotype: “Let us wait until our lord the “barin” comes back. He will tell us how everything should be.” It has to be admitted that this is how the Russian people like it, which means that soon Putin will throw away the mask....”¹⁰⁰

Here, she brings back part of Russia’s past social attitude, and uses it to rebuke her fellow modern-day citizens. In another report, Politkovskaya effortlessly combines fairytale diction and

⁹⁹ Politkovskaya, A. (2007). *A Russian Diary* (Harvill Se). London.

¹⁰⁰ Politkovskaya, A. (2007).

memories of life under the Soviet Union, when she complains that,

*“If the town madman were to suddenly kill the dragon, millions would flock to share his glory and enjoy the fruits of his victory. It is an old, deplorable Soviet custom: do nothing yourself, lie still in the mud on the riverbed, and wait for a wonderful new life to float down to you from above.”*¹⁰¹

Her style of using traditional Russian and Soviet idioms and humor to rebuke contemporary events and figures, shows that Politkovskaya is a patriot in her own way. She is obviously aware, and at times proud, of the history and struggles that her people have gone through. She goes back into that history to draw out illustrations that she hopes will spur improvement in her country, instead of relying on the words, examples, and histories of other countries for her groundwork.

As previously defined, patriotism in contemporary Russia is distinguished by its brash, militaristic stance, and verges on simply being consumed by nationalist sentiment. Any alternative to this type of patriotism, such as what Anna Politkovskaya embodies, is denigrated as subversive, or as feminine and weak. “Feminine” patriotism takes important step and makes contributions that “macho” patriotism fails to do. One thing that feminine patriotism does that its counterpart does not, is focus on the moral state of the country. In many of Putin’s speeches, he emphasizes the need for violence regardless of moral stipulations. The “*masculinized humiliation*” of Russia as a result of terrorism has led Putin to demand retribution in kind.¹⁰² In 2014, Putin asserted that “*a bear doesn’t ask permission from anybody,*” referring to Russia’s refusal to abide by Western norms on human rights and political freedom.¹⁰³ That quote also

¹⁰¹ Politkovskaya, A. (2007).

¹⁰² Eichler, M. (2006.).

¹⁰³ Sperling, V. (2015). Putin’s macho personality cult. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 49(1), 13–23.

carried sexual undertones, implying that if one is masculine and forceful enough, then the feminine and weaker elements of society will not be able to refuse you, not that they would have been politely asked in the first place. Putin's patriotism has no room for moral considerations. It is fitting then, that Politkovskaya became known as "*Russia's lost moral conscience*," for her efforts to try and link national pride and security with human rights.¹⁰⁴

Women around the world are often seen as the ones that keep the traditions and cultures of their communities alive. Oral histories and customs are passed down from generation to generation, usually through the female line. This is true in Russia, and especially Chechnya, where mothers bear the sole responsibility for passing down Chechen culture.¹⁰⁵ During the Chechen wars, most of the people getting information out of the area were women like Politkovskaya.¹⁰⁶ The role of women in Russia and Chechnya has been expanded; instead of just using traditional oral and written techniques to ensure the survival of culture, they are using those tools to try and ensure the survival of an entire group of people.

¹⁰⁴ Politkovskaya, A. (2007).

¹⁰⁵ Lacassagne, A. (n.d.).

¹⁰⁶ Conley, B. (2004). For the women of Chechnya , hope dies last, 3(3), 331–342.

Chapter 5: Continuing Anna's Legacy

Anna Politkovskaya was the most well-known female reporter and human rights advocate working inside Chechnya, but she was not alone. During the Second Chechen War, female activists worked together to disseminate information try to bring relief to their communities. These women were advocates before Politkovskaya began her work in the area, and they have continued to fight for human rights after the murder of Politkovskaya and others of their colleagues. Two such influential women are Natalya Estemirova and Tatyana Lokshina. Estemirova was killed as a direct result of her advocacy within Chechnya, and Lokshina suffered harassment due to her advocacy.

Natalya Estemirova was a well-known human rights advocate in Chechnya, and a close friend of Anna Politkovskaya. Born in Siberia in 1958 during the height of the Cold War, she spent most of her adult life in Chechnya. Graduating from Grozny University, she went on to pursue a career in journalism at local Chechen papers such as “The Voice” and “The Worker of Grozny.”¹⁰⁷ Estemirova gained attention as a reporter due to her dogged work on exposing Russian punitive practices that violated human rights.¹⁰⁸ She believed that she was in a unique position due to the fact that she was of mixed Russian-Chechen parentage, and as a result, she felt more able the different parties involved in the conflict than the average observer. However, just because she was able to understand both sides does not mean that she stood idly by on the sidelines. Early on in the conflict, it became clear that Estemirova was concerned about human rights abuses being committed against the Chechen population, particularly the extra-judicial

¹⁰⁷ Askerov, A. (2015). The Chechen Wars, Media, and Democracy in Russia. *Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences*, 8(2).

¹⁰⁸ Obituary: Natalia Estemirova. (2009). Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8152648.stm>

kidnappings and executions of Chechen civilians. Like Politkovskaya, her work took on urgency and gained recognition during the Second Chechen War when the traditional Russian media, as well as the international media, was prevented from accessing Chechnya. Estemirova was a close friend of Anna's Politkovskaya's, and wrote an article entitled "The Courage of Anna Politkovskaya," which examined the humbling sacrifices that her counterpart made for her work. Their close working relationship was further exemplified when Estemirova was awarded the first "Politkovskaya Award" honoring her work on human rights.

Estemirova's narrative style, like Politkovskaya's, was simple and straight-forward, at times bordering on being terse. Her reports were full of facts, and she used these facts to directly contradict the narrative that was being pushed by the Kremlin. Her use of the truth was often embedded within the experiences of others, most notably women. For example, in one of her reports criticizing the 2005 Amnesty that the Kremlin was pushing, she used the personal experiences of a female village head to rebut the lies that pro-Moscow reports were publishing,

"Zulai Visingirieva, the head of the village of Ulus-Kert in the southern mountains of Chechnya, collected all the young men in her village who had connections with the fighters and took them to the local office of the intelligence agency, the FSB. But instead of getting amnesties, five were charged with crimes and four of those were detained.

*Visingirieva advised her counterparts in other villages not to act as she had done."*¹⁰⁹

This short passage uses the female village head as a spokesperson against the "alternative truth" that the Kremlin was pushing about the nature of the amnesty. Instead of preaching against the effectiveness of the amnesty herself, she lets others who are directly impacted by it use their own words and experiences to denounce it. By doing this, Estemirova avoids misrepresenting the

¹⁰⁹ Estemirova, N. (2005). Chechnya: Amnesty Fails to Inspire. Retrieved from <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/chechnya-amnesty-fails-inspire>

opinions of her sources. This also enables her to create a feeling of sympathy within her readers; they are confronted with the experiences of real people, instead of just the opinion of a reporter. Estemirova also used her writing to remind people of the violence in Chechnya. At the conclusion of several of her articles, she includes a brief sentence or summary of the most recent act of violence. In one article, she writes,

“Meanwhile, the violence continues in Chechnya. More than fifty people died in the recent suicide bombing in the military hospital in Mozdok...”¹¹⁰

This is the concluding sentence of her report. The brevity and matter-of-fact manner in which she writes about the violence is not always as heart wrenching as some of Politkovskaya’s deeply descriptive writing. However, this bluntness zooms out, and away from the personal tragedy that impacted so many in Chechnya, and focuses on the mass scale of the violence. Perhaps Estemirova hoped that, if personal tragedy did not shock the outside world, barbed recounting of the constant number of casualties would.

On July 15, 2009, more than two years after Politkovskaya’s own murder, Natalya Estemirova was kidnapped outside her home in Grozny. According to reports,

“...four gunmen grabbed her and threw her into a car as she screamed at the top of her lungs. Eight hours later, officials reported that her body had been found sixty miles away [...] Like Politkovskaya, she had gunshot wounds to the chest and the head – hallmarks of an execution killing.”¹¹¹

Although there was a limited investigation into her murder, the international community, as well as opposition groups within Russia, recognized that the Chechen president, Kadyrov, was behind

¹¹⁰ Estemirova, N. (2005).

¹¹¹ Smith, W. (2011). Europe to the Rescue: The Killing of Journalists in Russia and the European Court of Human Rights. *George Washington International Law Review*, 43(3), 493–528.

the attack. The failure of the Russian government to adequately investigate the murder of Estemirova, only a few years after the execution of Politkovskaya, displayed a trend that outraged human rights advocates. The European Court of Human Rights noted that there were several grounds upon which human rights advocates could bring a case against the Russian government's lack of responsibility in protecting their citizens and the freedom of the media.¹¹²

Tanya Lokshina (also known as Tatyana Lokshina) is another woman who has taken up the mantle of investigative reporting in relation to the conflict in Chechnya, as well as the more recent issues in the Northern Caucasus. Her work includes articles on the current issues that continue to plague the Chechen people, even though most of the fighting between the rebels and the Russian army has died down. With the conclusion of the conflict, the interest of international journalists in human rights in the area has faded. Lokshina's work served as a beacon of awareness, reminding the rest of the world that, even though bombs are no longer pummeling Grozny, injustice still permeates the atmosphere there. While luckier than many of her counterparts in that she has not fallen victim to a murder attempt, she is nevertheless no stranger to life-threatening situations. While working as the deputy director of Moscow's Human Rights Watch office in 2012, Lokshina started to receive death threats. These threats detailed the violence that would be committed against her, her unborn child, and the rest of her family.¹¹³ These threats served as an indirect reason for Lokshina temporarily departing Russia, although she returned a few months later and continued her work.

The narrative style that Lokshina favors is one that is more academic and thorough in

¹¹² Smith, W. (2011).

¹¹³ List, J. R. (2012). Human Rights Activist Lokshina, Who Received SMS Threats, Leaves Russia. Retrieved from <http://russialist.org/human-rights-activist-lokshina-who-received-sms-threats-leaves-russia/>

nature. Although she occasionally produces shorter pieces of work, her most notable advocacy appear in lengthy memorandums and reports. She specializes in long, in-depth pieces for groups such as Human Rights Watch and investigative journalism for The Guardian. Part of the reason her writing takes on an academic tone is because of the world that she is a part of; in 2005 she was a founding member of a civil rights think tank in Russia and she has worked for the International Helsinki Federation on human rights.¹¹⁴ This academic tone can be seen even in her moving obituary for Estemirova, in which she details background information on her friend's work that most obituaries would have overlooked.¹¹⁵ In addition to this, her narrative style often focuses on the important players in the Chechen conflict, instead of relying on the personal stories of everyday people. She takes an interest in exposing the corruption of Kadyrov regime through writing about the events that take place in the upper levels of politics. In one reports, she details the ever-changing state of the relationship between Putin and Kadyrov, making a note that, at one of his public speeches, Kadyov was *"flexing his muscles, as if to caution the Kremlin that withdrawing political or financial support could cost dearly."*¹¹⁶ Lokshina's reports also include interviews with everyday Chechens, but due to her audience, primarily experienced human rights advocates and academics, her writing contains less ferocity than Politkovskaya's. Instead, she is meticulous in her detail and political knowledge, and uses that understanding to put forward possible solutions to the current situation.

Lokshina was constantly aware of the danger that followed her and her family due to her

¹¹⁴ Participant Bios for Human Rights Defenders Conference. (2005). Retrieved from <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc2106.html>

¹¹⁵ Lokshina, T. (2009). Killing With Impunity in Chechnya. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/aug/13/chechnya-activists-murder>

¹¹⁶ Lokshina, T. (2016). *"Like Walking a Minefield": Vicious Crackdown on Critics in Russia's Chechen Republic.*

writing. In an obituary article that she wrote in honor of the her fallen-colleague, Natalya Estemirova, she wrote that,

*“Independent activists are not tolerated in contemporary Chechnya. This intolerance goes far beyond the seething contempt officials have expressed for human rights activists – it can be lethal [...] more murders are bound to follow and we'll keep asking ourselves, "Who's next in line?"”*¹¹⁷

In some ways Lokshina’s life may be more protected than others due to her high-profile position at an international organization. However, Politkovskaya was an internationally-renowned journalist, and Estemirova was a director of the Memorial human rights organization, which elevated their profiles as well, but in the end they were seen as expendable by Putin’s administration. Lokshina’s most recent work has focused on the daily struggles of the people living in the conflict zones in Eastern Ukraine; in many ways the civil war there mirrors the conditions that Chechnya went through in the early 2000s, and the linkage is one that Lokshina makes often.

Narrative Style:

These women and their experiences offer a small glimpse into the lives and circumstances surrounding female human rights activists working on Chechen issues since the death of Anna Politkovskaya. The work of these female reporters is distinguished from that of their male counterparts, in part because it seems that they have gained more notoriety than the men in their fields. This may be due to their writing style, which like Politkovskaya’s, evokes emotion and plays with ethos, while using plain language which resonate with their audience. They also may have gained more attention due to the fact that they are female; journalism is not

¹¹⁷ Lokshina, T. (2009).

necessarily an exclusively male field anymore, but it is still uncommon to see women forge a path in political subject matter. Men have certainly advocated for human rights in relation to Chechnya, but the group of women in question resemble a phenomenon of women spearheading social and political critique of the government in a straightforward manner that many in Russia would consider foolhardy, and that many in the international community laud as heroic. One thing that the narrative styles of these women have in common, is that they are not afraid to directly lay blame at the feet of public figures. They not only offer general rebukes to Russian society, but they pinpoint specific people and accuse them of not doing their part to support human rights. Not only is this risky (critiquing those in power in an authoritarian state is never safe), but it is also reflective of an older style of Russian journalism, known as lamentations.

Lamentations have a strong and ancient history within the Russian culture and the Russian psyche. In the past, lamentations have been used by women to create a narrative through which to connect their audience to the petition that they wish to make, usually to an authority such as the government.¹¹⁸ In short, the lament is a style of appeal. Russian women in particular have made use of this type of complaint, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, during the early days of the Soviet Union. As one scholar writes,

“The woman’s lament focused on hardships that were particularly common to women in this period – coping with the drunken husband, being left a widow, raising small children alone, managing a living while illiterate, caring for sick or handicapped family members.”¹¹⁹

Many of these hardships are still familiar to women in Russia today. Politkovskaya, Estemirova and Lokshina have taken used the format of lamentations as a vehicle to submit their complaints

¹¹⁸ Alexopoulos, G. (1997). The Ritual Lament: A Narrative of Appeal in the 1920s and 1930s. *Russian History*, 24(1), 117–129.

¹¹⁹ Alexopoulos, G. (1997).

about human rights and the state of the Russian country to the government. In many cases this “submittal” takes the form of a forceful thrust. Lamentations are characterized by their highly emotional appeal, which is reflected in the high level of ethos that these writers utilize. Lamentations also help to construct an image for their audience, and “*challenge the reader,*” while also making “*imminent threats*” about what may happen to themselves, or in these activists’ cases, the nation, if they are not listened to.¹²⁰ Although all of these women have a unique voice, the narrative style that encompasses the idea of lamentations connects them, and provides a sort of blueprint for women who wish to write in a similar way, for a similar cause.

The risks that these women face vary from the usual disruptions that come with the territory of investigative journalism, to levels of harassment and violence that can lead to the loss of life. Russia has created a reputation for itself as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, and that reputation is based purely off of the number of journalists who have died in mysterious or unnatural circumstances, not the non-lethal harassment that many face more often. Estemirova was the eighteenth journalist killed for her work between the years of 2000-2009.¹²¹ According to one report, Russia is the “*world’s third deadliest country for the press and the ninth worst in solving journalist murders.*”¹²² This does not bring into consideration the intimidation tactics that are used against journalists who paint the government or oligarchs in a negative light. As a result of this, it is hard to find talented reporters who are willing to risk their lives to advocate for issues that most of the country may not agree with in the first place. This is even more true with female journalists; many, like Politkovskaya, are mothers, and of these, many are also single or divorced. Politkovskaya divorced her husband, in

¹²⁰ Alexopoulos, G. (1997).

¹²¹ Smith, W. (2011).

¹²² Smith, W. (2011).

part due to their disagreement over her career path, yet she still took most of the responsibility for raising their children. Natalya Estemirova raised her daughter alone, after her husband was killed in the First Chechen War, an event that was partially responsible for Estemirova beginning her career in activism.¹²³ Being a single mother, or having strained familial relations that result in the mother doing most of the domestic labor, is an extra deterrent for women to put themselves in potentially dangerous situations.

It is undeniable that these women have brought attention to the issues of human rights in Russia and Chechnya, and that they have shone a light on areas that members of the government would rather have stay shrouded in darkness and inaccessibility. But have the actual ground conditions of human rights changed as a result of these women's work? Is there proof that this work has tangibly changed the lives of people for the better? Unfortunately, there is little evidence that it has. Apart from individual examples, such as Politkovskaya's role in evacuating the residents of the Grozny Old People's Home, there does not seem to have been a mass movement dedicated to bettering the conditions of the Chechen population. One reason for this, is because it has been acknowledged that one of the primary reasons why there are still conflicts between the Chechen population and the military is due to the corruption of the officer corps.¹²⁴ Many in the officer corps benefitted through their illegal side-occupations in the black market, as well as in the physical and financial harassment of activists who spoke out against them. Although the war in Chechnya may officially be over, the continual violation of civil rights there will not stop as long as there is a direct financial gain that can be gleaned from it.

¹²³ Harding, L. (2009). Who Shot Natalia Estemirova. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/23/chechnya-natalia-estemirova>

¹²⁴ Rodgers, J. (2014). From Stalingrad to Grozny: Patriotism, political pressure, and literature in the war reporting of Vassily Grossman and Anna Politkovskaya. *Media, War & Conflict*, 7(1), 23–36.

The primary way in which these writers have been able to affect any semblance of change in Chechnya has been through their indirect lobbying of the international community through their writings. Although the West, and most international bodies, have not gone as far as to directly intervene in the sovereign governance of Russia, they have lodged protests and aided in the depicting of Russia as a type of pariah in the community of states. This international disapproval has fluctuated in severity, in accordance with the policies of different administrations, as well as in accordance with what hand Putin decides to play that week. Many thought that U.S.-Russia relations were beginning to turn for the better in the early 2000s, with President George W. Bush's declaration that, when he looked into the eyes of Putin, he was able to "*get a sense of his soul.*"¹²⁵ This interaction occurred at the height of the violence in Chechnya. However, since the American public was stranded in a state of fear and hysteria, and since American government was relying on the international community, which included Russia, to join them in their fight against terrorism, President Bush decided to overlook much of the human rights violations in Chechnya, and encouraged his counterparts to do the same. He justified his less than stringent approach to the Chechen issue by stating, "*we do believe that there are some al Qaeda folks in Chechnya.*"¹²⁶ Despite fluctuations and inconsistencies in the West's approach to Russia during this time period, the presence and recognition of the work of these women, Politkovskaya in particular, were used by many human rights advocates in the United States and Europe to pressure their governments to place sanctions and punishments upon Russia.

Ground-level improvements in Chechnya have been slow to make themselves visible. If anything, the work of human rights activists has become even more difficult, as the atrocities

¹²⁵ Fawn, R. (2009). "Bashing about Rights"? Russia and the "New" EU States on Human Rights and Democracy Promotion. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(December 2014), 1777–1803.

¹²⁶ Fawn, R. (2009).

committed are done in a way that is less brazenly visible, as they were during the war. Many of these female advocates realize that they are in a more favorable position than their male counterparts, though; it is typically too dangerous for men to launch any protest movement, or even signal their displeasure with the Chechen regime, without violent repercussion. As a result,

“Eliza Moussaeva, Director of the Ingushetia Office of the Russian human rights organization, Memorial, has commented: ‘...the real protectors of rights in Chechnya are women. If something happens in Chechnya, the demonstrations and different meetings are organized usually by women ...’”¹²⁷

Another reporter commented that, *“reporting out of Chechnya has literally become women’s work.”*¹²⁸ Women shoulder much of the burden of violence in Chechnya, especially after the media made infamous the Chechen “black widows,” but they are still less likely to be randomly targeted than men. Therefore, it is not the case that women such as Politkovskaya and Estemirova were exceptionally adept at changing the circumstances of their fellow citizens on the ground, but that they were some of the only members of the population who stood a chance to do so from the beginning without immediately forfeiting their lives.

Bullets and intimidation are silencing the voices of reason in Chechnya.¹²⁹ These voices have, if not efficiently changed the reality on the ground, added valuable information and dialogue to the current discussion of human rights in the area. Much of this discussion can be looked at as a reality-check on how human rights are seen within the large-scale global context, and how they actually manifest themselves on the ground. Western countries have long been

¹²⁷ Conley, B. (2004). For the women of Chechnya , hope dies last, 3(3), 331–342.

¹²⁸ Conley, B. (2004).

¹²⁹ Bullets Silence Voice of Reason. (1998). Retrieved from <http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol9/galina.html>

able to pick and choose which human rights issues matter to them, leading to them being able to intervene in situations which most suit their goals at that time. In this way, they are able to retain a reputation of being ethically conscious, while purposefully ignoring or downplaying the issues that they do not want to address.¹³⁰ Part of this can be written off as the inability of a few countries to police the entire world in regards to every single human rights crises; such a situation is not possible, and even if it was, such work would most likely be delegated to an institution like the United Nations.

Female human rights advocates in Chechnya have been working with issues on a local basis, creating a localized breadth of human rights issues and responses. The “localization” of human rights allows people to examine and work with human rights issues in their own communities without having to relate those efforts and results to the broader spectrum of human rights in the international context. Area-unique approaches appeal to area-specific senses of morality and tradition. As such, they are often critiqued by those who support a universalistic idea of human rights, which is part of a larger tension between local cultures and universalistic human rights in general. In Politkovskaya’s writing, it does not seem that she attempts to spread universalistic human rights theory; her writing focuses more on the simple morality and regard for human existence that she believes is being disregarded by the state. As mentioned before, Politkovskaya is Russian-centric, avoiding drawing upon outside histories and examples when making her point. Following in this vein, she rarely invokes the cause of human rights in an international context, choosing instead to focus solely on how human rights and their abuses manifest themselves in Russia.

¹³⁰ Chandler, D. (2002). *From Kosovo to Kabul: Human Rights and International Intervention*. Sterling, VA: Pluto Press.

The women discussed in this chapter excel at dissecting and working within the “moral adhesive” that links communities within Russia and the Chechen region.¹³¹ They do not ignore the deep cultural and religious ties that have created these communities over time, which is a pitfall that many outsiders succumb to. At the same time, they do not create elaborate excuses based on traditional beliefs and norms, to explain away the abuses that occur. One reason for this might be that the abuses occurring are often perpetrated by an over-zealous, authoritarian government, not by local communities acting on traditional motives. An example of their consideration of traditional attitudes can be seen in how they advocate for the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers and for the role of mothers in the conflict in general. Politkovskaya respected the fact that the Committee at times advocates for working outside the law to ensure the safe return home of young army conscripts.¹³² Estemirova and her fellow female journalists often lauded the bravery of mothers and women in Chechnya, who were doing the crucial work of holding together a society which Russian and Chechen men were, more often than not, trying to tear apart. One reporter described his meeting with Estemirova, and wrote that her opinion was that,

“The real heroes of this war, she said, were the women who assumed the burden of saving the nation, who pulled their men out of dungeons and who gave milk and bread to the Russian soldiers who did not try to rape and kill them.”¹³³

The role of women, particularly the traditional mother, has held a revered spot in Russian

¹³¹ Jacobsen, M., & Lawson, S. (1999). Between Globalization and Localization: A Case Study of Human Rights Versus State Sovereignty. *Global Governance*, 5(2), 203–219.

¹³² Politkovskaya, A. (2001). *A Dirty War*. London: The Harvill Press.

¹³³ Harding, L. (2009). Who Shot Natalia Estemirova. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/23/chechnya-natalia-estemirova>

culture. By recognizing this and by writing about the strength of such women, they are able to write in a way which relates to the more traditional members of their audience.

By focusing on these women through a feminist political lens, we can ascertain how their approach to human rights in Chechnya specifically addressed the issues of women, how it did so, and what implications their work had for the role of women in general. As previously stated, little changed on the ground as a result of these women's work. There were simply too many obstacles and officials willing to obstruct their efforts. However, the words and stories put forth by these women did advocate for women in a way which few other did. One of the ways that they did this was by focusing in on human rights issues that specifically impacted women, primarily the large scale rape of Chechen women by Russian soldiers, as well as the increasing limitations being forced on women by the Kadyrov regime. Tanya Lokshina, in an interview, defended the right of women to have religious freedom and leave the house with their heads uncovered. When asked about the rising number of paintball attacks on women who went into public spaces without their headscarves, she said,

“With regard to the paintball attacks on women who wouldn't wear headscarves, he [Kadyrov] said that if he found the individuals responsible for the attacks (law enforcement and security officials were among the perpetrators) he would give them an award. He said that the women who were shot at deserved to be treated that way. This is a clear signal of encouragement for these barbaric tactics.”¹³⁴

Lokshina went on to use these events to display how freedom of religion was clearly being

¹³⁴ Michele, J. (2011). Murder and Abudction in Chechnya - Interview with Tanya Lokshina. Retrieved from <https://www.asafeworldforwomen.org/global-news/europe/russia/654-tanya-lokshina.html>

disregarded in Chechnya, and that the Russian government was content to have its citizens civil liberties brazenly ignored, as long as the authoritarian regime in Chechnya continued to do the Kremlin's bidding. In this way, Lokshina used a "women's issue," – the wearing of headscarves – to illustrate a greater argument for civil liberties and the corruption that exists within the wider Russian political institution.

Politkovskaya and the other women also recognize that, while rape is typically labeled as a human rights issue, as it should be, in Chechnya it takes on a genocidal quality due to the conservative culture of the region. In one report, Politkovskaya described a harrowing experience of a group of teenage girls who had been brutally beaten and sexually abused by Russian soldiers. When they were eventually found by a kindly woman, she had them transported to her own house, and then, under the secrecy of night, transported to several different localities so that nobody would know where they were. The reason for this was the local traditions followed by some Chechen families, whereupon if a girl was raped, they would, "*assuredly die from the very hands of the men of their families.*"¹³⁵ Some believe that the widespread rape of Chechen women was, and is, part of a genocidal policy by the Russian military, who count upon local customs to drive Chechen men to murder those women in their family who had been raped, in order to preserve their families honor.¹³⁶ The ability of female advocates and journalists to report on these specific issues and advocate for women, when so many others seemed only to be focused on the role of potential terrorism and insurgency within Chechnya, is an example of women trying to protect and support other women in their community against primarily male forces, an effort which is undeniably linked with feminist sentiment.

¹³⁵ Lacassagne, A. (n.d.). **Controlling the Russian Soldiers' Mothers and Chechen Mothers The Story of a Hidden War.** *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, 159–169.

¹³⁶ Lacassagne, A. (n.d.).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Anna Politkovskaya's writings on the Chechen conflict established her as the primary crusader of human decency in Chechnya. Her collection of reports is still the definitive work that is looked to as having captured evidence of the cruelty and state-sponsored corruption that destroyed countless lives. It is difficult to hold international interest in any one area for too long, yet Politkovskaya managed to keep the world's attention on Chechnya for several years during the worst of the conflict. The presence of a somewhat watchful eye on the conflict perhaps tempered events in Chechnya, but it cannot be denied that international, and even domestic Russian attention, wavered and eventually dissipated after the Second Chechen War ended. Politkovskaya's tragic death raised concern about the issues once again, but this time those concerns were not solely about the abuses in Chechnya, but about the freedom of the press and the state of political corruption in the Kremlin. The issue of human rights in Chechnya, as a distinct issue, has largely been absent from the press since the death of Politkovskaya. The exceptions to this are when reporters or advocates within Chechnya are killed, such as Estemirova. At that point, the international press once again devotes space to mourn the activist and provide a brief overview of the state of affairs in the region, only to move on to other issues within a few days.

Interestingly, Politkovskaya provided no clear solutions for how to handle the conflict in her reports. She refrained from giving high-handed political and military advice, and stuck to what she considered her primary responsibility; reporting the truth of what she experienced and saw around her. Scholar Thomas de Waal noted that her work did not offer any solutions to the broad ranging conflict, it was "*the nearest thing yet written to a correct diagnosis.*"¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Politkovskaya, A. (2001). *A Dirty War*. London: The Harvill Press.

Politkovskaya believed that her role as a journalist was to advocate for a better world by exposing the realities of the one that people in Chechnya were living in; but her advocacy took the form of writing plain-spoken articles, not lobbying the government or trying to create a human rights movement within Russia. As such, she did not leave behind a concrete advocacy network that could continue her work. She conducted her work as an individual, and while she was in the employ of *Novaya Gazeta*, that organization was responsible for financially supporting her, not for creating a network of support around her. Politkovskaya did have a close group of friends and like-minded women, such as Estemirova, but these women provided support on a much more personal level rather than being the foundation of an actual movement. The personal support that these reporters gave each other is unique to women. Estemirova wrote that those in their group were thoughtful and trustworthy, and continued to meet in locations that were insecure, such as their bombed-out apartments, in order to take advantage of one another's company.¹³⁸ Much of the bonding that occurs between women such as centers around maternal experiences. As mentioned before, being a mother is a traditionally revered aspect of Russian and Chechen culture, and is something that sets the role of women apart from that of men. This is not to say that Politkovskaya and her cohort believed that a woman's role was solely to reside within the domestic sphere, but the fact that most of them had children, and were often raising them on their own, provided fodder for friendship and understanding between them.

There is no official human rights group, or set strategy that Anna Politkovskaya left behind. There is no blueprint for the next generation of activists to follow. What she did leave behind is a small, but passionate, group of women who are willing to sacrifice their lives to bring

¹³⁸ Estemirova, N. (2007). *The Courage of Anna Politkovskaya*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/courage-anna-politkovskaya/>

attention to the continuing tragedies that plague their community. What begun as a hope to bring about change in the larger community though, has turned into a fight for survival in which their best hope for change lies in simply staying alive another day. Such is the case with Elena Milashina, a reporter for *Novaya Gazeta* who took up Politkovskaya's work after her death. Milashina is the latest human rights prodigy to make Chechnya the focal point of her work, and because of this her life has come under constant threat.¹³⁹ Her reporting has covered a large amount of topics related to human rights in Chechnya, but she, like other women, has lent a special voice to the plight of women, particularly underage girls being forced into marriages they do not consent to. In response to the numerous public threats she received, Milashina said,

*"...saying I'll be killed and it's been decided.... It's a new sort of a death threat—not by phone, not by SMS, not by email but rather published in a state-sponsored media outlet....It's an attempt to silence me by threats, death threats actually, to prevent me from continuing my Chechnya reporting."*¹⁴⁰

The increasing brazenness of the open threats against reporters' lives has made reporting from Chechnya a job that few are willing to do. Those who do choose this path often quote Politkovskaya as an inspiration, while understanding that mirroring the work she did while alive could result in mirroring the way in which she died.

Despite the ferocity and intense ethos of Anna Politkovskaya's reports, it is unlikely that her work will have a long term impact on human rights in Chechnya. Too many people are convinced that the condition of human rights there has improved since the Second Chechen War, to the degree where outside intervention and observation is no longer required. Large NGOs

¹³⁹ Lokshina, T. (2016). *"Like Walking a Minefield": Vicious Crackdown on Critics in Russia's Chechen Republic.*

¹⁴⁰ Lokshina, T. (2016).

such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch still release reports on the area from time to time, but as the Kremlin's hostility to Western NGOs has increased in the past few years, these reports are toothless, as the organizations do not have power to effect change on the ground. Advocates and activists within Chechnya often partner with these larger organizations, which serve as an international platform for their reporting, which otherwise would have a difficult time being published in Russia. An example of this is the 2016 report on crackdowns against dissidents in Chechnya that Tanya Lokshina wrote, and which was published by Human Rights Watch.¹⁴¹ While reports such as these are useful for reminding the international community of the actual condition of things in Chechnya, in and of themselves they are unable to enact any change.

Over the course of the last two decades, women in Chechnya have been forced to take responsibility for the survival of their immediate families, and for the well-being of their larger communities. Chechen women have suffered both physically and rhetorically at the hands of the Russians. Chechnya has some of the highest and most gruesome reports of rape induced by conflict, and this issue has hardly disappeared since the official end of the war.¹⁴² Rape is still used as an intimidation tactic by government forces, and is extremely effective. In addition to this, the state-controlled Russian press has played an active role in stoking the fear of the infamous "Black Widows," the small group of female Chechen suicide bombers who became an obsession of many news groups during the early 2000s.¹⁴³ The Russian state has emphasized that *all* Chechen women have the potential to be, or become, "black widows," and by doing this

¹⁴¹ Lokshina, T. (2016).

¹⁴² Lacassagne, A. (n.d.). Controlling the Russian Soldiers' Mothers and Chechen Mothers The Story of a Hidden War. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, 159–169.

¹⁴³ Lacassagne, A. (n.d.).

they have driven a wedge of differentiation between Chechen and Russian women.¹⁴⁴ Russian women have been sorted into the traditional role of the defenseless female, while Chechen women are posed as being threatening and barbaric. The division of the women of Russia into these two camps has weakened the empathetic ties that normally exist between a society's women. Under normal circumstances, reading about women who have suffered extreme loss, such as the death of their children and husbands, or the loss of their home, would evoke empathy in a female audience. However, when Chechen women are framed as the enemy, that empathy in the female audience is harder to come by.

The pattern of women working within the context of human rights has created an increased level of social awareness within Chechen society, but the freedom of women itself has decreased since the Second Chechen War. Women form the backbone of community events and are the central point of the traditional family. While most Chechen families adhere to patrimonial lineage traditions, the responsibility of passing down cultural heritage and taking care of the domestic sphere usually falls to the women. Nationalist and patriotic movements around Europe in the 18th centuries relegated the job of creating a sense of patriotism within the family environment to mothers. The important work of outlining social norms, proper behavior, and expectations that children should have of those they associated with, all began at home.¹⁴⁵ In Chechnya, this role has undergone an expansion, whereupon women are also the primary providers of vocal resistance against oppression, an activity which is often done on behalf of other members of their family, typically male, who cannot vocalize for their own rights. The difference between the role of women in previous nationalist movements and the role of many

¹⁴⁴ Lacassagne, A. (n.d.).

¹⁴⁵¹⁴⁵ Sluga, G. (2006). Identity, gender, and the history of European nations and nationalisms, 4(1).

women in Chechnya today is that, in the 18th century the political participation and activism of women was heavily suppressed.¹⁴⁶ Most human rights-related political activity in Chechnya is suppressed by the current government, but this is not unique towards women. If anything, women have more leeway than men to protest their rights, as they are seen as less threatening by the patriarchal regime. Women's increasing visibility as the primary activists within Chechnya has begun to create some level of social change, though not on the grand scale that many had hoped for.

Human rights reports coming out of Chechnya depict a region governed by corruption and arbitrary punishment, one that is swift to crack down on any person who vocalizes dissatisfaction with the Kadyrov regime. In one of the Human Rights Watch's recent reports on Chechnya, the list of recommendations that the Russian government must complete in order to restore order and an acceptable level of human rights to the area is extensive.¹⁴⁷ Some of these recommendations include the following,

“Ensure Chechen authorities put an immediate end to the crackdown on free expression by Chechen authorities.

Ensure Chechen authorities immediately stop collective punishment and public humiliation practices in Chechnya.

Ensure victims have effective access to meaningful remedies and accountability mechanisms for violations of human rights, including cruel and degrading treatment, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, punitive house- burnings, and other violations perpetrated by security services and law enforcement agencies.

Bring perpetrators of abuses to justice and ensure transparency regarding investigations

¹⁴⁶ Sluga, G. (2006).

¹⁴⁷ Lokshina, T. (2016).

and/or prosecutions undertaken, including their outcome.”¹⁴⁸

This is only a small sample of the recommendations, but these show that Chechens are suffering from the lack of a basic level of human rights and civil liberties, even in comparison with the rest of Russian citizens elsewhere in the country. As a result of this, it has been hard for activists to point to significant triumphs or improvements in the situation, around which they could possibly rally more support.

In spite of the lack of visible improvement in the area of human rights, more and more news concerning the state of the situation in Chechnya is getting out of the region. Due to an increase in technological advances and the popularity of social media and messaging apps, it does not take professionals like Politkovskaya to make the outside world aware of what is happening. A recent example of this is Ayshat Inayeva, a social workers who was forced to appear on state television and apologize to the nation after it was discovered that she used a messaging app to complain about the number of Chechens who were going hungry due to the ineptitude of the Kadyrov regime.¹⁴⁹ Although this was a small act, it resulted in a humiliating form of punishment, wherein she was forced to recant and label herself as crazy on state television, a program in which her husband also verbally abused and humiliated her on camera.¹⁵⁰ Not only was this spectacle meant to deter activists, but it was also an encouragement for men to control their wives. Reports of this resulted in several protests overseas, in which Chechen immigrants made it clear that they were keeping an eye on developments in their homeland, and were prepared to be vocal when those developments went south.

¹⁴⁸ Lokshina, T. (2016).

¹⁴⁹ Traill, K. (2016). No TitleChechen families threatened after immigrants in Austria protest against dictator Ramzan Kadyrov’s crackdown on dissenters. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-09/chechen-immigrants-protest-against-dictator-ramzan-kadyrov/7077984>

¹⁵⁰ Traill, K. (2016).

Women in Chechnya itself have been subject to an increase in religious-based traditionalism, resulting in stricter dress codes and fewer opportunities for women outside of the home. While religion played a role in the war, the impact that stringent Islam had on the day to day lives of most women was minimal due to the difficulty of simply surviving during wartime. Now that peace has been established, Kadyrov's administration has been pushing for a more conservative role for women in Chechnya. This type of role would put social limits on how women can interact within society, and would likely have a profound impact on the physical ability of women to organize against the regime. Female activists in the past were essential in the attempt to hold both the Kremlin and the Chechen government accountable, and their efforts, though ultimately futile, brought outside attention to the human rights abuses occurring, which at least fostered international criticism of Putin. New restrictions on women and constant purging of dissidents will likely erase the progress that was made in the early and mid-2000s.

Forecast:

Anna Politkovskaya's work is a unique example of one woman's singular quest for justice in an environment that seemed to be without a social conscience. Her writing and narrative style enabled harrowing stories to make it out of Chechnya with their integrity and subtleties intact. While Politkovskaya drew clear moral lines within her work, the victims that she wrote about were always portrayed in a realistic way, however vulgar or unpalatable their actions and life choices may have been. Despite their personal failings, Politkovskaya did not presume to pass judgement on them, but instead wrote about them as real people, instead of placeholders for a general idea of what a "perfect victim" should be. Her realistic portrayal of events in Chechnya also extended to the perpetrators of violence; she conducted interviews with generals and conscripts of the Red Army, as well as with elements of Chechen rebel groups,

resulting in a well-rounded collection of reports from all angles of the conflict. Her narrative style also reflected an awareness and enthusiastic usage of Russian history and traditional literary references. Echoes of these aspects of her writing can be seen in the work of the women who worked with her and the women who came after her, though Politkovskaya, as the “first” of her kind in relation to her reporting on Chechnya, has always been given more regard than those equally vital women who are still fighting today.

Through the lens of feminist political theory, Politkovskaya’s work can be seen as a monumental achievement for women in Russia, both in the field of journalism and in the field of advocacy. Women are typically devoid of any real mouthpiece with which to criticize the state, which results in phenomena like Pussy Riot, that are more likely to illicit anger and mockery within Russian society than they are to change the status quo. Politkovskaya brought to the table an anger that is similar to the ribald emotion that the world has seen in infamous groups like Pussy Riot, but she channeled it and expressed that anger in a way that is more likely to resonate with the general populace. Unfortunately, the world’s interest could not be held by those who followed in her footsteps, although their writing was of a similar caliber. The inability of Politkovskaya’s reporting to jumpstart an effective movement of advocacy was not her failing, but the failing of a society that was easily placated and distracted by the false veneer of improvement in Chechnya.

Anna Politkovskaya was indisputably at the forefront of modern conflict reporting. Her work on human rights is regarded as the preeminent example of resistance against Putin in the early 2000s, and she inspired many women to take up similar calls for human decency after she was murdered. Regarding the question of whether or not her gender played a role in her work, there cannot be any doubt that it influenced both her own work and how others received it. From

the general negative perceptions of “women’s journalism,” to issues of gender-imbalance within Chechnya itself, Politkovskaya was faced with hurdles that men, simply put, would never have to consider. Her work let these dissimilarities in her experiences in Chechnya shine through.

Though she did not consider her own writing to be better due to the vantage point of her gender, the reports that she published were so unique and raw and unlike anything that the men that had come before her had published, that her gender is a reasonable place to look when assigning some of the credit for the way that she translated her experiences into paper and ink.

Politkovskaya was not a conscious pioneer of feminism, but her work is proof of the absolute necessity of women’s voices in human rights advocacy and discourse today.

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