



Domestic Violence and Murder of a Transgender Women in Russian Media (the Case of Anzhela Likina)

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Abstract

Purpose This article explores the notion of domestic violence in one of the most media-rich debates around transgender issues in Russia. Anzhela Likina's murder brought a lot of attention of various outlets from the social media to the federal TV channels. I aim to queer this very notion basing my critique on the case of her murder and the debate that followed afterwards.

Methods I analyse the discourse on family violence as it is given in the publications about the murder of Likina and comments under these publications. I identified 82 media reports on the murder and the following trial. My approach to the reading of these reports, comments and a TV-programme is discourse analysis. Hence, I am looking at power relations which constituted these narratives.

Results In February 2016 Anzhela was stabbed to death by the partner of her ex-wife Gulnara. The murderer built his defence arguing that he killed Anzhela to punish her for beating Gulnara. A detailed look at the media publications reflects that this was a narrative strategy to get a lighter sentence. In turn Anzhela's mother and sister accused Gulnara of being violent to Anzhela and their two daughters which constitutes another facet of family violence narratives. Based on my analysis of media reports I argue that domestic violence is instrumentalised as a narrative justification for further violence.

Conclusions I uncover the various kinds of violence that Anzhela had to endure on different levels: state violence, societal violence, police violence, domestic violence, and media violence towards her both while she was alive and after her murder. These various kinds of violence amplify one another as the analysis of discourse around them shows.

Keywords Transgender women · Violence against LGBTIQ+ people · Murder · Domestic violence · Anzhela Likina

Introduction

As I write these lines the Russian Duma has approved one of the most cruel anti-transgender legislations to date (Duma, 2023). Under this new law transgender people in Russia will be denied both trans-specific surgeries and hormone therapy; the certificates of those who have gone through the transition but who did not yet manage to arrange a change in the official documents will no longer be valid; guardianship and adoption of their children will be prohibited. Transgender people will face further discrimination as they are now deprived of access to adequate healthcare, the right to privacy, and legal protections of their family. The harsh reality

that most transgender people in Russia have lived in their everyday lives is being set in stone by the law defended by the violent intervention of the Russian state. As will follow from the text below the late protagonist of it experienced herself all these atrocities way before the State Duma had formalised its transphobic attitude.

This article aims to explore just one tragic story that brings together a myriad of different topics and examines the very notion of violence: state violence, societal violence, police violence, domestic violence, and media violence. It is based on an example of the misfortunes of a transgender woman, Anzhela Likina, murdered in Russia in 2016. Before I proceed, I would like to highlight that this story deals with sensitive and potentially triggering materials in order to analyze a violent action resulting in the death of a person, as well as the hate speech, misgendering, and other forms of verbal and physical attacks which Anzhela Likina had to deal with during her life and that were only

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incremented in the discussions following her death. Despite the fact that I myself had to flee Russia due to political persecution and went through a tough and alienating asylum system (Shtorn, & Kondakov, 2023) I find it necessary to acknowledge that as a cis man I am conscious that I am writing and exploring a story of a murdered transgender woman, and I genuinely want to be respectful to her memory and honour her. I perceive this research as a tribute to her and all the others who were affected by the violence against LGBTIQ+ people in Russia and beyond.

In the first days of February 2016 Anzhela Likina (TDoR, 2016), a well-known on RuNet (Russian Internet), transgender woman was stabbed to death in her garage in the city of Ufa (Republic of Bashkortostan, Russian Federation) where she worked as a car mechanic. Anzhela Likina became famous in 2014 when she was filmed by a road police officer's dash cam checking her documents and finding out that her driving license had a male name and gender assigned to her at birth. The video got almost 2 million views in just a few days (Bashdtp, 2014) and provoked a big debate in social media about how the state authorities as represented by police officers humiliate transgender people, on the one hand, and generated a lot of hatred towards LGBTIQ+ community in general and Anzhela Likina herself, on the other. Few days later, shocked by the number of messages that she received on her social media accounts Anzhela published a statement where she asked people to ignore her and – instead of wasting their time talking about her – dedicate it to safety on the road (Dubrovskaya, 2016).

When the news about Anzhela's murder spread initially, LGBTIQ+ community organizations decided that it was a hate crime (Lenta.ru 2016), while journalists wrote that she was killed by her lover. Nonetheless it became clear later that Anzhela was killed by Dmitry Alexandrov, then de-facto partner of Anzhela's ex-wife Gulnara. Despite their divorce, Anzhela lived in the same house as Gulnara and their two daughters. After being arrested for Anzhela's murder Alexandrov claimed that the attack was an accident and that his intention was to punish her for regularly beating Gulnara, who actively backed this claim. The perpetrator and the victim's ex-wife tried to justify his actions based on the domestic violence defence. Nonetheless it became known that Dmitry with his friends had already once physically attacked Anzhela. He had also regularly abused her verbally. This evidence cast doubt on the entire argument built by Dmitry and Gulnara. A few months later prominent independent Russian media *Meduza* also reported that the murder could have been connected to a significant amount of money Anzhela collected for her surgical operation (Turovsky, 2016).

As the case progressed, Anzhela's mother and sister accused Gulnara of being a bad and violent parent and

stated that the only person who cared about their girls was Anzhela. They tried to take away Anzhela's daughters from Gulnara, arguing that she was leaving them alone for weeks. This claimed neglect constitutes another facet of family violence. Anzhela's sister confessed that Anzhela had asked her to take care of the girls (understanding that the Russian state would not allow Anzhela herself to do so because she was a transgender person) while Anzhela would help to support them financially. Anzhela's mother and sister also stated that Gulnara and her partner Dmitry were violent to Anzhela and the girls, citing that even after Anzhela was murdered her ex-wife did not allow the daughters to come to her funeral.

This short description allows us to look at family violence from a queer perspective (Butler, 2004). Violence is performed in the action of every single individual of this story as an accusation of its commitment or as an action. In both cases invocation is justified by appealing to social norms of self-defence, punishment, fight for resources (house, savings, etc.). On a societal level, I look at the violent environment of Anzhela's life after she became a "public" figure. Then, I analyse how private "family violence" was used as a defence argument that could somehow excuse the murder of a supposed "perpetrator". Thus, each of the actors of this tragedy would argue that the motive of their violence was to protect themselves from domestic violence. For the sake of protection from violence, they would use violence, including in its most ultimate form of a murder. Finally, as I analyse Anzhela's story in detail based on the media reports about her murder I highlight how different forms of violence against transgender people are being injected into the media narratives: from misgendering to direct hatred and justification of the murder. Dmitry considers the domestic violence allegation as a good defence strategy, most likely because by the authorities Anzhela is perceived as a "queer" male person. Hence, my research question is: Do the prevailing narratives about transgender women in Russia ignore these women's exposure to dangers and exclusions as feminised persons in a heteronormative society, while simultaneously also lacking discursive recognition of transgender women as women when it comes to arguments of self-defence against domestic violence?

My article is based on the analysis of media outlet publications about the murder of Anzhela Likina as well as comments under those publications. I identified those publications using Sexuality Lab. Database of Russian media publications on violence against LGBT population that my colleagues and I were involved in creating in 2016–2017. The Database includes web-sites entries, newspaper, and journal articles from the larger Integrum database for the period from 2011 to 2016. The researchers of Sexuality Lab. explained that each entry they included in the database had to satisfy the following criteria:

- (1) the publication is from Russian media (SMI);
- (2) the publication is about violence;
- (3) the publication notes the sexuality of the victims of violence as lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, or transgender persons;
- (4) the episode of violence was committed in Russia.’ (Sexuality Lab. 2018).

Using the database, I extracted 311 entries on the murder of Anzhela Likina even though many of them are repetitive, containing the same text informing readers about the crime committed in Ufa against Anzhela Likina.

To get access to substantial materials about the incident with the road policemen and to analyse the texts of the publications, I additionally used Google search. I selected media reports on the incident with the road policemen, the murder and following trial. These reports included a TV programme “Govorim i Pokazyvaem” (“We discuss, and we show”) aired on the federal channel NTV with members of Anzhela’s family (her mother, sister, daughters, and ex-wife). Overall, my sample contained 82 substantial publications. The publications do not represent the full scale of the materials of the Likina’s case but illustrate the different types of publications about her: regional and federal (national) media outlets (including comments behind them where this option exists); social media blogs and forums usually hardly identifiable using google search; a TV-programme on the one of the main federal channels, NTV.

My approach to reading these reports, comments and the TV-programme is discourse analysis, where ‘a discourse is a way of talking about or representing something’ (Hall, 1996). Hence, based on Stuart Hall’s methodology I am looking at the power relations which constitute these representations. I also base my reading of those texts and the discourses that they represent on the methodological explorations that accompany queer studies since its very foundation. Kristen Schilts indicates that methodologically transgender studies as part of the broader queer approach have been pushed to the sociological margins. Hence those engaging in the problematics have to show resistance in overpassing an “attempt to erect boundaries against an emerging area of inquiry (...) that pushes up against an established canon of theoretical frame” (2018 p. 39). My research is also marginal, if not marginalised, as it may have not enough contextual or even factual information regarding the life of transgender women in Ufa; methodologically it also relies on research done often in different contexts that may not always translate to the case that I am trying to examine. Even within Russian studies these topics need further elaboration, discussion, and research.

Life and Death of Anzhela Likina

Life and death of Anzhela Likina occurred in Ufa. The city of Ufa consists of just over one million inhabitants and is the capital of one of the federal subjects of the Russian Federation: The Republic of Bashkortostan. Situated on the river Volga, Bashkortostan is a very diverse region bordering with the Republics of Tatarstan and Udmurtia, as well as with several Ural regions to the East and South. Regarding the LGBTIQ+ community, Bashkortostan is rather famous with its transgender people: for example, in 2020, a transgender woman from Bashkortostan became a participant in a famous reality show and tried to build a “normalized” picture of herself being a transgender woman there (Zabolotnaya, & Wiedlack, 2022). Also, The Alliance of Heterosexuals and LGBT for Equality (Russia) used to have its brunch in Ufa.

As for the rather scarce social research of LGBTIQ+ lives in Russia our knowledge is almost always limited by the research that was conducted in the two most populous and resourceful cities, Moscow and Petersburg (Kondakov, 2013; Soboleva, Bakhmetiev 2015), which used to have until very recently LGBTIQ+ specific community centres and advocacy groups, night clubs, film festivals and so on. However, as some transgender scholars have pointed out, those resources were rather exclusionary for transgender people (Kirei-Sitnikova 2016). Overall, it was a life under state sponsored homophobia (Kondakov, 2019), “anti-gay propaganda” law, but those two cities were a sort of oasis in the Russian snowy desert during the first two decades of the 21st century.

In 2012 in Bashkortostan, and one year later all over the Russian Federation, “anti-gay propaganda” law was enacted and designated non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals as a sort of pariahs or agents of western influence. This was an openly discriminatory legislation which contributed to the level of violence against LGBTIQ+ people and generally closeted them back due to increased dangers (Kondakov, 2021; Kondakov, 2022; Kondakov and Shtorn, 2021; Shtorn, 2017; Shtorn, 2018). In addition to this generally homophobic environment, the intersection of living in a smaller place and being a transgender person makes life even more dangerous. The overall resources for the LGBTIQ+ community are distributed disproportionally between the city centres of Moscow, Peterburg and a few other big Russian cities, at the expense of the rest of country’s immense territory. In his article in memoriam of Anzhela Likina, Jose Alaniz focused on a completely different topic (he analyses queer comics in Russia) intuitively drew this line and put it perfectly in words, pointing out these subtle differences between urban Russian queer culture and the other reality:

It's safe to say "Vasya's Not Gay!" could not have existed in Russian comics in the 1990s, or even a few years before it appeared on the internet—to say nothing of its publication in an academic journal funded by Moscow taxpayer funds in the year of the "anti-gay propaganda" law. It presumes a level of matter-of-fact sophistication and comfort with queer identities ("You can't become gay. You have to be born that way" [122]) and terminology (e.g., orientatsiya [161], genderkvir) which belies the painful realities for many queer people in Russia. It goes without saying that at most the story represents a sliver of the community—deep-pocketed, Western-leaning, urban—not the flesh-and-blood Anzhela Likinas struggling to survive. (Alaniz 2022)

In other words, even before the introduction of this cruel 2023 legislation directly targeting transgender people in today's Russia, they have been de facto deprived of their most basic rights. The Report of The Transgender Legal Defence Project prepared in 2017 highlighted the challenges that transgender people had already experienced back then: access to transition-related health care services; experience of high levels of discrimination in the workplace and in the healthcare system; and "even though the current Russian legislation and practice do allow change of transgender persons' documentation, there is **no quick, transparent and accessible procedure for legal gender recognition**" (Report, 2017, emphasis original). In addition, other researchers indicated that trans people could be deprived of their parental rights (Ashuha, & Nevzgodina, 2016); and that their gender is not taken into account in case of imprisonment (Zvonova, 2019). Overall, the everyday life of transgender people in Russia (Korsi, 2017; Ushkova & Kireev, 2017) is challenging in all aspects: from access to public or commercial services, like banks, to issues with border control while leaving or entering Russia where an official ID is required, and it is increasingly problematic (Yashenkova, & Kirichenko, 2016). Forced to remain at the very margins of society transgender people can only rely on their own networks of support such as each other, their families where those families did not reject transgender relatives and some activists or other LGBTIQ+ support initiatives.

This geographical context of the everyday difficulties faced by transgender people in Russia help to better understand the isolated existence of Anzhela, who worked in her own garage as a car repairer. The garage was situated in the same building where she lived with her daughters and ex-wife. Anzhela Likina became "famous" as a "funny" meme in Russia after a small episode between her and road safety inspectors. The police officer looked a bit confused as he peered alternately at the photo in the document and then at

the woman sitting beside him, then back to the document and again back to the woman. He finally asked her if she was the person in the photo and if the documents actually belonged to her. After Anzhela confirmed her identity, the police officer gave back her driving licence and let her go. He did not charge her with any fines. Right after Anzhela left the car, another police officer who witnessed the situation from outside, joined his colleague in the car. Both cis men started laughing out loud, commenting that "he looks like a real pussy". The video spread out on the Russian segment of the internet in an instant.

All these details are known to hundreds of thousands or even millions of people, just because this incident was filmed by a road safety authority camera which is installed in every road police car for internal use only. These cameras were introduced by the Russian government in order to prevent corruption and abuse of power (Russian road police are notorious for bribery). Nonetheless the video, despite the official regulations that should have prevented it, ended up on the internet and became viral. Anzhela was quickly identified by the public through her social media accounts and started receiving insults and threats both privately and publicly. Multiple journalists also requested interviews with Anzhela about herself and about the incident. Overall, such an attention made her feel very intimidated. She claimed that it was her private matter and that her gender was no one's business, but obviously it would only give haters more reasons to attack her. She wrote on her page on vk.com:

People die in accidents, children suffer, cars are stolen, it takes blood to save someone's life... Gentlemen, why are you breaking the record for likes and reposts about me? Honestly, I don't get it. I don't care how you live or what you do or anything else. As long as everyone is alive, healthy and happy. And my life has absolutely nothing to do with you (Zvezda.ru 2016).

Her cry is an attempt to protect herself from societal abuse by presenting the argument of privacy: her gender is her private thing and should not be of anyone's concern; whereas real problems are corrupt road police officers not doing their job ("cars are stolen") and the state not financing health-care enough ("people die" and "children suffer"). Yet, she has not been heard by the internet masses. Following Butler (2004) I argue that the very fact of Anzhela's public exposure as a transgender person is an act of violent exposure to the eyes of internet commentators who cast her as "less-than-human". This means that she somehow was recognised but the terms of this very recognition made her life "unlivable". Thus, it was ultimately an act of societal violence.

Grieving a Monster

Since that cruel incident Anzhela had lived a life exposed to societal violence, becoming a meme at the very least, but certainly being ridiculed if not dehumanized. Paraphrasing Judith Butler we can perceive that sort of existence as an ungrievable one, where “an ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all” (Butler, 2009). Other transgender scholars would offer different forms of describing this state of societal exclusion or, to be more precise, this societal rejection as “less-than-human”, which at the same time contains in itself an interrogation of the societal norm or even of the social order, elaborating, creating, and even demonstrating the other possibilities of living. Eric Darnell Pritchard’s (2017) analysis of the disruption of rigid representations of race, gender, class, etc. in Dee Rees’ 2011 drama *Pariah* uses the word *pariah* to describe the subject of this rejection and resistance of the transgender body by the society. The queer perspective in a certain way presupposes the potential for resistance and reclaiming. Tija Uhlig for instance offers their own perspective of “the monstrous process of (un)becoming self/other, specified through the figuration of the genderqueer clown” (2021) that can help to perceive that exclusionary existence of Likina in Ufa assuming, probably involuntarily the role of the somehow liberated “clown”.

Another scholar Margrit Shieldrick (2002), following Stryker’s perception of transgender body as a Frankensteinian creature (1994) for instance, describes this body otherness as monstrous, where monster is not something to scare us, but to attract our attention. In the case of Anzhela this monstrosity as something that kept her out of the eyes of the public, but at the same time exacerbated the extreme interest in her, and fuelled a huge number of views of the notorious dashcam video.

On the TV programme “Govorim i pokazyvaem” (“We discuss, and we show”) on NTV, one of the major Russian TV broadcasters, members of Anzhela’s family – her daughters and ex-wife, her mother and sister – told that since that viral video Anzhela had barely left home (Govorim i Pokazyvaem 2016). As her garage where she worked was right in the house where she lived, she would always stay there or sit in her room watching TV or playing video games. She basically had to live in complete isolation, with no friends and no social life, and after the incident she had to avoid using her social media accounts too. As Alaniz (2022) pointed out “the flesh and blood Anzhela Likinas struggling to survive” shows the reality of complete societal rejection, forcing a transgender woman to remain under “voluntary” house arrest. In a city of one million inhabitants there was no community to help her and provide her with moral or physical

support as she sat alone in her room until she was stabbed to death. These conditions reflect not only the violence of her murderer, Dmitry, but another facet of the violence of Russian society, the violence of those people that were living in a proximity to Anzhela and were not there for her, who were at best indifferent to her isolation and endurance, but who probably made of her a clown, a pariah, a creature, a monster.

The point is supported by my analysis of the comments and publications that followed Anzhela Likina’s murder. The same lack of grief, of basic compassion to a murdered individual can be explained by the monstrousness which journalists of the federal TV channel assign to Anzhela by mocking her very essential way to appear in the gender of her choosing:

The ex-wife’s lover decided to kill the Internet star. The man dressed up in women’s clothes, called himself Anzhela, for which he paid the price. And now the relatives of [First name]¹-Angela want to severely punish his wife. The man was stabbed in the chest because he was getting in the way of his ex-wife. (Govorim i pokazyvaem 2016)

The language of media reflects a complete lack of understanding of the stories, struggles and experiences of trans community. The media shows how poor their vocabulary is, how confused they are when they mention anything about gender and sexuality. The misgendering, the lack of respect or compassion make Anzhela’s body, her life, her memory appear – in Butlerian terms – ungrievable. In an attempt to de-monstrify the transgender body, Anzhela’s “friends” would talk to the press only to be debunked by the media narratives of monstrosity:

Even the children suffered from their father’s unusual predilections, Ufa1.ru reports. “They would come back in tears, sometimes refused to go to school, but Anzhela loved her daughters and gave them a lot of time”, - noted the friends of the transsexual. (Dni.ru 2016)

In this quote, some unnamed Anzhela’s “friends” are trying to picture her as a good parent, while the journalist is devaluing these comments framing transgender identity as the source of children’s suffering due to “their father’s (sic!) unusual predilections”. It creates a context of talking about transgender people in Russia in a hostile way, so the murder that occurred looks like something completely logical,

¹ Unfortunately, the NTV uses here Likina’s first name together with her name after the transition. I decided not to reproduce this and substituted it with the [First name].

if not inevitable. The online comments following her murder reflect this perception of the death of a transgender person, this time appearing in the role of a “clown”: the body that can become a pretext for insulting jokes: “Ew bitch, if I were a cop I would give the car to dry-clean, after such a passenger!”² or whose very appearance might be “traumatizingly” monstrous:

And people like Anzhela bother me.

I feel *moral anguish* when I see them. I don't like it. What should I do? My rights have also been violated)))) Who will answer for this?

I see that everyone here is defending Anzhela, oh oh, how unhappy she is, and you are intolerant.

And if our moral rights are violated, who will be held responsible?

I also suffer when I see things like this. (Forum 2016)

These illustrations lack any grief and empathy and reflect the context that Anzhela was living in a context that doubtlessly contributed to the isolation and loneliness that she experienced in her everyday life in Ufa, prior to being murdered. Her murder is not just a criminal act committed by one human being towards the other. It is also a reflection of that structural violence that I describe here. The invisibility of transgender people and the challenges they face are illustrated by the lack of understanding comments, as well as the absence of supporting institutions, rights-based actions, and resources among civil society and LGBTIQ+ activists in Russia. But also, marginalization of transgender people is reflected in the inability to speak about and describe the suffering, the loneliness, the experiences of transgender people by the journalists, and at the same time by the cruelty and cynicism of social media users. Anzhela Likina had to live in this context of societal violence and had to hide from it at home. Yet, she was not safe there either. Home was not a shelter for her, probably no place was.

On the 1st of February 2016 Anzhela Likina was murdered in her garage while she was working there. Initially journalists wrote that she was killed by her lover. This reflects the immediate perception of transgender community as something necessarily sexualised and also criminal, too. What else can be associated with LGBTIQ+ people than sex that could not finish other than the way it did, with violence and murder:

According to Anzhela's neighbours, she was killed while she was in her home. The knife struck her in the heart area. However, death did not come immediately - the Ufa woman had time to call for help.

“She went to her neighbour, had time to tell him who did it,” says Anzhela's neighbour Olga. - And while the ambulance was coming, she died.“ According to unconfirmed information, Anzhela's lover could have been the killer. (Prufy.ru 2016)

Nonetheless it later became known that Anzhela was actually killed by her ex-wife's partner Dmitry, who had already once beaten Anzhela so severely that she ended up in hospital. Between Anzhela and Dmitry existed a not-so-unusual kinship. The murderer was dating Anzhela's ex-wife with whom she had two daughters before her gender transition. Here we witness a complex picture of family relationships. Anzhela was working in the garage, repairing cars. She started her own business before her transition, and as the business was successful and she enjoyed the work, she did not want to leave it, so she kept working as a car mechanic after transition. The garage she was working at formed part of the house that she had bought with Gulnara, for their girls. It is a spacious house, where Anzhela, after she separated from Gulnara, continued to live in her own private room. She wanted to be close to her daughters and as her garage was also there, it would not be possible for her to move out completely anyway, so she shared the house with her ex-wife and daughters. But despite being autonomous in that house, and having her own room, Anzhela still was not safe there. Since Gulnara started dating Dmitry it became obvious that he and Anzhela did not get on well, which led to a severe fight when Anzhela was seriously injured and could barely escape the violence of Dmitry. The state would dismiss such cases because it was perceived by the police as a sort of frivolous hooliganism. There are definitely similarities between this case and how women's complaints about domestic violence are treated by the police (Muravyeva, 2014; Muravyeva et al., 2020):

Friends of the murdered woman said that she dreamed of moving to Thailand, where transgender people are commonplace, but continued to “suffer” in Russia while waiting for her youngest daughter to grow up. Likina loved both girls very much and continued to support the whole family, working in her own auto shop located on the first floor of their house. Also, friends claim that [Surname]'s³ ex-wife does not work and is a hard drinker, but violence on the part of Angela-[First name]⁴ was out of the question, since who he had problems with was his ex-wife's friends

² A comment under the video (Bashdtp, 2014) made by @user-cp5eu-7wu3r in 2017.

³ The journalist Petr Kuznetsov is also using here Likina's family name before the transition. In order to keep consistency and not to reproduce it I substituted it with the [Surname].

⁴ Here he does the same with Anzhela's given name, and I use the [First name] instead as in the previous case with the NTV.

and, in fact, her current beau. The women's "drinking buddies" who came to visit allegedly insulted Likina and threatened her with violence, and once cut her finger in a fight. Six months ago, Aleksandrov and his tall companions beat up [Surname] who barely managed to escape. Still, there was no escape from the worst of it. (Kuznetsov 2016)

After being arrested for murder Dmitry claimed that the reason he killed Anzhela had nothing to do with her being a transgender woman. Against all the evidence and the history of violence against Anzhela he insisted that it was just an accident and that his intention was to punish Anzhela for being cruel to Gulnara. His strategy was to use the domestic violence argument as a defence to make him look like a protector rather than perpetrator, and to present the now forever silenced Anzhela as an abusing monster. While Anzhela's ex-wife confirmed this and actively supported the words of Dmitry which would save him from a harsher sentence. She claimed that after the divorce and transition Anzhela had not just kept living with her in the same house but also kept beating her when she had, as she would call it "nervous breakdowns". Nonetheless as it became known at the trial:

[Dmitry Aleksandrov] still claims that he attacked the victim out of revenge: [Surname] allegedly systematically beat his ex-wife, with whom Aleksandrov had a relationship. Meanwhile, the scandalous story acquires more and more details. So, according to the suspect, [Surname] beat out of his ex-wife money for his coveted sex-change operation. [Surname] dressed as a woman and took hormones, but still remained a pumped-up man, and the forces were obviously unequal. As previously reported, despite the fact that five years had passed since their divorce, Anzhela, his ex-wife and their two young daughters continued to live in the same house, which also made Aleksandrov terribly nervous. (Kuznetsov 2016)

There was no evidence of Anzhela's cruel behaviour towards Gulnara registered by the police or health services, otherwise it would be presented by the defence, while on the contrary there was evidence of Dmitry's cruel behaviour towards Anzhela herself. In this particular case the argument of domestic violence as the justification of a committed crime seems weak. Nonetheless, five months later, Dmitry was sentenced to 6,5 years at a corrective colony (Leonova, 2016) for the murder, which is a fairly mild sentence for such a crime. So against all the evidence the strategy that Dmitry and Gulnara picked has served their goal to soften the punishment.

The story of domestic violence and abuse in Anzhela's family does not finish here, though. Once Anzhela's death started the discussion in the Russian media about violence against LGBTIQ+ people, journalists were able to find out that Anzhela's mother and sister were trying to remove parental rights from Gulnara and adopt Anzhela's girls. Anzhela's sister said that Anzhela was staying at that home with Gulnara in order to protect the girls and to help them with their studies. Anzhela was convinced that the Russian state would never allow her to raise her daughters on her own, considering that she was a transgender person, but that was her dream, to take them from their mother, who was very bad to them and never cared about her children. Therefore, Anzhela's mother and sister tried to go to the court to accomplish Anzhela's last will and save her children from their mother. In the already mentioned TV programme on NTV nonetheless the girls did not agree with this and stated that they were always treated well by their mother and that people laughed at them at school but that they did not care, because they loved their father and missed him. Regardless of whose story is truthful, what was acknowledged there by the mother and the sister of the victim was that the girls did not in reality want to move in with them. So, the domestic violence can be an argument to soften the sentence for a murderer, but also as an argument for removing parental rights that can be used as a vengeance.

Conclusion

The story of Anzhela Likina structures a multidimensional narrative that ties different forms of violence together, from misgendering and insults to violent attacks and ultimately murder. These forms occur on societal and individual level and are perpetrated by various actors there. It also reveals the complexity and potential misuse of the very idea of domestic violence as a tool of vengeance or an argument of defence of a perpetrator that somehow makes domestic violence a justification of further violence. Yet, this narrative only works as a successful case of defence of a murderer when the social position of the victim is dismissed as ungrievable and monstrous. This is so in the case of transgender women in Russia. On the one hand, they are at risk of physical abuse for being "feminine". On the other hand, they are constructed as monsters and therefore viewed as capable of committing acts of violence, such as domestic violence. The way that power constitutes such narratives works in favour of the male perpetrator in the court room and against the transgender body. As Ki Namaste pointed out almost thirty years ago the increase in interest of queer theorists struggle in "connecting this research to the everyday lives of people who identify as transgender" (1996

p.208). Hence methodologically I focused on the details of the everyday life of Anzhela that could be extracted from publications about her, considering that she barely left her home and had a very isolated life, especially after the notorious video went viral.

Even though this text is based on just one story I aim to summarise the different forms of violence that transgender women experience in today's Russia. On a social level, the violent environment towards transgender people is being injected into media narratives. From social media to the federal TV channels, on a regional and national level, the language towards and perception of a murdered transgender woman was as not deserving grief in Butlerian terms. Transgender people are treated as monstrous and even after their death – in a rare case it gains public attention – their names, their past, their privacy could be violently exhibited and turned over as if they did not concern a human being but a monstrous creature, or a worthy-of-laugh clown.

These social narratives are supported by the state. State violence is expressed in the “gay propaganda” law which shuts down those few LGBTIQ+ organisations or independent media that inform about the real challenges that transgender people face in Russia. The state sponsored homophobia turns accessing public services, the healthcare system, and the police into systemic violence. The societal violence of the masses and state violence of these institutions have direct lineage to personal violence which Anzhela endured for some time but ultimately was a victim of. She was trapped at home as she tried to escape the outside violence and yet there, she was subjected to domestic violence. Just like for many LGBTIQ+ people in Russia and other countries, homes are not safe places for a transwoman. It is a matter of my deep personal responsibility to pay this humble tribute to Anzhela Likina and all the LGBTIQ+ people who did not survive all these levels of violence.

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