Moscow Goes Hollywood: The Russian Television Industry in the Global Age

by

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Abstract

This study examines ways that both authoritarian capitalism and global flows of culture have shaped the Russian television industry. This dissertation explores three main questions: How does the system of state-directed capitalism shape television production, particularly with regards to balancing propaganda and profit? What kinds of representations are possible on television in Russia under authoritarian capitalism? What is the relationship of the Russian television industry with other parts of the global media industry? To explore these questions, this dissertation examines the structure of the Russian television industry with particular attention given to the most important channels and production companies. In all cases, the relationship of these companies to both the Putin-led state and their level of integration with the global television marketplace is examined in-depth. Using a mix of semi-structured interviews with industry workers, analysis of industry trade journals, popular press and textual analysis, this dissertation examines four of the main television stations in the country all of whom have different relationships to the state. I argue that typical accounts of Russian media as merely serving the interests of the state are overly simplistic. The expectation that television channels or production companies linked to the ruling elite create programming that supports the Putin government's nation-building efforts while commercial stations use their platforms to criticize the status-quo is shown to be erroneous. State-owned and state-affiliated stations whose leadership has strong ties to Putin's inner circle often produce programming that represents key Russian institutions negatively while commercial networks generally produce apolitical programing unlikely to attract the attention of the state. Along with the internal dynamics of the Russian industry, this dissertation

examines the role that global media have played in the development of the Russian television industry in the post-Soviet era. The role of major western media companies in post-Soviet Russia is explored through a case study of Sony Television's expansion into Russia in the 2000s. This dissertation argues that contrary to theories of cultural imperialism prominent in the fields of political economy and cultural studies, the global television industry's strongest influence has not been in spreading Western values to Russia, but instead transferring industrial and production practices. Therefore, this project significantly complicates notions of how television industries function in an authoritarian capitalist state, with important implications for those examining media in other states with similar systems.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jeffrey Brassard. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Moscow Goes Hollywood: The Russian Television Industry in the Global Age", No. Pro00039744, 03/07/2013.

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Introduction

Soviet-era comedian Yakov Smirnoff famously joked that "in Russia, we only had two TV channels. Channel One was propaganda. Channel Two consisted of a KGB officer telling you: Turn back at once to Channel One."[1] While he was clearly exaggerating for comedic purposes, the Russian state's involvement with television has been and remains one of its central characteristics. In the post-Soviet era, television has been used by the Russian government to consolidate its hold over the Russian imagination. Even following the Russian Federation's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and the economic hardship caused by the imposition of sanctions by Western nations, Russian President Vladimir Putin's personal popularity rating has remained extremely high. Most Russians also support his project to return the country to a place of prominence and respect in the world. News and television drama disseminate this message.

Along with a great deal of crude propaganda, often featuring a shirtless Putin performing ultra-masculine feats, patriotic fictional programming is an important aspect of the Russian television landscape. Many of these fictional programs have focused on either Russia's imperial history or the Second World War, though it is called the Great Patriotic War in Russia. While less direct than the news, these types of series are meant to sway people to a vision of Russia that is in line with the Putin government's overall project to rebuild confidence in Russia as a great nation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the "Iron Curtain," however, Russian culture no longer exists in relative isolation from the rest of the world. During the 1990s Russia was inundated with cultural content, primarily from the West and Latin America. Even given the revival of the Russian television industry which started in the 2000s, the programming

[1] Francis Tapon, *The Hidden Europe: What Eastern Europeans Can Teach Us* (New Delhi: Thomson Press, 2011), 672.

that is now available to Russian audiences has to be understood as the result of market and cultural forces that transcend that country. Russian cultural products must compete for audiences with the rest of the world to be successful today.

Russia was a relatively late entrant to the system of global capitalism. The country, therefore, represents an important case study for understanding how post-socialist countries have managed the transition from a communist form of modernity, characterize by planned, state-directed economies and high levels of social and cultural control, to late modernity and globalization. The most salient feature of Russia's experience in the post-Soviet period has been the development of a form of governance and economics called "Authoritarian Capitalism." The term is similar to that used to describe the political-economic systems in other post-socialist countries, most notably the People's Republic of China. The system embraces capitalism, but in a way that differs sharply from the free market neo-liberal capitalism of the West. Laurence Ma defines authoritarian capitalism as "economic growth…achieved without democracy, with the scope, tempo, and processes of change controlled by the authoritarian state."[2] The style of governance that this model follows has the state playing the dominant role in the economy. In the case of China, the governing communist party maintains its ownership of almost all property and heavily directs economic planning. The Russian example is a bit different since the country lacks a defined party structure that oversees every aspect of governance. While it is clearly Putin and former members of the state security establishment, called *siloviki,* that are the power brokers in the country, it is less clearly defined than the single-party rule in China. While state ownership is less pronounced, the Russian government has substantial holdings in strategically vital industries

[2] Laurence Ma, "Viewpoint: China's Authoritarian Capitalism: Growth, Elitism and Legitimacy.," *International Development Planning Review* 31, no. 1 (2009): i.

such as oil and gas, transportation (primarily rail), defense, and media. Even for privately owned companies in Russia, the Putin government looms large. Any action by these companies that directly involves politics can lead to the seizure of property and incarceration. For example, oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky was jailed on trumped-up charges after he funded the opposition party *Yabloko*.[3] Despite the state's seeming omnipresence in the economy, the goal of most corporations is still to be profitable.

This study examines the ways that the Russian television industry, Russia's most vital and important cultural industry, has been shaped by both authoritarian capitalism and the global flows of culture. I argue that the relationship of network and high-ranking network personal largely dictates the type of programming that appears on Russian channels. Generally, the more direct the relationship, the more they will produce series that directly support the Putin government's nation-building efforts. In some cases, however, a network executive with a personal connection to Putin or his inner circle can produce some programming that does not serve the interests of the state as long as the overall tone of the station's programming is pro-Kremlin. For their part, networks that have a less direct relationship with the state act more like their counterparts globally. Namely, they try to produce programs that will ultimately attract audiences so that the station can sell more advertising. While these privately-owned, for-profit networks do not directly produce content for the state, they do have to carefully navigate the labyrinthine dictates of the Russian state to avoid sanction by some official body. Therefore, even when there is no direct ownership, the state and its ideological needs are one of the greatest factors shaping the production of new programs.

[3] Ben Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Herein lies one of the key distinctions that this project seeks to address. A substantial proportion of the theoretical framework and the scholarship in television studies has been undertaken by researchers either working in or steeped in the norms of industries that operate in western, developed, globally integrated, free market societies. Because they assume that the norms prevalent in the West are universalizable, scholars have assumed the dwindling importance of the nation state. In Western countries like Canada, the United States and the nations that make up the core of the European Union which have been integrating their cultures and economies into global markets for several decades this assumption is understandable. In those places the nation state is far less important than it was in the past. While Russia is no longer as isolated from the West as it was in the Soviet era, its experience of late-modernity remains markedly different from those of Western nations. Russia often positions itself as being a civilizational opposite and alternative to the West. While these claims are problematic and highly debatable the fact that Russia as a nation is presented a substitute for the West, and that many Russians accept this idea, speaks to the continued salience of the "nation" in that country.

Even the state-directed nature of the Russian television industry stands in stark contrast with arguments taking place in the field of media studies. These arguments suggest that in the age of globalization and transnational transfers of texts and knowledge, that the nation-state is merely one actor among many and that, it should not be given precedence over actors like transnational and multinational corporations. In Russia, the nation-state remains not only the most important actor in the field of cultural production, but it is also able to supersede the influence of all other actors through a variety of legal and extra-legal means. The central position of the state in Russian media production is a result of Russia's particular experience of modernity which is heavily influenced by authoritarianism. Broadly speaking the Russian

example speaks to the fact that while the models that media studies scholars have used to argue for the decline of the nation-state make sense in the context of Western, free-market democracies, these arguments lose much of their salience when they encounter a country like Russia. While Russia has some distinct attributes, it is not unique. Some of the trends explored in this study correspond with those in other authoritarian capitalist states like China and Vietnam and may herald changes that will occur in states moving in a similar direction, like Hungary and Turkey.

For Russia, much of the post-Soviet era has been characterized by a struggle to reconcile the shift from communist modernity to a modernity anchored primarily in Western-led global capitalism. The concept of modernity most commonly used in media and cultural studies is "a post-traditional order marked by change, innovation, and dynamism" which Anthony Giddens suggests emerges partially as a response to the forces of capitalism.[4] Giddens' focus is a bit too narrow since communism was a type of modernity that employed a different economic structure but broadly shared some of the features as its western counterpart. While Soviet Russia was clearly subject to a form of communist modernity, Russia is a new entrant to global, capitalist modernity. Because Russia developed different social institutions and practices than the West during the Soviet period, it represents a different inflection of modernity. One can point to the authoritarian power structures, the lack of a free press, the absence of a Western sense of the rule of law and heavy state involvement in key sectors of the economy, as examples of modernity that is different from the West. S.N Eisenstadt suggests the term 'multiple modernities' to make sense of these differences. He claims that "one of the most important implications of the term 'multiple modernities' is that modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of

[4] Chris Barker, *Global Television: An Introduction* (New York: Blackwell, 1997).

modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others."[5] Russia today stands as one of the most prominent examples of a non-western modernity.

While Russia represents an example of a non-western modernity, it is important to note that, particularly in the post-Soviet era it is increasingly interacting with and integrating elements of global culture. These elements come into Russia through exchanges driven by globalization and are localized through a process called hybridity.[6] In this process, textual elements and forms from abroad are integrated into new texts being produced in a local context. Thus we might get a "Russian sitcom" that has the form of western television programs, but is entirely local in content. Theories of hybridity are primarily useful in countering ideas that ethnonational cultures ever existed in a state of undefiled purity by pointing to the continual cultural exchanges that nearly all groups have experienced historically. By pointing to moments of exchange and assimilation the concept of hybridity suggests a path forward for understanding how cultures survived by taking in the elements that suit them and rejecting those that do not in a dialectic of transgressing and reasserting cultural boundaries.

In many ways, this study is the among the first of its kind. While some work has begun on television in the former Eastern Bloc, in particular, a recent anthology edited by Timothy Havens, Iniko Imre, and Katalin Lustik examined television in the former Soviet vassals of Central and Eastern Europe; Russia remains almost completely unexamined. While there are important parallels between these other formerly communist states and the Russian Federation, namely their shared political histories and relatively deep cultural ties, there are significant

[5] S.N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Deadalus* Winter 2000, no. 1 (2000): 2–3.
[6] Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 100.

differences, which also make the insights of studies in the region difficult to transfer to the Russian case. For example, with the possible exception of Poland, none of the other countries of the former Soviet Empire have populations or economies large enough to sustain domestic television industries that produce most of the content that appears on their television screens. Except for Belarus and Ukraine, the countries in the former Soviet sphere of influence all have deeper historical and cultural ties to the West than Russia does. As a result, their engagement with Trans-Atlantic culture is perhaps less complicated than it is for Russians who continue to struggle with a deep suspicion of Western culture.

With a few exceptions, studies of Russian television to date, while interesting have several important flaws. They are almost all overly reliant on textual analysis. These accounts rarely segment the series they look at by channel and thereby fail to sufficiently examine the role that different organizational structures play in the development of Russian television. They also tend to ignore or downplay the Russian audio-visual industry's interaction with the global industry and the myriad ways these interactions have transformed the former. Consequently, these accounts have frequently been lacking in detail and nuance with regards to why certain programs have been produced in Russia during the Putin era. These accounts are still useful, but their lack of focus on the broader political and economic context makes them problematic.

The principle contribution of this work is to provide a portrait of a media industry within an authoritarian capitalist state. While many accounts of media systems in liberal democratic, capitalist states and totalitarian societies have been undertaken, work on authoritarian capitalist states has not been as extensive. These types of states are increasingly common. The most notable are, of course, Russia and China which are also the largest in terms of economic output, but other post-socialist states such as Hungary are moving in the direction of authoritarian

capitalism. Other countries like Turkey and Israel are also beginning to show signs of moving in the same direction. The appeal of this political, social and economic arrangement is primarily located in China's three decades of rapid growth and, to a lesser extent, Russia's rapid economic improvements during the Putin era. Though it is only a single exemplar of this relatively novel type of political-economic system, Russia offers an excellent opportunity to examine authoritarian capitalism. Popular accounts of the Russian media in the West give the impression that the system is similar to that of the Soviet Union. Most popular reporting portrays a media industry dominated by the Russian state. However, my study shows that by mixing the needs of the state with the profit motives of the market, authoritarian capitalist states create media systems that are extremely complex. Different agendas are constantly at play and cronyism plays a large role in who makes decisions about what programs get to air. The system even allows for the creation of programs that do not support the overall nation-building goals of the state, even if the actors involved are loyal to Putin's inner circle.

This project shows that even the most tightly controlled systems are part of the global system of media exchanges on numerous levels. While Russians are without a doubt proud of their cultural heritage and often outwardly disdainful of Western cultural products, they also consume them with fervor. As such Russian cultural products no longer exist, if they ever did, in isolation from the rest of the world. Programs made in Russia are either in direct competition with those of the West or at very least are being actively compared to them. The result is that Russian cultural industries today are increasingly attuned to global trends and work to keep their audiences by creating local versions of what is popular abroad. The most obvious of these is the use of global formats to create local versions of popular programs. There are also less evident, but more important transfers that occur such as the transfer of technologies, techniques, and

knowledge about making television. Russians and others on the global cultural periphery actively merge global forms and knowledge with their own. The third type of transfer is called hybridity where Russian production companies and channels make original Russian programs based on a global model or trend, but with no direct reference to a global model. For example, a Russian program like 2013s *Ottepel* (*The Thaw*) is described as Russia's equivalent of AMC's *Mad Men*. Hence, while the system of authoritarian capitalism makes the Russian case different from that of Western or other liberal democratic states, many of the same globalizing forces that are affecting the rest of the world are present in Russia. They may be mediated differently based on the specifics of Russia's articulation of modernity.

The Case Studies

This study uses a mixed methodology that includes analyses of political and economic institutions, in-depth analyses of significant television programs that aired on four different television networks, interviews I conducted with media industry workers who had experience in Russia, and insights from popular press and industry trade publications. In total, I interviewed nine individuals, seven from the West and two from Russia who had worked for extended periods of time in Russia. I also included several radio interviews that aired on *Ekho Moskvy's* television analysis program *Telekhranitel*. The program frequently has guests from the highest echelons of Russian television industry and as such is an important source of data. In also used interviews found in the now closed industry trade magazine *Variety Russia*.

The project is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one is an examination of the relevant literature in the fields of media studies and cultural theory as well as an examination of some of the relevant concepts that this dissertation combines with the field. Chapter two continues the discussion of the current literature, with a particular focus on histories of Soviet and Russian

television. In particular, there is an emphasis on the problematic text-focused nature of current research and the limits it seems to place on understanding the industry. The rest of the chapter uses industry trade, popular press accounts, and official financial reports to document institutional relationships within the Russian television industry. For the most part, this is an effort to determine to what extent each station is imbricated in the state's overall structures of power. It also examines how people within the industry understand their relationship to that power and how that understanding limits what they are willing to portray on screen.

The remainder of my dissertation examines the Russian television industry through four key cases, each of which is an important institutional site in the Russian television industry. Each case study will examine a number of the most important series produced by each company. Chapter three examines the television channel Rossiya One. As the only fully state-owned television station, it most directly presents the official state position vis-a-vis Russia and its history. The station tends to present genres and programs that closely align with the Putin government's goal of strengthening Russian identity and its historical sense of importance which was damaged by the collapse of Soviet Union. This role is especially evident in the way it reconfigures key moments in Russian history to fit present needs for a sense of national cohesion and meaning. Drawing on the concept of ontological security from international relations and concepts of governmentality drawn from Foucault, the chapter looks at literary adaptations, World War II and other historical dramas and how each plays a role in promoting the official versions of Russian cultural identity and memory. Literary adaptations were the first series to appear following the revival of the television industry in the early 2000s. Particularly in their earliest incarnations, they proved to be extremely popular with audiences. These series were significant, given that reviving interest in Russia's cultural heritage has been a stated goal of the

Putin government. Rossiya has been the leading producer of adaptations and has broadcast the two most popular and critically acclaimed series *The Idiot* (2003) and *The Master and Margarita* (2005) both directed by Vladimir Bortko.

Russia's second largest broadcaster was equally active in the production of two different types of historical series: World War Two dramas and costume dramas that focused on important Russian historical figures. Both of these types of programs try to restore Russian national pride by bringing important moments and figures of the past into the present. This approach is particularly true of the series focused on the Second World War. These series are very important because they speak to what remains one of the most unifying historical moments in Russian history, often reconfiguring it to fit the current ideological needs of the state. The 2004 series *Shtrafbat* (*Penal Battalion*), is one of the most significant examples of a war program in the Putin-era because it transforms the Soviet achievement to one that is purely Russian. Other historical dramas focus on significant figures in Russian history, particularly on important rulers in Russian history. Series like 2014s *Yekaterina* (*Catherine*) which took as its subject Empress Catherine the Great present audiences with an official version of Russian history, in a way that is ultimately meant to channel the greatness of Russia, bringing back the sense of Russia's grandeur and importance into the present. These series are meant to link Russian identity to its roots in Orthodox Christianity as an alternative to ideas of liberal democracy.

Chapter four looks at the role of Sony Pictures in transforming the Russian production system in the late 2000s by importing several genres as well as knowledge and production techniques to the Russian Federation. This chapter theorizes that Sony and its particular style of engagement were responsible in large part for the formation of the parts of the Russian media industry that most closely emulate media institutions in the West. This section also examines the

spread of the cultural technologies that Sony brought with it into Russia. It also shows the extent of Sony's influence and its continuing importance in the market. Of the major Hollywood studios, the company has the longest and most successful history of engagement with the Russian market. While Sony has certainly faced numerous obstacles in the market, very early on it developed what has proven to be a localization strategy that has differentiated it from every other Western studio. From 2003 to the present Sony has been deeply involved with the production of thousands of hours of television. They are responsible for the successful introduction of the situation comedy as a genre in the country as well as a myriad of production techniques. Their influence continues to have significant effects on the Russian market to this day. Sony chose to deeply embed themselves in the Russian production environment, investing capital and talent to help the Russian industry move forward.

Chapter five looks at the television channel STS and the role that it has played in bridging the gap between the Russian and the global television industries. The station is, by far, the most Western in both its outlook and organization. In many ways, it is a cultural "window to the west," pioneering many of the new genres and other cultural technologies that have entered Russian television in the Putin-era. The network has been able to act as the conduit for these new ideas because it is the most capitalist network in Russia. While, like all Russian networks, there are ties back to the state, they are relatively weak compared to the other major networks. As a consequence, the network, driven primarily by ratings, has the deepest engagement with the global television market as it seeks ways to both import and export programming to make money. This chapter examines the trajectory of the Russian sitcom, from the earliest Russian adaptations, the growth of original Russian series and eventually to series clearly aimed at accessing the global marketplace

I have chosen two sitcoms series from STS. The first series I intend to examine is STS' original sitcom Papiny Dochki (Daddy's Girls) (2007-2013). This series is the first successful original Russian sitcom to become genuinely popular following the successful localization of *The Nanny* and *Who's the Boss*. It follows the lives of the Vasnetsov family, the father Sergei and his five daughters: Masha, Dasha, Zhenia, Galina and Paulina (called by the diminutive Pugovka). The series is a conventional situation comedy in most ways, employing fairly standard scenarios, mostly centering on work, relationships and domestic life. Each episode tends to have a self-contained story arc, although the series also has several ongoing plot lines. The series proved very durable for STS, running four-hundred ten episodes, though the later seasons saw a sharp decline in ratings.

The second series I analyze is one of STS' most recent situation comedies *Kukhnia* (*The Kitchen*) (2012-2016). Set in a French Restaurant in Moscow, the program is the most expensive television series ever produced for STS. The series at times appears to be going out of its way not to appear too Russian. On the whole, it seems that STS has tried to create a series aimed at both the Russian market and the growing trade in scripted formats. As such it signals a shift towards creating products that do well in Russia and the former Soviet Union but are also amenable for eventual sale as formats. *The Kitchen* seems to be the culmination of everything learned by STS since it started working in the sitcom genre both with Sony and independently.

The sixth chapter examines STS' most significant rival, the television station TNT. Broadly speaking the channels resemble each other in significant ways. Both broadcast many of the same types of programs with a particular emphasis on comedy genres. TNT is, however, owned by a state company Gazprom-media, but remains an afterthought with regards to political communication. In that sense, the network presents one of the paradoxes of the authoritarian

capitalist system. While its ties to the state are clear, it is not used for propaganda. TNT is allowed to simply generate income by producing highly successful programming which is primarily a hybrid form of western genres like the sitcom. It has managed to create more popular programs for Russian audiences than its rival by focusing on grittier depictions of Russian life, albeit in a humorous way. The station is also far more controversial than STS, and its series are often the source of conflicts with the state. While STS carefully avoids the political arena because of its weak ties to the state, TNT occasionally seems to use it to generate controversy and drum up interest in its content.

The situation comedy is the genre that has brought TNT the most success. Therefore, I have selected three series for analysis. The first of these is one of TNT's early attempts at creating an original sitcom. The program called *Univer* a Russian slang word for University follows the lives of a quartet of Russian undergraduates who share a dorm room. Like much of TNT's content, the series is notable for the fact that it addresses a male audience and contains more overt sexual content, crude jokes and is less family friendly than the content on STS. *Univer* is the earliest example of the network developing this type of series themselves. It was produced from 2008 to 2011 airing two-hundred, and fifty-five episodes, and two spinoffs: *Univer: Novaya Obshaga* or *University: The New Dorm* which has also proven very successful and *Sasha/Tanya* which follows the lives of two characters after they graduate, marry and have a child.

The second series that I will examine from TNT is the mockumentary style program *Realnyy Patsany* or *Real Guys* (2010-present). The series, whose storytelling style closely parallels those of the American sitcom *Modern Family*, tells distinctly Russian stories. It comes from one of the most important studios in the Russian industry, Good Story Media. Rather than a

series set in the heart of Moscow, with characters who live relatively elite lifestyles, the series focuses on a group of working-class Russian men entering adulthood who live in the dingy, neglected suburbs of the capital. The focus of the series is the daily struggles to get by in Putin's Russia. Russians clearly make the series for Russians, and the stories it tells are so distinctive to the country that it is totally unsuitable for the export market.

The seventh and final chapter of the dissertation looks at Russia's leading television network, Channel One and two of its recent series. While the station is known outside of Russia for its pro-Kremlin news programming, it also produces some of the most acclaimed dramas in the Russian-speaking world. This chapter examines the somewhat strange mix of programming that Channel One produces, particularly looking at the way that it has incorporated global formats into its schedule, before turning to two drama programs *Shkola* (*School*) and *Metod* (*The Method*). Both of these programs represent the network's shift towards being a producer of complex television melodrama modeled on similar Western programs (ex. *The Sopranos, Dexter, House of Cards*). These dramas are well produced, well written and compelling, but also contradictory. While they appear on a station whose leading executive has close personal ties to Vladimir Putin, the fictional programming that it produces often puts it at odds with the official image that the Putin government wants to portray.

Themes and Implications

I argue that typical accounts of Russian media as merely serving the interests of the state are overly simplistic. The expectation that television channels or production companies linked to the ruling elite create programming that supports the Putin government's nation-building efforts while commercial stations use their platforms to criticize the status-quo is shown to be

erroneous. Often state-owned and state-affiliated stations whose leadership has strong ties to Putin's inner circle produce programming that represents key Russian institutions negatively while commercial networks generally produce apolitical programing unlikely to attract the attention of the state. Along with the internal dynamics of the Russian industry, this project examines the role that global media have played in the development of the Russian television industry in the post-Soviet era. This dissertation argues that contrary to theories of cultural imperialism prominent in the fields of political economy and cultural studies, the global television industry's strongest influence has not been in spreading Western values to Russia, but instead transferring industrial and production practices. Therefore, this project significantly complicates notions of how television industries function in an authoritarian capitalist state, with important implications for those examining media in other states with similar systems.

Chapter 1 Global Media: Trends and Theories

Global media studies has two main historical traditions. Broadly speaking these intellectual traditions can be described as political economy and cultural studies. Political economy is the oldest. One of the main tenets of political economy is that the global circulation of media texts is part of a Western system of cultural imperialism and domination. Scholars in this tradition argue that the West has shifted the focus of its imperialism from the sphere of conquest and empire to the realm of soft power. What they essentially argue is that the West now spreads its ideas, values, and institutions, primarily through culture, though increasingly this is taken to mean the West's powerful film, television and music industries.

At the other end of the spectrum are cultural studies with a greater emphasis on the multi-directional flows of media products between regions. There is also a significant and growing body of scholarship on issues of hybridity and other types of transnational cultural flows. These approaches tend to focus on issues of textual polyvocality, audience agency to interpret texts apart from the dominant paradigm, and more recently what Annabelle Sreberny suggests is "a complex syncopation of voices and more complicated media environment in which Western media domination has given way to multiple actors and flows of media products."[1] This approach tries to move away from a well-established center versus periphery models. It emphasizes the emergence of competing centers of cultural production and cultural power in the current media environment. Both the political economy model and cultural studies are concerned with the disproportionate power and influence of Western media. Of particular concern is the dominant role of the American media industries. How developing countries such as Russia,

[1] Annabelle Sreberny, "The Global and the Local in International Communication," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 607–8.

China, India, and Brazil, all of whom have large populations and thus large internal media markets, interact with transnational media, particularly large studios like Sony, Disney, Warner Brothers, and Comcast Universal is an increasingly important and complex question for scholars.

Within cultural studies, there is also an emerging area of studies called media industry studies. It seeks to move away from a broad top-down examination of political and institutional structures or broad studies of texts to more nuanced understandings of the everyday decision-making processes that take place within media industries. This view is not oblivious to the questions of media imperialism or those of increased globalization and global flows of media. It also seeks to understand the minute details of everyday decision making made by media industry workers at various levels, which ultimately influences cultural production. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore what these different approaches can offer my project and how they might help to better understand the particularities of the Russian television industry in the Putin era.

Political Economy of the Media

Political economy, whose noteworthy contributors include Herbert Schiller, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman and more contemporary scholars such as Robert McChesney, Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, Ting Wang and Richard Maxwell, has been an important current in contemporary studies of media. Michael Curtin points to Schiller's works as one of the earliest scholarly texts that tried to understand the central role of the American media industries in the global cultural economy.[2] The model that emerged from these studies is one that is primarily a center and periphery model. In this model, the West is at the center of the global cultural economy, and its influence flows out like spokes to the marginal countries of the

[2] Michael Curtin, "Thinking Globally: From Media Imperialism to Media Capital," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 109.

developing world. The core concern was that uneven power relations between the West and economically weaker regions would lead to cultural homogenization often described as a form of cultural imperialism. As Chris Barker notes "television as both technology and cultural form is a Western-originated project and continues to be dominated economically by Western and particularly American economic powers."[3] For his part, John Tomlinson argues that the concept of cultural imperialism is inherently unidirectional, in that the very word imperialism requires domination of one group by another.[4] More than simply being cultural containers, the texts that come out of the West are seen by political economists as the bearers of a particular set of ideological propositions. McChesney is particularly concerned with the role that media plays in disseminating Western neo-liberal ideologies globally.[5] This "soft power" allows the West to spread its ideology, perhaps best described as neo-liberal capitalism, around the world.

For all of their analytical prowess, political economists remain ensconced in the classical Marxist understanding of the society and economics as a base and superstructure relationship. In classical Marxist accounts, the economic base ultimately shapes the superstructure, which is essentially made up of institutions like the family, the media, and religion. These institutions get their ideological forms from the base then maintain the base by constantly re-inscribing ideology in the subjects.[6] For political economy, if a cultural product comes from a capitalist country, like the United States, it inherently carries its ideology with it wherever it goes. In effect, cultural imperialism is a way of bringing groups on the global periphery into the capitalist system by

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[3] Barker, *Global Television*, 5.
[4] John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 176.
[5] Robert McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).
[6] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 294–304.

instilling in them the values of capitalism. Armand Mattelart expresses this view in his 1972 book *How to Read Donald Duck* which examined the spread of Disney cartoons as nothing more than containers of Western ideology.

Political economy is problematic for several reasons. Desmond Hesmondhalgh suggests that the central issue of "political economy analysis is that it provides little sense of the contradictions in capitalist media production."[7] In essence, he is saying that political economy ascribes both a teleological purpose to media production and assumes that ownership of media, by either individuals or large corporations ultimately means that the ideological agenda of those entities is carried out exactly as they intend. Such perspectives miss the numerous negotiations that take place in large organizations of any kind. Russian television networks, global companies like Sony pictures and the Russian state, all broadly speaking, have agendas that they promulgate while also navigating the shifting demands of the market. While we might reasonably say for instance, that it is Vladimir Putin and the members of his inner circle that set the general direction of television messages in Russia, only rarely does Putin, or one of his closest associates deal with such decisions directly. Presumably, it is bureaucrats that make small scale choices about censorship rather than Putin's inner circle. The same is doubtless true of the media companies since industry workers make decisions based on their understandings of the conditions on the ground. These may or may not be fully in line with the design of powerful actors and institutions.

Cultural Studies

[7] David Hesmondhalgh, "Politics, Theory, and Method in Media Industries Research," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 249.

Cultural Studies emerged from the University of Birmingham where scholars from the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies played a leading role in developing the field. Academics in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Canada, adopted it as an alternative to the field of political economy and the administrative/effects model of media studies that had been dominant particularly following the work of Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz.[8] The work of scholars in both these fields, while interesting, ultimately was focused primarily on news and more problematically always viewed audiences as passive recipients of media messages, rather than active participants shaping the meaning of the content.

It is primarily against the view of audiences as passive recipients of meaning encoded by all-powerful media elites that cultural studies initially argued. Several studies were particularly influential in building an alternate understanding of how culture works. Notably, cultural studies scholars began trying to reimagine the ways that audiences understand and receive media messages. One of the most important concepts that emerged was Stuart Hall's idea of encoding/decoding in which he argued that texts are encoded with ideological messages during production but that audiences could decode them in many ways based on their life experience, social class, and education as well as other factors. In some cases, they might accept the dominant messages, accept some aspect of them or reject them outright.[9] Subsequent investigations such as David Morley and Charlotte Brunsdon's study of the audience of the BBC current affairs program *Nationwide* confirmed aspects of Hall's thesis. Their findings, published in separate books and later combined into one volume, showed that the way audience members

[8] Elihu Katz and Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence, the Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1966).
[9] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner (Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 166–76.

read the texts was even more complex than Hall's model assumed. Morley, in particular, found that people might read a text one way at home with their families, but produce a slightly different reading in a different social situation, for instance with male peers.[10]

Cultural studies scholars have also been prominent in advocating for an understanding of popular culture as being more polyvocal than either political economy or effects research would allow. The work of John Fiske is particularly notable in this regard. Particularly in *Understanding Popular Culture*, he assigns a great deal of power for producing the meaning of a cultural text with the audience. Fiske borrows the idea of culture as a form of guerilla warfare from the French philosopher Michel de Certeau, to argue that audiences and producers are in a constant struggle to define the meanings of their products. For Fiske, audiences take the products of the cultural industries and generate new meanings out of them, temporarily occupying cultural territory. In their work to commodify everything, cultural industries eventually appropriate these unauthorized readings and turn them into commodities that they can sell for profit. Essentially, according to Fiske, even mass-produced forms of culture are polyvocal in that audience can create out of them a range of meanings.[11]

Other important studies have sought to verify the idea of textual polyvocality by asking audiences how they interpret what they are seeing. The aforementioned study by Morley and Brunsdon is a prominent early example but has been followed by many more. Among the more famous and influential of these studies were Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* and Katz and Liebes' *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*. Both studies emerged out of the enormous trans-national popularity of the evening melodrama *Dallas.* Genuine fears had been

[10] Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley, *The Nationwide Television Studies* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1999).
[11] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

expressed, particularly in Europe, that the popularity of the program would lead to the Americanization of cultures all over the globe as they consumed it instead of locally produced content. Ang's study, which involved interviews with women who watched the program in the Netherlands, led her to the conclusion that such fears were exaggerated since the women she interacted with expressed a variety of different reasons for enjoying the program and primarily understood the program through the lens of their experiences.[12] Katz and Liebes took a similar approach showing the program to people in Israel, many of whom were immigrants from different parts of the Jewish diaspora community. Their findings suggested that rather than carrying some pre-existing meaning, viewers tended to understand the program based on their pre-existing cultural codes. For example, recent immigrants from the communist bloc countries interpreted the program as a critique of the excesses of capitalism.[13] While these studies are not by any means an exhaustive list of this type of research, they are iconic in the field. This study does not primarily deal with audiences since most of my audience information is limited to television ratings. It is, nevertheless, important to mention these studies since they support the thesis that textual meaning is not fully determined by the elites that produce them. The absence of in-depth engagement with the Russian television audience should not be taken to mean that audiences are unimportant. While most of the major decisions about what appears on television occurs at the level of the elites, audiences can still impact programing in significant ways. Programs with low ratings are routinely cancelled and many of the major studios and networks also now use focus groups to test programs before they are widely broadcast. An example of the of this use of focus groups appears at the end of the documentary *Exporting Raymond* when

[12] Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
[13] Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas* (New York: Wiley, 1993).

American producer Phil Rosenthal reveals that the original lead actor for the series was replaced after focus groups reacted negatively to him. Consequently, as in other capitalist media systems, audiences matter because the success or failure of a network is predicated on attracting and keeping their attention.

Beyond the level of the text and the audience, cultural studies has also been a significant force in examining the role that industrial and broader cultural factors play in the production of media texts. Perhaps the most famous of these is the examination of the Sony Walkman by a group of scholars led by Paul du Gay who developed a model for studying products of the culture industries. It examined five interconnected nodes that taken together formed the ultimate meaning of a product. They identified these nodes as regulation, representation, identity, production, and consumption. Their assertion was that it was only when all these aspects were taken into account that one could fully understand the cultural meaning of a product. For example, their study looked in-depth at Sony, the company that produced the Walkman, and the many negotiations that took place within the company in the production of the device. In particular, it examined how Sony positioned itself as a Japanese electronics company making a product for the rest of the world. They looked at some of the design choices that were used to make the product more appealing to consumers. They also studied the way that the device came to be a source of both elite consumer status and a way to affirm identity through the private consumption of music. What is most notable about this study is that rather than focusing on one aspect of a cultural product as many studies tend to do, it tried to understand it as broadly as possible.[14] The model that they proposed has been adapted by others who have sought to refine elements of the "circuit of culture" in order to make it easier to apply. At their core, all of these

[14] Paul du Gay, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1996).

models are meant to look at cultural products from the processes that are at play in their production, to their consumption and how they are used to generate identities.[15] The industrial dimension of these types of circuit models has been particularly influential on critical media industry studies and studies of globalized media.

Globalization of Media

With the collapse of the communist Eastern block and the opening of much of the world to globalization, cultural studies also began to consider the problems posed by the transfers of media products between different parts of the world. Curtin, a leading researcher in this field, suggests that the "globalization of media… should not be understood reductively as cultural homogenization or western hegemony. Instead, it is part of a larger set of processes that operate translocally, interactively and dynamically at a variety of levels: economic, institutional technological and ideological."[16] At the core of these understandings of global media flows are arguments and assumptions about the changing roles of transnational corporations, nation-states, and other cultural actors. Specifically, many of the theorists in this line of thinking see the nation-state as an increasingly problematic and unstable social formation that is no longer a sufficient context for examining media industries. Globalization they suggest transcends and problematizes the very concept of the nation-state because as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest globalization has "no territorial center of power... it is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus."[17] It follows that if there is no central node and no "core" of the global cultural economy, then it no longer makes sense to use a conceptual framework that broadly relies on the

[15] Julie D'acci, "Cultural Studies, Television Studies, and the Crisis in the Humanities," in *Television After TV*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004), 418–45.
[16] Curtin, "Thinking Globally: From Media Imperialism to Media Capital," 111.
[17] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001), xii.

idea that the powerful states of the developed world, mostly the United States, are somehow imposing their ideological, political and economic systems on the rest of the world. As Arjun Appadurai puts it "The United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images, but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes."[18] Thinkers in this tradition see the world as increasingly multipolar especially when it comes to media.

Appadurai's work has been particularly important in theories of media transfers. He proposes that the globalized world no longer operates along the lines of direct bilateral exchanges between nation-states. He argues instead that the system of globalization is characterized by a series of complex, multidirectional "flows" that disrupt ideas of fixed political boundaries. He identified five aspects of the global cultural flow that he terms "scapes." He states that there are:

> five dimensions of global cultural flow which can be termed: (a) ethnoscapes; (b) mediascapes (c) technoscapes (d) finanscapes; and (e) ideoscapes. The suffix –scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes which characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These terms with the common suffix – scape also indicate these are not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups such as villages, neighbourhoods, and families.[19]

The "scapes" that Appadurai describes are, fundamentally, the movement of ideas, technologies, capital, and people that twenty-first-century nation-states are powerless to control fully. For example, the Russian government could not really hope to stop the flow of Hollywood products into the country. Efforts to curtail their own people from consuming global cultural products

[18] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1990), 4.
[19] Ibid.

would likely end in the population finding alternate means of consumption via the internet. Nor is it simple for any one country to stop the flow of illegal migrants, capital, and ideas into their territory. The idea of "scapes" also suggests that the global circulation of culture is no longer a uni-directional "West to the rest" process and that while global forces are undoubtedly shaping the local, the local also shapes the global.

Adding to Appadurai's notion of global flows of culture as usurping the nation-state, scholars such as Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry have argued against using the nation-state as the base unit of media studies.[20] Studies of media have traditionally been delineated along specifically national lines. Scholars, particularly those who happen to study films and television from specific national contexts, have tended to class their studies along the line of the country that they are examining. For example, studies of Chinese, Soviet/Russian or Indian films have normally considered those within their separate national categories rather than how they interact with the rest of the world. What Hepp and Couldry argue is that nations are no longer, if they ever were, sufficient categories of explanation since every nation-state is constantly interacting and taking on elements of other cultures globally.

The idea that the nation-state is a less and less sufficient locus for study appears in much of the recent work on global media. As James Curran puts it "this [new line of thinking] contributed to a rewriting of media history in which the nation was portrayed as culturally constructed rather than a given."[21] Curtin, in particular, makes an important contribution to this

[20] Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, "What Should Comparative Media Research Be Comparing? Towards A Transcultural Approach to 'Media Cultures,'" in *Internationalizing Media Studies*, ed. Daya Kishan Thussu, 1 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 36.
[21] James Curran, "Cultural Theory and Market Liberalism," in *Media and Cultural Theory*, ed. James Curran and David Morley, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), 131.

line of thinking when he argues that increasingly the central locus of the media studies should not be the nation-state, but instead what he calls "media capitals."[22] By this term, Curtin means several large, cosmopolitan cities where media industries have centralized their operations. These have tended to be, to some extent, clustered around particular language-centered markets. For example, according to Curtin, Hong Kong serves as the central point for production and distribution in the Chinese cultural space that encompasses Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora living around the world. Mumbai serves as the central node for the Indian media industry and Miami for the Spanish-speaking world. Though Curtain does not mention it specifically, Moscow is clearly the media capital of Russia and the Russian diaspora living in the former Soviet Union and further afield. The central idea behind the "media capital," is that in the increasingly globalized world we can no longer speak of large media environments that are limited to the borders of a particular nation-state since they often serve scattered groupings more connected by language and culture than contained within borders. Therefore, Curtain wants to shift the focus of media studies to the places where media is made. He contends that "media capitals, then, are sites of mediation, locations where complex forces and flows interact. They are neither bounded nor self-contained entities… [rather they are] meeting places where local specificity arises out of migration, interaction, and exchange."[23] Therefore, we can think of a media capital like Moscow as a place where global and local forces interact and where global influences are mediated to suit the tastes of Russian audiences before themselves being disseminated to Russian speakers in the country and the diasporic community. It is in Moscow that global media influences encounter the power of the Russian state, whether it is through

[22] Michael Curtin, "Media Capitals: Cultural Geographies of Global TV," in *Television After TV*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 270–303.
[23] Ibid., 273–74.

explicit censorship or passive forms of self-censorship. Moscow dominates the modern Russian media-scape with all but one of the major Russian television channels based in the city. Virtually all major studio space in the country is also located in the Moscow region.[24] Between the major studios in Moscow and the few channels and studios in Saint Petersburg, the majority of the media infrastructure in the country is centered in the two most elite cities in the country. As a result, the mediation of world culture into Russia passes mostly through the country's capital, which also houses its government and bureaucratic apparatus.

Curtin does suggest that media capitals are always somewhat contingent. He notes that after Hong Kong, the major media capital for Chinese speaking countries, was returned to Beijing, Taiwan and Singapore tried to establish themselves as competitive alternatives to the Special Administrative Region. While these attempts ultimately failed and Hong Kong remains the most important center for the production and distribution of media content in the Sinosphere, Curtain suggests that Hong Kong's position is by no means certain, there is always the possibility that it may one day be usurped by another center.[25] For Russia, with Moscow as its primary media center, it seems unlikely that another center could challenge it in the foreseeable future. The other major centers with numerous Russian speakers seem unlikely to want to create a great deal of Russian media. Saint Petersburg has the most infrastructure outside of Moscow, but it is not significant compared to the production space in the capital. Centers outside of the Russian Federation, such as Kiev, Minsk, and Riga that have large Russian-speaking populations find themselves in countries that are either repressive, poor, hostile to Russia or some combination of these traits. As such they seem unlikely to become centers of Russian media

[24] The only major Russian network found outside the capital region is Channel Five Petersburg, located in the Saint Petersburg. One of the few major studio spaces outside the capital, Lenfilm, is also located in Saint Petersburg.
[25] Curtin, "Media Capitals: Cultural Geographies of Global TV," 274.

production. The Russian market is large enough in economic terms to be an attractive target for media producers in other Russian-speaking regions, but it is not entirely clear how such productions would be received in Moscow, where all of the distribution within the Russian market takes place. Therefore, for the foreseeable future, Moscow will remain the primary center of media production for the Russian-speaking parts of the world.

I agree, in principle, with the overall contributions of Appadurai, Hepp, and Couldry and Curtin. Their arguments that in an increasingly interconnected world that the nation-state as the basic unit of study in media studies generally should matter less are, for the most part, compelling. For these television scholars who mostly operate in a western, developed, globally integrated, free market, capitalist society this desire to move beyond the nation-state as the basic unit of comparison is understandable. Particularly looking at societies like Canada, the United States, and The European Union, where to a large extent economic and cultural integration into global markets is a process that has been taking place for several decades moving beyond the nation-state is understandable. In such a context, the nation-state cannot be totally discounted, but to a degree, they are far less important than they were. It is indeed true that the world is more linked than in the past, and as I will show in the chapters that look at the television network STS and Sony, even Russia is starting to integrate with the global media system and is increasingly importing texts and localizing other cultural technologies. Russia is not cut off from the global cultural economy in the way that it was during the Cold War; it no longer represents a parallel media system to that of the West. It is, however, notable that the Russian experience remains quite different from that of Western countries. The key difference between the experiences is a result of authoritarian capitalism. What is clear in looking at the Russian experience is that despite significant cultural changes, Russia has not become a liberal democracy, and in fact is

different enough from Europe and America that it is difficult to compare them on a one to one basis. As Ivan Krastev argues "Post-modernism, post-nationalism, and secularism are making [the West] different from the rest of the world, not making the rest of the world more like [the West]."[26] This increasing divide between the West and the rest is doubly true of Russia which frequently frames itself as being in opposition to the West. Western media studies models make sense primarily in states that follow neo-liberal, democratic models of economics and governance. They need to be carefully modified in states that have certain similarities, (i.e. are capitalist) but also where key differences such as authoritarian models of governance exist.

As I show in chapter two, in the Russian television industry, the state plays an outsized role. It directly or indirectly owns parts of the four largest television channels in the country. At the network it completely controls, Rossiya One, the state sets the agenda regarding what genres and what themes the network will produce. Arguably even networks that are privately owned remain tied to the state, to various degrees through a web of ownership by Putin aligned oligarchs. The private networks and their production partners are constantly evaluating what the state will allow and what might create a conflict with official state actors, primarily in the bureaucracy. As much as possible they avoid those areas. There are certain topics that are simply off limits.

While there is significant debate regarding the continued importance of the nation-state, nations and the idea of the 'national,' they remain important concepts. One of the central arguments for the continued importance of ideas of the nation comes from Michael Billig who views the nation as being constantly reconstructed in small, banal utterances that permeate the

[26] Ivan Krastev, "Authoritarian Capitalism Versus Democracy," *Policy Review*, no. 172 (May 2012): 52.

media system. He suggests that "banally, [the media] address 'us' as a national first-person plural; and they situate 'us' in the homeland within a world of nations. Nationhood is the context which must be assumed to understand so many banal utterances."[27] Albert Moran makes a similar case that while television is being internationalized, it is probably too early to write the obituary of the nation. Speaking of television formats, he suggests that:

> nationhood continues to be inconspicuously suggested in the interstices of format adaptations – in a detail of color, a quiz question, an outdoor setting, a story situation, an accent a theme song and so on… Nationalism has constituted a bedrock of television in the past… this [is] by no means superseded by the cultivation of other formations. Instead, in an era of a rapidly changing international television landscape, TV formats continue to anchor their adaptations in the ongoing reality of the national."[28]

Moran is arguing that despite the spread of television texts and other cultural technologies the vast majority of people's experiences even of global culture remain anchored in their national context. The nation is still the cultural lens through which people experience the global, and thus, most things remain mediated through a lens of national understanding.

Both scholars point to the continued role of cultural texts in shaping the national. The process of constituting the nation through the production of symbolic culture is particularly relevant in the case of Russia where television is the most important and widely consumed medium. Benedict Anderson's theory that nations are 'imagined communities' remains one of the most widely cited conceptualizations of the nation and culture's role in shaping it. In brief, Anderson imagines that media allow geographically and culturally dispersed populations to

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[27] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 1st ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1995), 175.
[28] Albert Moran, "Reasserting the National? Programme Formats, International Television and Domestic Culture," in *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, ed. Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay (New York: Routledge, 2009), 158.

envision themselves as connected.[29] His focus on physical products highlights the strong connection between the nation and material culture produced by cultural industries. Although Anderson's examples, the newspaper, and the novel, are probably no longer sufficient as explanations for the continued maintenance of the nation as an 'imagined community,' their displacement does not mean the end of the nation. As Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz state "television remains one of the most powerful forces, with arguably the widest reach, in presenting and hence creating images of the nation. The nation as such will 'occur' at the level of the television audience"[30] In fact, this is exactly the argument made by both Michael Billig and David Morley. Billig conceives of the nation as being sustained by micro-signals that are implanted everywhere in the discourses that circulate within it. He points to moments as insignificant as a newscaster on television referring to the nation as 'we,' thus implying that everyone addressed is a part of that indivisible cultural unit.[31] Morley, for his part, suggests that broadcasting in the United Kingdom quickly supplanted print media in shaping national culture and supports Billig by pointing to the national broadcasts as moments that generated national consciousness.[32] These moments of national cultural production are, in reality, moments where the power of the state, of corporations, or some mix of these are working to generate common visions of identity. Particularly in the Russian case, it is primarily the state or state-affiliated actors that author "national" texts, therefore, we see power being used to move the population in a particular direction.

[29] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 6–7.
[30] Jonathan Gray and Amanda D. Lotz, *Television Studies* (Malden: Polity, 2011), 81.
[31] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.
[32] David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 107.

The power of television as a cultural medium in Russia is considerable. According to a recent report, by 2014 ninety-nine percent of Russian households owned at least one television. On average Russian households had 1.7 televisions per household, making it the most widely distributed medium in the country.[33] A report from the European Audiovisual Observatory stated that Russians watched on average three hours and forty-six minutes of television each day, one of the highest levels in Europe in 2010.[34] Combined with the fact that since 1998, Russian series have completely displaced import programs in prime time, it is logical to assume that Russians now see messages aimed at them specifically.[35] It is reasonable, therefore, to say that a post-Soviet cultural discourse has emerged on Russian television.[36]

More evidence of the continued relevance of the nation is found in research by scholars that look at other countries with authoritarian capitalist systems. Russia's most noteworthy comparative example is the People's Republic of China. Arguing against notions that globalization and marketization, in particular, lead to a decline in the importance of Chinese nationalism, Ying Zhu notes that allowing:

> commerce into China does not mean taking the Chinese state out; the financial base has changed without substantially reducing the state's regulatory power or its inclination to exercise ideological and moral oversight of the media. In fact, what we have witnessed in the last few years is the reassertion of content control by a combination of legal and

[33] Anna Vorontsova and Xenia Leontyeva, *Focus on the Audiovisual Industry in the Russian Federation* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016), 13
[34] Svetlana Vodyanova, *Television and On Demand Service in the Russian Federation* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2011), 25.
[35] Anna Kachkaeva, Ilya Kiriya, and Grigory Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2006), 91.
[36] Sada Aksartova et al., *Television in the Russian Federation: Organisational Structure, Programme Production and Audience* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2003), 79.

> administrative means supplemented now and then by personal interventions from top leadership.[37]

He adds that three different sets of regulation have essentially given the Chinese government control of drama production from conception to production.[38] The Chinese leadership has used their control of the medium to create texts that address different social questions as they arise. For example, Zhu states that many of the post-Tiananmen series focused on Chinese history were explicit attempts to promote the idea of "clean" officials.[39] Essentially, in its attempt to battle official corruption, the Chinese establishment enlisted television to produce heroic stories of uncorrupted bureaucrats. According to Zhu, television dramas have also been used to create discourses around the rise of organized crime, and questions of political reform. According to Zhu, this is by explicit design since the Chinese state sees television series as a way to allay specific worries and promote traditional Confucian values. Therefore, authoritarian capitalism tends to create television programs that serve the state's interests.

Hybridity, Cultural Technologies

When examining a late entrant into globalization like Russia, it is important to understand how a local culture makes sense of and integrates elements of global culture. The mixing of cultural elements through the processes of globalization is called hybridity. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse suggests, hybridity is ultimately useful in breaking down notions of cultural purity and reducing the dependence of national cultures on prelapsarian purity narratives for their self-

[37] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership and the Global Television Market* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 11.
[38] Ibid., 5.
[39] Ibid., 31.

definition.[40] By pointing out that no culture is pure and untouched by another and that for all of their differences they are constantly taking on aspects of other cultures and transforming them for their own purposes, hybridity suggests a path forward for understanding how cultures interact in the global age. Pieterse is also explicit in suggesting that in resisting the influences of global cultures one of the only tools available to a grouping of people is to fall back on a narrative that views the origins of that culture as a pure ideal, unpolluted by outside elements.[41] Hybridity and the pushback against cultural inclusion, therefore, exists in a dialectic of transgressing and reasserting cultural boundaries. Naturally, this takes place in the creation of discourses of inclusion and exclusion, both of people and ideas.

Pieterse also suggests that there are several distinct modes of hybridity that are possible: asymmetric, symmetric and with or without centers.[42] What he admits, however, is that for both symmetric and decentralized hybridity it is difficult to think of concrete real world examples. Therefore, we can conclude that hybridity is both an asymmetric process and one that ultimately exists in a center-margins relationship. The case of Russia is an example of this type of hybridity. Russian culture today is being heavily influenced by Western culture. American films dominate the Russian box office week after week, McDonald's restaurants have sprung up in many major Russian cities, and consumer goods and electronics such as the Apple iPhone have become high-status products. It would be impossible to make the case that Russian products or cultural texts have had the same amount of influence on people in the West. As a result, Russian culture is encountering, and taking on elements of Western culture in a very uneven way. As a Russian

[40] Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 100.
[41] Ibid., 93–94.
[42] Ibid., 108.

television executive suggested in an interview with Variety Russia, Hollywood sets the trends, Moscow follows Hollywood and Russia follows Moscow.[43]

The above, however, only suggests the general outlines of an idea of hybridity and why it adequately describes the way global cultures are interacting without speaking to it in specific detail. Marwan Kraidy's work on cultural hybridity, on the other hand, is useful for describing the process of cultural mixing that is currently transforming the Russian television landscape. Essentially, hybridity exists when a text enters into a foreign culture, and people blend it with elements of the indigenous culture. Kraidy argues that hybridity "repudiates the idea that cultures are discrete and separate entities, historically unchanging wholes into which birth alone secures membership."[44] Instead, he proposes that cultures are constantly being shaped by other cultures they encounter, a process that has increased exponentially in intensity and speed in the era of globalization. Cultures, in his mind, are also constantly making use of elements of other cultures that seem to resonate, but not always in the way that they were presented in the original culture. Kraidy cautions, however, against romanticizing hybridity. He notes that hybrid cultural practices adopted by the creative class are not necessarily a form of resistance to globalization, but instead are one of the many mechanics that enable its spread.[45] Culturally hybrid texts may, but are not required to contain elements of opposition to global forces. He even goes as far as to assert that "as the cultural logical of globalization, hybridity is not post-hegemonic… unequal intercultural relationships shape most aspects of cultural mixture" but is careful to say that this

[43] Ksenia Boletskaya, Vyacheslav Murugov Televidenie-Eto Ne Kanaly Eto Khity [Vyacheslav Murugov - Television is Not About Channels it is About Hits], Variety Russia, October 4, 2014, http://www.varietyrussia.com/tv/10-04-2014/vyacheslav-murugov-televidenie-eto-ne-kanaly-eto-khity/.
[44] Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity: The Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 161.
[45] Ibid., 148.

"does not mean that hybridity is tantamount to an effect of dominance."[46] Consequently, the introduction of global cultural forms to Russia and their subsequent absorption into Russian cultures are part of the process of globalization. It is also worth noting that there are areas where Russian culture has felt a need to push back against the increasing encroachment by foreign cultures.

Having established a general sense of what hybridity entails, a more important question is how texts that originate in one cultural milieu transfer into another. For the global television industry, one of the key systems of cultural transference has been the format. Albert Moran states that a program format is "understood as that set of invariable elements in a program out of which the variable elements of an individual episode are produced."[47] In the most developed form, formats include everything from: "the Bible" (which is a total reference guide to the program), consultancy services, blueprints and set specifications, computer software graphics, titles, sound, scripts, a dossier of demographic ratings, scheduling and related information, off-air video tapes of programs and insertable footage.[48] The format represents the perfect medium for cultural hybridization since it provides all of the documents and services which make it possible to translate the original text into a new cultural milieu, including all of the knowledge gained through past attempts at creating localized versions of the program. While these localized versions contain elements of local culture, for example culturally specific jokes, the core of the program remains the same. The original text does not disappear, but rather provides a template while keeping its underlying ideology and purpose more or less intact.

[46] Kraidy, *Hybridity*.
[47] Albert Moran and Justin Malbon, *Understanding the Global TV Format* (New York: Intellect, 2006), 20.
[48] Ibid., 23–25.

Formats have proliferated in the last quarter century as producers in many countries have tried to find ways of minimizing risks and costs while still drawing significant audiences. Formats, particularly in their unscripted iterations have proven ideal in this regard. They also provide a way for local producers to access proven content without running afoul of the increasingly stringent quotas on imported content in some important markets like China.[49] Roland Robertson initially described the trend toward creating local versions of global programs as "glocalization" a term he borrowed from the lexicon of Japanese businesses that sought to adapt themselves to local business environments. In television, the term has been seen as meaning a desire to blend global and local styles and content.[50]

Jean Chalaby suggests that formats are a way for television producers to integrate the success of global television products into their local markets while at the same time making the global origins of these programs essentially invisible. He argues that "the rules of a format are put in place to weave narratives and disappear behind the stories they generate… formats may be international to the industry, but they are always local to the audience."[51] In that sense, they are potentially powerful hybrid forms. They carry with them some of the ideas and assumptions of the culture from which they came but introduce those ideas to their new international audience in a way that is accessible and palatable. In their work on the Flemish localization of the Columbian *Yo Soy Betty, la Fea* franchise Adriaens and Biltereyst suggested that the process of creating a television format involved both the reaffirmation of the national, in banal ways and the opening

[49] Silvio Waisbord, "McTV Understanding the Global Popularity of Television Formats," *Television & New Media* 5, no. 4 (November 1, 2004): 359–83.
[50] Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities*, ed. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1995), 25–44.
[51] Jean Chalaby, "Reflection I: Transnational TV Formats: Making the Local Visible and the Global Invisible," *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* 8, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): 55.

of new vistas of debate. This dual process is achieved by exposing the audience to a type of story-telling that ultimately is different from that to which they are accustomed.[52] While the melodramatic closed structure of the telenovela remained, several aspects were adapted to make the series more acceptable to Flemish audiences. Specifically, more of the characters were given in-depth back stories to make them more appealing, and additional characters were added so that there would be additional narrative complexity.[53]

Moran and Keane have been critical of the way that the format market has developed noting that in many ways it has reproduced already existing power structures in global media markets. Specifically, they suggest that most of the creators and rights holders of large successful formats were from either the United States or the European Union, with a few formats coming from Latin America.[54] Their observation was, at the time, correct since most of the formats of the time were game shows and talent competitions. However, in the intervening years, other media centers have grown in importance. Oren and Shahaf note that Isreal, Columbia, and the Netherlands have become important suppliers of formats, but they do not yet match the scope of major format producers such as Britain and the United States.[55] Conversely, Silvio Waisbord has been particularly celebratory in his assessment of formats as a form of transnational culture. He asserts that:

[52] Fien Adriaens and Daniel Biltereyst, "Glocalized Telenovelas and National Identities A 'Textual Cum Production' Analysis of the 'Telenovelle' Sara, the Flemish Adaptation of Yo Soy Betty, La Fea," *Television & New Media* 13, no. 6 (November 1, 2012): 563.
[53] Ibid., 559.
[54] Michael Keane and Albert Moran, eds., *Television Across Asia: TV Industries, Programme Formats and Globalisation* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[55] Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, "Introduction," in *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, ed. Sharon Shahaf and Tasha Oren (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

> the popularity of formats is more than just another trend in an industry perennially hungry for hit shows and eager to follow them. It reveals two developments in contemporary television: the globalization of the business model of television and the efforts of international and domestic companies to deal with the resilience of national cultures.[56]

He argues that formats are essentially ways for global media industries to penetrate markets that prove otherwise resistant to the products that they sell.

Moran in studying the way that formats deploy global norms suggests that localization and hybridization are part of the normal flow of media globally and are to a large extent synonymous. He places hybridization below localization suggesting that it is one of the results of the former. He suggests that:

> localization is central to the process of cultural hybridization: the blending of global and local cultural forms, the constant borrowing, and meshing of styles and forms whose origins are geographically located in distant corners of the globe. Recent studies have stressed the significance of hybridization as a distinctive characteristic of contemporary cultural processes… As expressed in a variety of cultural forms, hybridization is seemingly the dominant cultural form in today's globalized media cultures.[57]

He stresses that the spread of cultural forms remains a deeply complex exchange where large global players are forced to deal with local companies that are often dominant within that market. The hybridization/localization of a particular text, or even a wider constellation of texts within a genre, involves swapping out of culturally specific markers. Moran suggests that:

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[56] Waisbord, "McTV Understanding the Global Popularity of Television Formats," 360.
[57] Albert Moran, ed., *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs* (New York: Intellect, 2010), 58.

> localization needs to be understood as a series of efforts to make content 'real' through particular interpretations of local and national 'reality' at a specific time. It entails erasing cultural signs that establish cultural distance between programs and audiences, and instead developing markers that signal common belonging.[58]

He stresses that in doing so, the producers, who he refers to as gatekeepers, do not fall back on a set of symbols that could be called official national culture. Instead, "nationhood is defined as a collective culture shaped by a set of common and recent experiences" adding that "localization entails sketching out 'the nation' at a particular moment in time…it is less about the past and more about the present."[59] It follows that hybridization involves making texts relevant to audiences by having it speak to their lived reality. In this way, it is different from simple translation. It is a way of keeping the core of the text intact, and monetizing it internationally while bypassing the problem of what Colin Hoskins and Rold Mirus call the "cultural discount" by which they mean the difficulty programs have transitioning from one culture to another.[60]

He also stresses that this kind of cultural exchange is part of a complex network of knowledge transfers. The companies that own the rights to formatted programs play an active role in determining the overall shape of the programs that ultimately become hybridized. They provide consultancy and are present on the sets of programs. They act in a teaching role, especially in industries where there is little experience working with certain genres or where there are different patterns of production that may clash with the needs of a specific genre. These consultancy services are not, as Moran stresses, part of a culturally imperialist program, but are

[58] Ibid., 65.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus, "Reasons for the US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes," *Media, Culture & Society* 10, no. 4 (October 1, 1988): 499–515.

instead meant to smooth the transition towards global programming and often lead to an overall skills buildup within local cultural industries.

Michael Keane, Anthony Y.H. Fung, and Albert Moran propose that formats and other cultural texts are, in essence, types of cultural technologies.[61] They define the term stating that "cultural technology has a more direct connotation to television content if linked to the idea of 'knowledges' about production, about marketing, and about consumer patterns… all commercial entertainment media are cultural technologies insofar as they aim to attract your attention, keep your attention and - in the case of commercial television- sell your attention to advertisers" adding that:

> Cultural technology transfer has two edges. In a material sense a cultural commodity is formed; in another sense, the success of the commodity… leads to further dissemination of the technology… cultural technology transfer entails looking at program flows through the pragmatic lens of content internationalization.[62]

They conclude that:

> the cultural technology transfer model is, therefore, a way of bridging the gap between modernization theory that supposes that modern 'Western' technology and its ways of organization contribute to the inevitable transition from tradition to modernity, and media imperialism, which has tended to see foreign programming as a threat to social values. In effect, the equation is not so straightforward… cultural technology transfer of format

[61] Michael Keane, Anthony Y.H. Fung, and Albert Moran, *New Television, Globalisation, and the East Asian Cultural Imagination* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 88.
[62] Ibid., 88–89.

licensing and appropriation depends on the environment in which it is transplanted. Sometimes it takes, sometimes it doesn't."[63]

They also note that a very important aspect of these kinds of transfers is that there is, inevitably also "intellectual, social and institutional reconfiguration."[64] Particularly in the case of the Russian industry, these other technologies, primarily brought in by major western studios like Sony, are in some cases, as important as the programs that were imported. Specifically, these technologies helped the newly formed Russian channels and production companies to understand transnational television standards and produce compelling programming.

Methodology

As discussed briefly in the introduction, this study uses a mixed methodological approach combining the analysis of political and economics institutions (political economy), textual analysis of the programs, nine semi-structured interviews with people who have worked or are working in the Russian television industry (conducted by me) and analysis of popular press and industry trade publications. Of these approaches, my use of political economy is the one that most goes against some of the most recent trends in media studies. According to Havens, Lotz and Tinic political economy engenders a perspective roughly equivalent to that of staring out the window of a jet plane.[65] This description offers an excellent metaphor for understanding the limits of what political economy describes and also why this view might be problematic in isolation. They contend that this outlook sees only macro-level operations rather than the innumerable creative negotiations that take place constantly. While I agree with their objections

[63] Ibid., 89.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic, "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2, no. 2 (2009): 234–253.

to political economy in general, when examining the Russian case, it is impossible to talk about the television industry outside of its relationship with two powerful groups: the state and the oligarchs. In fact, even here, separating those two groups is somewhat problematic since the oligarchs in most cases maintain their elite political and economic positions specifically by cultivating close ties to the Putin administration. Authoritarian capitalism means that television in Russia remains dominated by the state in direct and indirect ways and requires this macro-perspective to understand all its various parts. The two largest television stations are directly state-owned, and the rest of the television economy has indirect ties to the state. Therefore, one cannot understand their programs or the choices made by producers without looking at the institutional context at a broad level.

The "critical media industry studies" model proposed by the trio, is specifically designed to address the media economies of developed capitalist countries, where the rule of law is the norm and state's influence over the media is primarily related to regulation. Therefore, it cannot transfer to an authoritarian capitalist state like Russia without some modification. While the insights gained from talking to industry insiders, examining trade press and doing textual analysis does offer a level of detail that is absent in the typical political economy accounts, this does not negate the need to examine pressure from a nation-state that acts as one of the central hubs of power. Their model is adept at examining how producers meet the needs of networks, studios, and audiences and how they understand their relationship to each of those nodes. In Russia, while networks do seek to attract audiences there is the extra layer of navigating the dictates of the state. One can only understand these negotiations by looking at the political institutions involved. Without this understanding, it is impossible to understand the system as a whole. Therefore, I will be using a modified version of the critical media industry studies model

that includes the broader perspective of political economy to examine the power relationship within the Russian media system. I will metaphorically, bring the aircraft down to observe the dynamics in a more comprehensive fashion.

Critical media industry studies locates its philosophical underpinnings of their proposed field of study in the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, particularly in their incorporation of the works of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci. Specifically, they borrow the conception of power from these two theorists, suggesting that power should be conceived as productive, in that it tends to produce specific ways of understanding audiences, texts, and economics.[66] Conceiving of media in this manner also suggests the importance of Stuart Hall's articulation of Gramsci's conception of power. Gramsci, according to Hall, conceives of the dominant ideology as being in a constant state of struggle with other ideas and value systems. When one set of ideas gains dominance, it gains the status of 'common sense' and becomes the overarching societal system of values that most people accept as the natural order. This victory is never total as competing ideological systems continue to exist and challenge the dominant system in an attempt to displace it.[67] Hall adds that "hegemony is understood as accomplished… principally by means of active consent of those classes or groups who were subordinated within it."[68] As a result, the common sense of hegemony is not forced on populations; rather they actively concede to it by accepting its discourses.

The media plays an active role in the dissemination of these competing discourses within a society acting as what Newcomb and Hirsch term a "cultural forum" where competing

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[66] Ibid., 237.
[67] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).
[68] Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Tony Bennett et al. (New York: Methuen, 1982), 81.

ideological positions are presented.[69] To prove their point, they reference an episode of the program *Father Knows Best* where the character of Betty Anderson tries to work as an engineer on a survey crew as part of a career day. Their contention is that this event presents the viewer with a set of competing discourses with the characters taking different positions on Betty's job and how it relates to gender norms in the very conservative 1950s when the concept of women's roles in the workforce was very limited. The program acted as a forum for the idea that young women might want a career other than those typically available to them. This example highlights television's function as a venue for the presentation of ideas about society. Heather Hendershot, in her reflections on the contemporary usefulness of the idea of television as a forum, notes that the period that they discussed is more of a historical curiosity at this point than something reflective of the current media environment. She notes that when the pair initially proposed the idea, there were only three main networks in the United States and, as a result, people tended to watch mostly the same programming. Therefore, a program like *Father Knows Best* could broadly discuss ideas such as gender roles with the expectation that it would reach a vast audience, and could be a conduit for competing ideas. In some ways, Russia is similar enough to the United States in the network era since television is still the dominant medium and a few broadcast networks are dominant. Therefore, it is still possible to speak of it as a cultural forum in Russia. This dominance is changing gradually as high-speed Internet access proliferates, but the six largest networks in Russia still command enough attention to warrant calling them a cultural forum.

Along with the circulation of formats and other such technologies, another key aspect to examining television texts is questioning the ways they are understood using categories such as

[69] Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum," in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. Horace Newcomb, Sixth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

genre. Especially when looking at the Russian market, there are certain genres that have a longer history in television than others. Jason Mittell suggests that with regards to studies of television genres, rather than looking at genre as a particular quality arising from the text, that genres instead should be examined as discursive formations.[70] He notes that "genres obviously primarily work to classify texts together… genres also serve as sites of interpretive consistency, as genric interpretations posit core meanings for any given genre. – police dramas as conservative rituals of assurance, horror as a means to cope with social anxiety."[71] Genres, he adds "work as discursive clusters with certain definition, interpretations, and evaluations coming together at any given time to suggest a coherent, clear genre."[72] Genres, therefore, come loaded with pre-existing systems of understanding that help the audience know what to make of them.

His definition is relatively similar to Tony Bennet and Janet Woollacott's suggestion that texts are part of reading formations. Bennett defines genres as "a set of intersecting discourses that productively activate a given body of texts and the relations between them in a specific way."[73] This statement is also similar to the suggestion by Mikhail Bakhtin that "a text lives only in contact with another text (context). Only at the point of this contact does light flare up, shining backwards and forwards, bringing the texts towards dialogue… This … is a dialogue of contact between texts (utterances) and not a mechanical contact of 'oppositions.'"[74] Genres as discursive or reading formations, therefore, exist only at the points of contact with other texts. It is these

[70] Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 15.
[71] Ibid., 17.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Tony Bennett, "Texts, Readers, Reading Formations," *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 5.
[74] Stephen C. Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin's Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6.

points of contact that help audiences decipher their meaning. Diane Carr articulates this relationship further:

> Viewers and readers will respond to and interpret a text according, in part, to their reading formations – the social, cultural and historical make up of their interpretive perspective… Bennett and Woollacott intend to move past a focus on either the 'text itself,' or the 'active reader,' to highlight the cultural and ideological forces which organize and reorganize the network or inter-textual relations within which texts are inserted as texts-to-be-read.[75]

The inter-textual relationships encompass the question of genres since texts interact through these categorizations structures the understanding of texts. The genres that they belong to and help constitute ultimately shapes the audiences' understanding of what they are experiencing. Or to put it more simply, the genre conventions in part tell the reader what to expect from the text.

As discussed earlier, along with my analyses of institutions both political and economic and textual analysis, I also have two bodies of interviews that contribute to my understanding of the dynamics of the Russian television industry. The first are nine interviews conducted directly by me with industry professionals who have been working in the Russian television industry since roughly 2003. I also consult a few other sources of interviews most notably from *Ekho Moskvy*'s *Telekhranitel* program. *Telekhranitel,* meaning "Defender of television" – a play on the words *telokhranitel* or bodyguard – airs once a week on Sundays and features a prominent member of the television community in conversation with host Elena Afasyenova. These interviews cover a wide range of topics from specific programs to the general philosophy of some of the television networks in Russia. The interviewees have a particular agenda and are

[75] Diane Carr, "Textual Analysis, Digital Games, Zombies," in *Proceedings of DiGRA 2009* (Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory, Brunel University, West London, United Kingdom, 2009), 4.

often acting in a promotional capacity. These interviews, however, often reveal important details about productions that are useful even though they contain "industry spin."

Other industry interviews that I consult are from the pages of the industry trade publication *Variety Russia*. The now-shuttered magazine was the local Russian edition of the American entertainment industry publication *Variety*. The magazine was published in Russia from July of 2012 to January 2015 and routinely conducted interviews with some of the most influential members of the Russian television and film industry. In this study, I will include interviews with Vyacheslav Murugov, the general producer at STS, Yuliana Slashcheva CEO of STS Media Holdings and the production team at Yellow, Black, and White, one of Russia's leading production companies. Each of these provides important insider details about one of the networks or programs that I am examining.

Lastly, much of my understanding of the shape of the industry comes from articles taken from both the industry and popular press. These accounts help shape a basic understanding of ownership and influence patterns within the Russian industry, particularly how each network is connected back to the state. This body of data makes up the bulk of the political economy portion of my analysis. The combination of all of these different data points, allow me to generate a broad picture of the Russian industry, from its reemergence as a cultural force around 2003 through the fifteen years of Putin's political dominance to the present.

Chapter 2 Russian Television: Past and Present

When examining the Russian television industry, it is important to remember that it did not emerge *de novo* in the post-Soviet period. This chapter examines the history of Soviet and Russian television to understand better the conditions from which the current Russian television landscape emerged. Continuities and moments of rupture with the past are emphasized in order to make sense of why certain genres emerged at certain times and how the historical roots of the medium in the country continue to shape industry practices. The medium's Soviet era history has had a strong long-term effect on production strategies and programming choices. Very little has been written about Soviet-era entertainment programming on television by scholars in the English-speaking world. However, two relatively recent works present an in-depth historical account of its development. Kristen Roth-Ey's *Moscow Prime Time* gives a very thorough account of the development of the Soviet television industry, and it offers a way to understand why television entertainment developed in Russia along a fairly unique trajectory. She reveals two interesting facts that are surprising given the monolithic view of culture ascribed to the Soviet period. What Roth-Ey recounts is that in its initial phases, television was the purview of hobbyists, who often obtained the equipment to put on amateur television productions with help from local branches of the Communist Party. These branches also provided political protection from Moscow officials when they eventually wished to take control of the system.[1] These amateur productions were difficult for Soviet authorities to control as late as 1964. These internal

[1] Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 186.

struggles with local party officials suggest the challenges Soviet authorities had in bringing the new technology under their control.[2]

Even once Moscow had effectively centralized the operation of television broadcasting and production primarily to the Soviet capital, another factor, this time economic, led to considerable problems with television production which made the medium unwieldy for Soviet censors. The Soviet Union suffered from a lack of film stock on which to record television programming. The film industry, which was adequately supplied with such materials, viewed television as a lesser medium and therefore, was unwilling to turn over materials, equipment, and facilities to help the budding sector.[3] As a result, the output of Soviet television remained almost exclusively live-to-air programming well into the 1970s. This deficit limited what genres and types of storytelling eventually found their ways to Soviet television screens. At first, it led to the broadcast of mostly cultural events such as theater, ballet, and sports.[4] Eventually, however, game shows were developed. The earliest of these was *Vercher Veselykh Voprosov* (*Evening of Merry Questions*) better known as *VVV*. The program was an eclectic game show that did not pre-screen contestants, inviting members of the studio audience to participate at random.[5] The program's open format led to its eventual demise when the host invited Muscovites to come to the theater where it was being filmed, dressed in sheepskin coats and carrying samovars, despite it being the middle of summer. While prior invitations had elicited only a few entrants, this time, hundreds hurried to the theater causing traffic jams and general confusion. The show was canceled shortly after this incident, but the program remains a favorite of those people who

[2] Ibid., 188.
[3] Ibid., 230.
[4] This practice continued into the twilight days of the Soviet Union. During the failed putsch that attempted to oust Mikhail Gorbachev, the army ordered that main television stations to play a recorded version of *Swan Lake.*
[5] Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 251.

remember the early days of Soviet television. A second game show *Klub Veselykh i Nakhodchivykh* (Club of the Merry and Quick-witted) or *KVN*, originally invited primarily male university students to compete in teams. They were meant to present a mix of sketch comedy and improvisations which were then judged by the studio audience. The program aired monthly from 1961 until 1972 though it was revived in the post-Soviet era.[6] Like *VVV* before it, *KVN* had a reputation for spontaneity, which endeared it to audiences but which made communist officials uncomfortable.

Given its relatively long history as a domestic genre, it is not surprising that the game show continues to be popular in Russia. In fact, one of the most popular programs of the 1990s according to Natalia Rulyova and Stephen Hutchings was the unlicensed *Wheel of Fortune* copy *Pole Chuda* (*Field of Dreams*). The Soviet game shows may have also laid the foundation for the spinoff genre of reality television. This genre remains popular in Russia with programs like *Dom-2,* a *Big Brother*-like program, and numerous musical and talent competitions often dominating the ratings. I do not mean to suggest that this genre would never have attracted an audience in post-Soviet Russia had *VVV* and *KVN* never existed, but clearly their presence and later Soviet game shows such as *A-nu-ka Devushki* (*Let's go Girls*), a baking game show, and *Chto? Gde? Kogda?* (*What? Where? When?*), a quiz show, set the stage for the acceptance of the genre.

Roth-Ey's account of Soviet television's early days also touches on the biggest shift that came to Soviet television. In the 1970s Soviet television began to produce and air mini-series. These Brezhnev-era programs remain cultural touchstones to Russians. Where Roth-Ey's

[6] From 1968 until its cancellation in 1972, *KVN* was filmed and edited rather than being shown live, limiting its spontaneous character.

account of Soviet television leaves off, Elena Prokhorova's in-depth account of many of the most significant programs of the Brezhnev era offers a detailed look at the types of series that would lay the foundation for post-Soviet entertainment television. She states that genres like the spy-thriller and police dramas of that time are "narratives of control over individual and community identity" which "was itself a sign of an unstable, troubled identity."[7] She suggests that what "new Russian productions [demonstrate is] the fact that the break with Soviet cultural tradition has been most pronounced in form rather than content."[8] In looking at the early output of the post-Soviet Russian television industry, she concludes that massively popular series such as *Ulitsy Razbitykh Fonarei* (*Streets of Broken Lights*), *Kamenskaya,* and *Banditskii Peterburg* (*Criminal Petersburg*) continue the cultural trajectory of the Soviet period and strongly favor genres that speak about social cohesion.

A potential problem with Prokhorova's reading of the police and spy genres is the degree to which she attributes the qualities of both the Soviet and post-Soviet examples of the genre to their specific cultural milieu. While her analysis of many aspects of television in Russia and the USSR are thorough, she displays a "specialist" blindness that is somewhat troubling. She often assumes that the trends she is talking about are unique to Russia. In reality, much of what Prokhorova argues about Russian television and the spy genre are in line with other articulations globally. Jason Mittell observes that police procedural, detective dramas, and spy thrillers are consistent as discursive formations since they seek to reassure viewers that society is stable and safe and that the forces of order are likely to overpower those of disorder.[9] Rather than suggesting that Prokhorova's analysis is incorrect, I am suggesting that much of what she sees is

[7] Elena Prokhorova, "Fragmented Mythologies: Soviet Mini-Series of the 1970s" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Pittsburg, 2003), 235.
[8] Ibid., 234.
[9] Mittell, *Genre and Television*, 15.

not unique to Russia. The specific issues that Russians deal with are different, but the phenomenon of security genres on television being a way to assuage insecurities about society and identity is not unique to that country.

Regardless of the limits of her argument, hers remains one of the most complete accounts of early post-Soviet television. She points to *Streets of Broken Lights* as particularly important in understanding post-Soviet television. In her analysis, the series demonstrates the instability and uncertainty of Russian society. While many crime dramas would be about a criminal investigation, she suggests that *Streets of Broken Lights* is more about engaging with the mythology of the city of St. Petersburg. The everyday crimes that she points to as the core of the series make it less about solving complex criminal undertakings as about examining the "Russian soul."[10] In the same vein, Jennifer Tishler's analysis of the same series suggests that it primarily tries to generate a post-Soviet sense of Russian identity, and casts the police as the ultimate defenders of that identity. She suggests that the series is actually about the enduring spirit of St. Petersburg, which has survived wars, floods, the benign neglect of the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian states, and is likely to survive the criminal infestation of the late 1990s and early 2000s.[11] She notes that the creators of the series generally use pre-Soviet monuments in the city to make a distinction between the police, who are aware of their importance, and the criminals, who are completely ignorant of their meaning. [12] The police are, in a sense, defending the physical heritage of Russian identity (embodied in the city itself) against the criminals who exist as a result of the weak, disorganized post-Soviet state. This depiction of the police is what

[10] Elena Prokhorova, "Can the Meeting Place Be Changed? Crime and Identity Discourse in Russian Television Series of the 1990s," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 521.
[11] Jennifer Ryan Tishler, "Menty and the Petersburg Myth: TV Cops in Russia's 'Crime Capital,'" *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 10, no. 2 (2003): 129.
[12] Ibid., 131.

Prokhorova has in mind when she suggests that new Russian television serials are a response to a fundamental uneasiness Russians have with regards to the stability of their society.

One of the exceptions to the early post-Soviet police procedurals' focus on dark social themes and the glamor of the criminal underworld, seen in series like *Criminal Petersburg*, was the television series *Kamenskaya.* The series follows the career of its eponymous heroine Anastasia 'Nastya' Kamenskaya. The series ran between 2000 and 2011 with a total of eighty-four episodes and is based on the highly popular novels of Russian author Alexandra Marinina. The series now numbers 30 novels all of which have been adapted for television. The six seasons of the television program are themselves subdivided into smaller 'films' each of which is based on an individual novel. According to the ratings data available, the series routinely drew roughly a quarter of viewers across Russia and a slightly higher percentage in the capital.[13]

As Andrei Rogatcheski notes "*Kamenskaya* can [be] justifiably treated as an example of skillful post-Soviet pro-government small screen propaganda."[14] The reason for his interpretation is the series' portrayal of the events and the protagonists. Anastasia Kamenskaya is a type of super detective in the lineage of Sherlock Holmes and shares billing in post-Soviet Russia with Boris Akunin's Erast Fandorin. She is part of a team of dedicated and, ultimately, very honest policemen who solve bizarre crimes. Principle among her allies are Yuri Kopotkov, who shares the rank of major with Kamenskaya and the head of their division Viktor Gordeyev, who is known by the nickname 'kolobok' a type of round Russian pastry. Kamenskaya's intellect is the key to connecting the often disparate pieces of the various puzzles the team confronts.

[13] "Telerejtingi: 'Delo Bylo Na Kubani' uderzhivaet Pervoe Mesto [Ratings: 'It Happened in Kuban' rises to First Place]," *Newsru.com*, September 6, 2011, http://www.newsru.com/cinema/06sep2011/ratingf.html.
[14] Andrei Rogatcheski, "May the [Police] Force Be with You : The Television Adaptations of Alexandra Marinina's Detective Novels," *Russian Studies in Literature* 40, no. 3 (July 1, 2004): 80.

The crimes vary widely. The first novel and series, *A Coincidence of Circumstances,* deals primarily with corruption, murder, and blackmail within the police. Other stories such as *The Stylist* follows a serial killer who is targeting gay men in Moscow and its surrounding suburbs. What is most striking is that, in a way likely to be inconsistent with the experiences of the majority of Russians, the cases are always solved, and the criminals are always brought to justice. Rogatcheski correctly identifies one of the key elements of the *Kamenskaya* stories stating that their "main goal was to find an imaginary solution to the very real problem of the proliferation of crime in post-Soviet Russia" adding that "A new type of crime –characterized by ruthlessness, a high media profile and the inability of the police to apprehend criminals… demands a new type of police investigator."[15] The exploits of Kamenskaya and her cohorts also serve another purpose. As Tom Whitehouse suggests, "the millions who read her books must have faith in the prospects of justice –real and poetic- for the burgeoning number of Russian baddies."[16] In effect, the series helps to alleviate concerns about the state of post-Soviet Russia by creating a world where crime is always punished. Again, this is very much in line with what Mittell identifies in non-Russian series of the same genre.

Whitehouse's remarks correspond with comments made by Valerii Todorovskii, who at the time served as one of the producers of the series and deputy general producer at Rossiya One. He states that:

> "Generally speaking, it's like a fairy tale. And this is why TV series are not depressing. How come these fairy tales are so popular? The answer is simple… Opinion polls reveal that respondents always put crime among the three most important things that make them

[15] Ibid., 81.
[16] Tom Whitehouse, "Big In... Moscow: Alexandra Marinina," *The Guardian*, November 14, 1997.

> anxious. If they are anxious about crime, they will keep watching TV crime series… Subconsciously it'd be nice to see of course, that there are good policemen [sic] in the country and the criminals get what they deserve. There is an expectation of some sort of justice and of the absence of impunity… Unlike crime reports in the news, TV series give you hope."[17]

This kind of representation helps to build the sense of a solid society where the rule of law and honest police officers exist. In this way, it helps to build up a sense of ontological security since the world of *Kamenskaya* is one in which people can legitimately live and interact with their institutions with confidence. As Roger Silverstone suggests, this is one of the ways that television has its strongest impact, by giving the comfort of an ordered and consistent world even where one does not exist.[18]

Beyond these early crime dramas, Birgit Beumers suggests that one of the breakout moments for Russian television came in the form of the melodrama *Bednaya Nastia* (*Poor Anastasia*). She states that "[STS] –an entertainment channel- understood the potential of the melodramatic genre and collaborated with Columbia Sony Pictures, adopting serial production methods from its more experienced co-producer."[19] In this statement, Beumers addresses one of the most important aspects of television production in post-Soviet Russia, namely that STS has been particularly effective in learning from foreign partners and replicating their techniques to create hit shows. In fact, STS is essentially responsible for popularizing the situation comedy in Russia. Dana Heller documented the numerous failures of early attempts at producing situation

[17] Natalia Gorbunova, "Chas Seriali [Series Time]," *Itogi*, February 19, 2002.
[18] Roger Silverstone, *Television And Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
[19] Birgit Beumers, Stephen Hutchings, and Natalia Rulyova, eds., *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 166.

comedies in that country. Critics and audiences hated the Russian-made sitcoms, particularly the shallowness of the characters and the use of a laugh-track.[20] It was not until 2004 when STS launched a version of the CBS show *The Nanny*, titled *Moia Prekrasnaia Niania* (*My Fair Nanny*) that the genre gained traction with Russian audiences. As Hutchings and Rulyova state, television humor in Russia has more closely been associated with the sketch-comedy genre and the "comedy of the virtuoso, stand-up variety," because those genres had been present on Russian television since the Soviet period and had historically been part of Soviet theater culture.[21] Consequently, *My Fair Nanny's* success is significant and will be discussed further in chapter four.

Since the success of *My Fair Nanny,* it has become clear that STS is the most important generic innovator in post-Soviet Russia. In addition to *Poor Anastasia* and *My Lovely Nanny,* STS produced the series *Be not Born Beautiful,* a localized version of the Columbian series *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea,* more commonly known for its American adaptation *Ugly Betty*. Elena Prokhorova locates the appeal of the series in the Cinderella story of rags to riches but also suggests that the Betty character (called Katya in the Russian) embodies the Soviet ideal of communality. She suggests that the poor characters in the series, including Katya and her family, represent more authentic values, than their shallow and materialistic upper-class peers.[22] Prokhorova's view of post-Soviet adaptations tends to be slightly myopic in this regard because she focuses on elements of the Russian adaptation of *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* as unique when they are in fact quite common to most versions of the series. As Michele Hilmes notes, class conflicts

[20] Dana Heller, "Russian 'Sitkom' Adaptation: The Pushkin Principle," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 31, no. 2 (2003): 63.
[21] Hutchings and Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin's Russia*, 140.
[22] Elena Prokhorova, "Glamorously (Post) Soviet: Reading," in *TV's Betty Goes Global from Telenovela to International Brand*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

and the opportunity of the heroine to transcend them are nearly universally present in the Betty format.[23] The Russian version is similar to the Chinese and Indian adaptation of the series each of which recasts elements of the narrative to fit the cultural milieu while retaining the core of the narrative, particularly as it relates to class. As Xiaolu Ma and Albert Moran note, the Chinese adaptation of the format transforms the love triangle to make it more appropriate in the eyes of Chinese audiences. Wudi, the Betty character, does not sleep with her boss, as she does in the Columbian and Mexican versions. Instead, she directs her energy at solving work conflicts rather than resolving the love triangle.[24] The Indian version makes the Betty character less ugly since an unattractive heroine was deemed inappropriate for the Indian market.[25]At their core, however, both those versions still involve a traversing of class barriers as the competent Betty character works her way up from her lower-class status. Nothing in these changes alters the core elements of the story or the characters. Like the Russian version, they are minor cultural differences to make the content palatable to local audiences.

Some other genres on Russian television have also garnered critical attention. Two, in particular, the historical drama and literary adaptations, have been studied. With regards to adaptations, David MacFadyen suggests that the popularity of television series based on novels increased exponentially from 2003 onward.[26] In a sense, this is not a strange or unexpected trend since this genre existed in the Soviet period. Prokhorova notes that the Soviet series *The*

[23] Michele Hilmes, "The World's Unlikely Heroine: Ugly Betty as a Transnational Phenomenon," in *TV's Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 40.
[24] Albert Moran and Xiaolu Ma, "Towards a Cultural Economy of Chou Nu (Nv) Wu Di: The Yo Soy Betty La Fea Franchise in the People's Republic of China," in *TV's Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 126–42.
[25] Divya McMillin, "How Ugly Can Betty Be in India," in *TV's Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 143–60.
[26] David MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson was a favorite of Soviet audiences.[27] However, MacFadyen notes the significant increase in the production of television adaptations of literary classics that began with the successful adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot.* The 2003 series launched what has become an almost unrelenting torrent of literary adaptations that continues unabated to the present. What is perhaps most notable, as MacFadyen suggests, is that the texts come from a wide range of genres and periods. These adaptations have included works from the Tsarist era, but also dissident works of the Soviet period and works that were considered masterpieces by communist authorities.[28] As such one should view the growth of the genre as a way to connect modern audiences with Russia's rich literary heritage and culture. This trend is explored in chapter three.

Organizational and Regulatory Framework

Beyond looking at genres, it is important to examine the organizational structure of the Russian television industry. Like most other television industries, it is shaped by some of the idiosyncrasies of the medium's history and the regulatory bodies charged with modulating its content. The regulatory framework of the Russian television industry was initially inherited from the Soviet Union and remains ill-defined and outdated. In many ways, the legal framework that governs audiovisual broadcasting in the Russian Federation reflects the overall power structure that has existed since the Yeltsin era. When President Yeltsin altered the constitution of the Russian Federation in 1993 to weaken the opposition he was facing from the lower house of the Russian parliament, called the Duma, he gave himself and his successors the ability to bypass the Supreme Soviet and the Duma and to rule by decree. It also created a legal structure that made it difficult for the Duma to amend laws that were implemented by decree. Consequently, one of the

[27] Prokhorova, "Fragmented Mythologies: Soviet Mini-Series of the 1970s," 207–29.
[28] MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today*, 32–67.

major pieces of legislation that still governs audiovisual services in the Russian Federation is the *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 2255 of December 22, 1993, On Improvement of State Administration in the Sphere of the Mass Media*.[29] This decree was folded into the *Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 1359 of the Seventh of December 1994* as a transitional measure until the adoption of new legislation. Part of this bill included a lengthy section entitled the *Regulation on Licensing*.[30]

Broadcasting remains the largest sector of Russian television and therefore looking at the regulations that manage this area is essential. All six major television networks in Russia today are over-the-air broadcasters. This technological backwardness likely has to do with the relative poverty of the Russian economy during the 1990s which stymied any reasonable attempts by entrepreneurs to build alternative cable or satellite distribution networks. While these networks do exist they are primarily limited to the major cities with Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the two largest and wealthiest metropolises, having the most developed cable systems. Even where infrastructure does exist the industry is hampered by long-term structural factors that, thus far, have been resistant to change. A report from the European Audiovisual Observatory outlines the fact that despite the growing number of cable and satellite options available to Russians, only about eighteen million users subscribe.[31] The authors of the report suggest that the reason for this is that "in large cities, [the] infrastructure mainly consists of old systems designed for collective (apartment building) reception of two to five terrestrial channels and frequently controlled by a local monopolist (usually a state-run communications provider)."[32] They add that "according to

[29] Andrei Richter, *The Regulatory Framework for Audiovisual Media Services in Russia* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2010), 25.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*.
[32] Ibid., 79.

the [Russian Federation's] Ministry of Communications, only 10% of the existing cable infrastructure has the technical capacity to provide broadband internet access… while 50% of all cable networks are outdated and allow the transmission of no more than five channels" adding that most of the cable providers that do exist are merely providing mostly the same channels available over-the-air. [33]

A second point that has entrenched broadcasting as the main model of television distribution in Russia is the attitudes of Russian consumers towards any kind of paid television subscription. The reports states that "since the populace is accustomed to free-of-charge television and there is so little diversity of content, cable network owners cannot generate enough revenue to build new broadband networks capable of delivering various packages and service."[34] This report remains the most recent one that details the growth and challenges of the Russian cable market. It is worth noting, however, that the report is nearly ten years old. Content has broadly diversified, and companies like STS Media have created secondary channels that theoretically could serve to diversify the base of content on cable. Headwinds against cable remain strong. With the major broadcasters transitioning to digital high definition over-the-air signals, the demand for cable as a source of high definition content is likely further suppressed. In addition, in the wake of the conflict with the West over Ukraine, media legislation was introduced in Russia that banned cable and satellite stations from running advertising.[35] This law has crippled the cable and satellite industries since without advertising they have no way of generating revenues. The only stations that are exempt from this legislation are those that are

[33] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*.
[34] Ibid., 79.
[35] Ilya Khrennikov, "Putin Bans Advertising on Pay Channels Amid Ukraine Tensions," *Bloomberg.com*, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-07-22/putin-bans-advertising-on-pay-channels-amid-ukraine-tensions.

primarily over-the-air broadcasters and happen to be carried on cable as well. The Russian state has its hand in controlling all of these stations to varying degrees.

As the European Audiovisual Institutes report also suggests "the government [of Russia] currently provides no economic stimulus for updating and developing the technical infrastructure of the cable industry, which is negatively impacting on the quality of the service and the product itself."[36] Though the report suggests the underdeveloped state of the Russian cable system is the result of benign neglect, the above law suggests an alternate reason for the poor development of the cable system. Cable, even in its relatively limited distribution model in Russia, has allowed the founding of a few stations that are openly critical of Vladimir Putin and his administration. One of these is *TV Dozhd*. The station primarily broadcasts live news and commentary, making it similar to cable news stations in the United States, but with much less influence. The station gained some prominence when it was one of the first to cover the 2011 rallies against what were perceived to be fraudulent elections for Russia's lower house of parliament, the Duma. *Dozhd* took a rather partisan view of the events and became a major promoter of the rallies against the United Russia political party and Putin. While most of the major stations (Channel One, Rossiya One and NTV) covered the rallies, most of them played down both their numbers and the anti-Putin rhetoric.[37]

The laws of 2014 that limited the ability of cable stations to run advertising seem to be a direct reaction to *Dozhd*'s reporting during these protests. As many commentators have noted the Russian leadership lives in constant fear that a "color revolution," like the "Rose" and "Orange"

[36] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*.
[37] Stephen Ennis BBC Monitoring, "Analysis: Russian TV Grapples with Protests," *BBC News*, accessed May 11, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16128473.

revolutions that swept anti-Russian governments into power in Ukraine and Georgia, might be repeated in Russia. A station like *Dozhd* that openly backs resistance to the ruling administration in the Kremlin, therefore, represents a threat. The easiest way to neutralize this possible outlet of resistance is to simply weaken cable television which the Kremlin apparently has more difficulty controlling. Thus, one can see the weak cable system in Russia as an example of the Kremlin, favoring the media that it can control and actively working to weaken the media that it cannot.

When it comes to regulating the broadcast industry, most parts of the original post-Soviet law remain in effect. The relevant provisions are the general licensing procedures that outline the requirements and possible reasons for refusal. The act lays out the general means that regulatory bodies may use to scrutinize licensees' activities and how they may ensure compliance with the law. The law also authorizes the executive branch (the office of the President) to set up open competitions, when two conflicting bids emerge for the same frequency.[38] A few statutes have been added over the year to govern the granting of broadcast licenses, but the law remains essentially unchanged since 1993. One of the strangest provisions of Russia's mass media laws is the fact that media companies require two separate licenses to broadcast content. One license is granted that permits broadcaster to actually "disseminate television and radio programs" while the other allows for the use of a radio or television broadcast frequency.

The granting of licenses is primarily the purview of two agencies within the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Communication and the Federal Competition Committee (FCC). In theory, the FCC is responsible for evaluating the proposals of the various applicants for licensing in terms of their ability to keep their station operating for the length of the license and for

[38] Richter, *The Regulatory Framework for Audiovisual Media Services in Russia*, 25.

acquiring or generating content required to fill a broadcast schedule. As Andrei Richter notes, the laws regulating the FCC's behavior "lacks established criteria for the FCC to assess the broadcasters' technical, financial and programming proposals" adding that "it is difficult to predict the volume of capital necessary to maintain a station for several years, and financial instability in Russia hinders the establishment of guidelines for broadcasters' business plans."[39] The rules that govern the FCC are also poorly defined. Richter notes that they suggest that "the FCC shall promote "socially oriented programs but no legal instrument defines what they are" and the law gives little idea of how such things should be judged.[40] Richter, Sklyarova and Kachkaeva et al. state that the laws of the Russian Federation regarding media industries in general, but television, in particular, are primarily based on the laws that came out of the final days of the Soviet Union, with minor revisions to those laws in 1994 and 1999. The poorly crafted aspects of the law could be used to withdraw licenses or otherwise inconvenience applicants by drawing out the processes or simply allowing them to be consumed by endless red-tape.

Overall, the situation with regards to regulation of the Russian industry is somewhat opaque. The laws are obviously flawed leaving a great deal of discretion to licensing bodies. Russia is a notoriously corrupt country, ranking one hundred and thirty-sixth out of one hundred seventy-four in the 2014 transparency international corruption index.[41] Vague laws in Russia offer a possible pressure point for corrupt officials to interpret statutes in a way that will assure them a bribe. Beyond that sort of run-of-the-mill corruption, however, the state also at times makes use of the law to coerce or otherwise force their opponents into submission. The example

[39] Yana Sklyarova, "The Russian System of Licensing of Television and Radio Broadcasting," *The Moscow Media Law and Policy Center*, 2003, 6.
[40] Ibid.
[41] "How Corrupt Is Your Country?," accessed May 13, 2015, http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/infographic.

of NTV offers a good case study of where Russian law can be used to either help or hinder those currently in favor with the Kremlin. Olessia Koltsova recounts that in 1996 when Boris Yeltsin was facing stiff competition from the communist party candidate, NTV which from its founding had been generally critical of the Yeltsin administration and particularly of the government's inability to enforce military discipline in the first Chechen war, decided to back the sitting president. Some kind of backroom deal was apparently struck between Yeltsin and Gusinsky, the oligarch who controlled NTV. In exchange for their support, the station was awarded the right to broadcast on the national bandwidth, previously allocated to Saint Petersburg's Channel Five, by executive order. This reallocation of bandwidth allowed NTV to become the third largest television broadcaster Russian immediately. The stripping of the Saint Petersburg-based broadcaster's national broadcast license was done without any real consultation as was the granting of those rights to NTV. These kinds of violations of the rule of law are problematic and show difficulties inherent in operating a business in Russia, where overwhelming executive power and poorly defined laws allow for cronyism. This problem fundamentally can affect all broadcasters since the laws on granting licenses are equally vague. Ultimately this leaves networks in a position where they may very well need to make sure that they are not displeasing the Putin government so that their businesses are not put at risk

Having discussed some of the central legislative and regulatory issues facing the Russian industry, it is important to understand who the major actors in the Russian television market are, particularly the largest channels. There are essentially six large and very important television channels in Russia today: Channel One, Rossiya, NTV, TNT, STS, and REN-TV. The state, for all intents and purposes, has some form of either direct or indirect control over each of the major networks. Sometimes as is the case with Channel One and Rossiya, the channel or holding

company is a majority-owned or solely owned by the state. Two of the stations, NTV and TNT, are owned by Gazprom Media Holdings, a subsidiary of Gazprom OAO Russia's natural gas monopoly and one of its largest companies. The firm is controlled by the Russian state and since 1999 has been run by staunch Putin allies. Current CEO Alexei Miller is widely seen as a Putin loyalist having served as a deputy energy minister in the Putin government, while the previous CEO of the company was Dimitri Medvedev, who served as President of Russia for one term while Putin was Prime Minister. Given that Gazprom is obviously controlled from the Kremlin it is safe to assume that its media wing is also under state control.

The final large holding company is STS Media Holdings which controls the large entertainment network STS as well as several sub-brands and second tier television channels. It is a NASDAQ listed company that has major shareholders from many parts of the world. Its primary ties to the state are through the National Media Group which owns a blocking portion, approximately twenty-five percent, of STS' shares. This investor is linked to Rossiya bank, and its owner Yuri Kovalchuk who was described by the U.S treasury department as "a close advisor to President Putin" and has been referred to as one of his 'cashiers.'[42]

Channel One

The most important television channel in the Russian Federation today is *Perviy Kanal* called Channel One in English.[43] The name reflects the fact that the channel occupies the first

[42] "Treasury Sanctions Russian Officials, Members Of The Russian Leadership's Inner Circle, And An Entity For Involvement In The Situation In Ukraine," accessed May 20, 2015, http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl23331.aspx.

[43] From 1994 to 2002 the channel was called *Obshchestvennoe Rossiyskoye Televidenie* (Russian Public Service Television) and abbreviated as ORT. While this name lasted for almost a decade, it never really achieved the common parlance that the current name, Channel One, held, since that name literally derives from the station's position of the dial and was the name the station had during its long Soviet history. Henceforth I will simply refer to the station as Channel One even if I am making a reference to a period where the channel was called ORT.

position on Russian television tuners. The channel emerged from the *Ostankino* channels of the Soviet Union, and initially, there were efforts made to transform it from a state-run broadcaster into a public service broadcaster. Today Channel One is a closed joint stock company. The Russian state owns the controlling fifty-one percent share of the network distributed among three government agencies. Two groups own the remaining forty-nine percent.[44] The first of these groups is the aforementioned Kremlin-aligned National Media Group which owns twenty-five percent and ORT-KB, a company owned by Putin loyalist Roman Abramovich, which owns twenty-four percent of the network. The ownership structure is held by a member of Putin's governing elites.

The station is managed by Konstantin Ernst a close Putin ally who serves as the company's general producer. The role of the general producer on Russian networks is akin to a vice-president in charge of programming. Ernst has held this post since 1995. As Simon Tucker, who owns a large production company in Russia suggested "Channel One is all about Ernst"[45] by which he meant that he makes all the decisions and benefits most from the success of the channel. The network, however, has a relatively diverse lineup of programming. While the news and current events portion of their schedule are by far the most important, they also maintain a number of other genres discussed in chapter seven.

The reason that the Russian state continues to own Channel One is fairly evident. At the end of the 1990s, the channel was one of the few that broadcast in every time zone in Russia reaching ninety-eight percent of the population. If Russian speakers living outside the country were counted, the station reached approximately two-hundred and ten million people. The most

[44] "Sotsialhyj (Nefinansobyj) Otchet [Public Nonfinancial Report]," 2013, 2, http://www.1tv.ru/first/socialotchet2013.pdf.
[45] Interview with Simon Tucker, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, July 31, 2014.

important program on Channel One is its nightly news program *Vremya*. Owing in large part to the long legacy that the channel has, its evening news bulletin remains the most popular source of information for a large part of the Russian population. Approximately forty percent of the channel's airtime is filled with entertainment programming mostly in the form of television series and films.[46] Some of its biggest hits in recent years have been programs like *Ottepel* or *The Thaw* a drama set in the Khrushchev era, *the Moscow Saga* a period drama set from the 1920s to the 1950s, *The Agents of National Security, The Dragon Sindrom* both of which are police procedurals and *Children of the Arbat* an adaptation of a Soviet literary classic. The station's programs tilt heavily towards melodramas and comedy programs are fairly rare. The government doubtlessly sees Channel One as the most important property in its media arsenal since it allowed the station to broadcast the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Black Sea city of Sochi. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that Konstantin Ernst was put in charge of organizing the opening and closing ceremonies of an event many felt represented a coming out party for the country onto the global stage. Given the level of control that the Putin regime seems to prefer, this fact alone suggests that Channel One and Ernst are key actors in the Russian media environment.

Rossiya One

Rossiya One is the crown jewel of the All State Television and Radio Company (VGTRK). The station occupies the second position on the television dial and in the Soviet period was known as Channel Two (*Vtoroiy Kanal*). The VGTRK group is actually very large and includes other stations like Kultura, Rossiya Two, 89 regional state-owned television

[46] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*, 47.

stations, RTR-Planeta a globe-spanning satellite service, a half dozen national radio networks and a handful of internet news portals.[47] In the immediate post-Soviet period the station was given a new name, RTR. The station would ultimately retain this name through the 1990s until it was given another name, Rossiya One, in the mid-2000s. The channel reaches about ninety-nine percent of the Russian population and another fifty million people in the former Soviet territories.[48] Unlike Channel One, Rossiya is completely state-owned and operated.

Its close relationship with the state has not always necessarily led to good governance. The authors of the 2006 report on the Russian television industry noted that "in its 15 years of existence, the channel has been reorganized frequently."[49] According to the authors through the 1990s the station was plagued with difficulties in its relationships with its regional partners. In the Yeltsin-era there was a feeling, partially promoted by Yeltsin, that the Russian regions should take as much independence as they could for themselves.[50] As a result, many of the re-broadcasters for Rossiya, who had connections to various regional governments had little incentive to transmit the programs that were mandated by their parent company in Moscow.

The end of the Yeltsin-era brought an end to any notion of broad autonomy for the regions. For Putin and his government centralization became the order of the day. Slowly, they started to bring state institutions back under the control of the central government. In February of 2004, the Russian government decreed that the various State Television and Radio Companies (GTRKs) would be reorganized into a single monolithic national broadcast network. According to the authors of the 2006 report on the state of the industry "By the end of 2004, the scale of the

[47] Ibid., 47–48.
[48] Ibid., 48.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Steven Erlanger, "Tatar Area in Russia Votes on Sovereignty Today," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1992, sec. World, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/21/world/tatar-area-in-russia-votes-on-sovereignty-today.html.

reorganization became obvious… local news programs were organized on network principles, and local companies turned into 'retransmitters' of the Moscow-produced content" adding that "VGTRK had decided to cut all types of [local] broadcasting in the regions except news."[51]

Much like their cousins at Channel One, the most important programming at Rossiya is its news and current affairs, which remains at all times firmly pro-Kremlin and pro-Putin. [52] The nightly newscast on Rossiya is called *Vesti*. Behind Channel One's *Vremya* it is the second most watched newscast in Russia. This use of the station is not surprising given the state's ownership and the general view among Russians that it is legitimate for the government to use information media to disseminate their point of view.[53] Rossiya has also become a major portal for fiction programming aimed at promoting national prestige. In the Putin era, the station has been especially active in producing two nationalistic genres: historical fiction and literary adaptations. The station has also been at the forefront of airing fiction based on significant events in Russian history or famous Russians, particularly miniseries focusing on the lives of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great respectively. They have also produced a number of war dramas including *Shtrafbat* (*The Penal Battalion*), *Pepel* and a feature film released in theaters, *Stalingrad.* They were also the producers of the pre-Olympics prestige film *Legend Number Seventeen* about Soviet ice hockey legend Valerii Kharlamov's career. Along with a good selection of police procedurals, spy dramas, and unscripted studio shows, Rossiya competes with the other national networks. However, many of the people that I interviewed felt that the network was somewhat old-fashioned and that it mostly attracted an older audience steeped in the norms of Soviet

[51] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*, 48–49.
[52] Sarah Oates, *Television Democracy Elections* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 87; Olessia Koltsova, *News Media and Power in Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 80.
[53] Koltsova, *News Media and Power in Russia*, 80.

television. This impression is supported by the fact that, with a few exceptions, Rossiya tends to make short running mini-series rather than long-running dramas or comedies. When it has made longer running series, like the *Kamenskaya* police procedurals, the release of the seasons has tended to be somewhat uneven in its spacing. Simply put, the network does not operate based on a season that runs fall through spring with re-runs in the summer. Instead, it tends to release its mini-series in a sporadic manner throughout the year.

The leadership group at Rossiya is somewhat murkier than that at Channel One. While Rossiya has had the same general director since 2002, Anton Zlatapolski, it has had four different general producers. Tucker, who owns a Russian production company, suggested to me that unlike stations like Channel One and STS where the general director or general producer (Ernst at Channel One and Vyacheslav Murugov at STS) is the most powerful figure, Rossiya lacks this level of cohesion.[54] Rossiya's structure may be the result of its management team or of the fact that, as Koltsova observed, Rossiya's offices housed eleven outside firms without charging rent and access to its studio space and airwaves, was used as a sort of *quid pro quo* for some state allies. [55] Consequently, decisions about specific programming might not be made directly by management, but instead for political reasons.

Unlike Channel One, Rossiya seems to use a relatively large number of production companies. As of October of 2014, the network was in active partnerships with nine production companies.[56] Most of these companies were relatively small producers, which, in a sense is surprising given the size of Rossiya's platform. The largest of their partners MB-Group produced approximately five hundred and twelve hours of programming in 2014. That production,

[54] Interview with Simon Tucker.
[55] Koltsova, *News Media and Power in Russia*, 81.
[56] "Karta Na Stvol [Map of industry Connections]," *Variety Russia*, October 2014.

however, was divided between STS and Rossiya. None of the station's other partners produced more than two hundred and fifty hours of programming in 2014, and of the remaining eight, only Studio Garmonia was exclusive to Rossiya. The station does seek to make some profit from its programming and as such has pursued partnerships with "hot" studios like Yellow, Black, and White. However, the overwhelming sense is that profits and overall viewership are secondary to spreading the official state message and serving as a form of patronage for allies of the ruling elite.[57]

NTV

The third of the "big three" national broadcasters in Russia is NTV. It is the largest and most influential property in the Gazprom-media Holdings group of companies and one of two national networks owned by the conglomerate. NTV began as a minor station renting airtime on Petersburg Channel Five which at the time was broadcasting nationally.[58] The larger channel based in Russia's second city had been broadcasting low rating educational programming. As a result, the programs produced by NTV quickly became more popular than those of the network from which it was renting space.[59] As described above, NTV was granted the use of the frequency occupied by Channel Five in a decree from President Yeltsin. With the use of this frequency, the station quickly started to challenge its two state-owned rivals in popularity. In the Putin era, NTV was brought under the control of Gazprom because the second Russian president was unwilling to have oligarchs use their media holding to further their interests as had been the case under Yeltsin.[60]

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[57] Koltsova, *News Media and Power in Russia*, 80.
[58] Ibid., 192.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin*.

Today NTV remains the third largest channel in Russia, but its programming has changed significantly. Its nightly news program *Sevodnya* (Today) lags behind both *Vremya* and *Vesti,* and its brand of journalism has shifted away from the hard-hitting war reporting of its early days to a tabloid style of news.[61] The entertainment programming on the network has tended toward gritty police and security service dramas. Programs like *Mentovskaya Voina* (*Policemen's War*) whose eight seasons are rerun constantly, *Inspektor Kuper* (*Inspector Cooper*) and *Moskva: Tri Vokzal* (*Moscow: Three Stations*), all police procedural, are the highest ranked on the network. Overall, NTV has a reputation for producing "grittier" content than most of its rivals.

The station is in active partnerships with eight small to mid-sized production companies. Thus, NTV is well diversified with regards to its partnerships. The key figure at NTV today seems to be Vladimir Kulistikov, a veteran of VGTRK, who has been the station's general director since he was installed after former owner Vladimir Gusinsky's ouster in 2003. Through his tenure, there was no general producer at NTV, a situation that is uncommon when compared to other television networks in Russia. Kulistikov was banned from Ukraine by that country's government following NTV's positive coverage of the annexation of Crimea in March of 2014.[62] These sanctions also included figures like Konstantin Ernst and can be read as a sign that Kulistikov is an important ally of the Putin government.

TNT

TNT is Gazprom-media Holdings' other major television channel. The station broadcasts no current affairs programming, choosing instead to air light entertainment. TNT's programming is aimed at young men between the ages of 14-34, though it also attracts a significant female

[61] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*, 52.
[62] "Vlasti Ukrainy Opublikovali Spisok Nev"ezdnyh Rossijskih Zhurnalistov [Ukrainian Government Publishes List of Banned Russian Journalists]," *Rosbalt*, accessed June 18, 2015, http://www.rosbalt.ru/ukraina/2014/08/28/1308962.html.

audience. It was virtually unknown before the arrival of Roman Petrenko in 2002. He held the post of general producer until 2013. Petrenko helped to cement the station as one of the most important entertainment brands in the Former-Soviet Union. After he had taken control, TNT began to focus heavily on unscripted programs many of which were purchased as formats from western companies like Endemol. Part of the station's strategy was to bring several foreign consultants in-house, to help it develop these western genres.[63] TNT's biggest successes in the unscripted genres are the reality formats *Dom-2* (*The House 2*), a *Survivor* and *Big Brother*-like show and *Bitva Extrasensov* (*Psychic Challenge*) based on the *British Psychic Challenge.* The station also airs several stand-up comedy shows which have proven to very successful such as *Comedy Club, Comedy Women* and *Nasha Russia* (*Our Russia*).

Eventually, the station, whose ratings lagged those of rival STS acquired several scripted formats as well. These were primarily in the sitcom genre, the most popular of these programs being *Schastliva Vmestye* (*Happy Together*) based on the *Married with Children* format. TNT essentially followed the same strategy as STS by using a format from Sony Pictures Television to build their expertise in the genre and then branching out for themselves. Eventually, the network would develop its own original sitcoms that have become extremely popular. Programs produced by TNT's in-house studios, Comedy Club Productions, and Good Story Media, have generated strong ratings. The programming on TNT is roughly evenly split between scripted and unscripted programs while also still including a few Hollywood films. Its entertainment products still do reasonably well, often rating in the top 20 programs in Russia and slightly better in Moscow, which has a younger population. In February of 2016, the station passed both NTV and

[63] Interview with Mike Montgomery, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, August 30, 2014.

Rossiya in ratings and for the first time became the second largest broadcaster in Russia by audience share.[64]

REN-TV

REN-TV (Henceforth REN) is the smallest of Russia's six national networks, able to reach only about sixty-two percent of Russians.[65] It also has the smallest audience of the major networks. Early in its history, it was relatively independent, at one point offering a safe-haven for journalists that had been fired from or left NTV due to their anti-government positions, today REN has been brought back into the fold of pro-government news coverage. The mother-son pair that had run the station until 2005 Irena and Dimitri Lesnevskiye were pushed out, and several pro-Putin holding groups took over control of the station. This new ownership group brought in a new general director Aleksander Ordzhonikizde to replace Dimitry Lesnevskie. The new head of the station was a veteran of Gazprom Media Holdings.

The ownership of the station has changed hands since this initial transfer with National Media group, the company owned by Kremlin ally Yuri Kovalchuk, taking the largest share, about sixty-eight percent.[66] Today, REN is safely in the Kremlin camp, or at least it could be neutralized at any moment. Their programming continues to include current events, as well as entertainment programs, though the ratings for those programs has steadily fallen and REN now has lower ratings than Petersburg Channel 5, which primarily airs old Soviet films and series.[67]

STS

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[64] "TNT Oboshel Po Vyruchke Rossiju 1 I NTV [TNT's Ratings Pass Rossiya One and NTV]," *Broadcasting.ru*, March 14, 2016, http://www.broadcasting.ru/newstext.php?news_id=109198.
[65] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*, 85.
[66] "President's Mate Takes Over Ren TV," *Kommersant*, December 19, 2006, http://www.kommersant.com/p731400/r_500/Ren_TV_Abros_holders/.
[67] "Russian Television Market Share," accessed June 18, 2015, http://www.tns-global.ru/services/media/media-audience/tv/national-and-regional/audience/.

STS Media was founded in 1989, and the station began broadcasting in 1994. By 1996 it had expanded into a national broadcaster but began commissioning Russian language content only in 2003.[68] The majority owner of STS' parent company was, until recently the Modern Times Group, a Stockholm-based media conglomerate, which helds approximately forty percent of the shares. As a result of a 2014 change in media ownership regulations, the company was forced to consider selling its shares to a Russian company.[69] The other major stockholder is the aforementioned National Media Group led by Yuri Kovalchuk's Rossiya bank. For most of its history, this stock composition left the company primarily under foreign control, making it unique among the country's six largest broadcasters. According to its current CEO, STS' programs compete primarily with those of Channel One and TNT.[70]

Like TNT, STS is an entertainment network that offers no news and current events programming. They air a mix of original and adapted series, Hollywood films and Western series (mostly children's series aired in the mornings). The network's parent company, CTC Media, today operates four Russian television channels nationally (STS, Domashnii, Che and STS Love). It also owns a multinational satellite station available in Germany, the Baltics, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and North America, a channel in Moldova (under the brand STS Mega) and one in Kazakhstan (under the name Channel 31).

Initially, most of the growth at STS came from its partnership with Sony Pictures Television which helped it produce the previously discussed series *Bednaya Nastya* (Poor

[68] "History of CTC," accessed December 17, 2013, http://www.ctcmedia.ru/about/history/.
[69] "CTC Speaks out about Russian Media Law," *TBI Vision*, accessed June 19, 2015, http://tbivision.com/news/2014/09/ctc-speaks-russian-media-law/333332/.
[70] Yuliana Slashcheva, Jeho Moskvy : Telehranitel' «STS Media» v novyh televizionnyh uslovijah: Yuliana Slashcheva - [Echo of Moscow: Television Defender STS Media in the New Television Environment: Yuliana Slashcheva], interview by Elena Afanaseeva, Radio, October 5, 2014, http://echo.msk.ru/programs/tv/1410468-echo/.

Anastasia). Other partnerships with Sony followed including adaptations of *The Nanny, Who's The Boss, Yo Soy Betty La Fea* (*Ugly Betty*), and *Everybody Loves Raymond* all of which were extremely popular and raised STS' ratings. Outside the Sony partnership STS also had major hits with *Margosha* an adaptation of a gender-swapping Columbian telenovela owned by Dori International, a few original series like the sitcom *Papiny Dochki* (Daddy's Girls) and the drama *Ranyetki.* Unlike its competitors, Channel One and Rossiya, STS produced series in the western sense, with seasons defined as twenty to twenty-five episodes. Where it differs from an American network is that the episodes of a season are aired four days a week, Monday to Thursday, which means that a season of a program runs about four to five weeks. This pacing requires a frantic production schedule. In the mid-2000s both STS and their partners were producing as many as a hundred episodes of a series each year.[71]

For a period around 2006, STS was challenging NTV for third place in the overall ratings in Russia. By the late 2000s, STS was, however, beginning to lose its place to TNT. The channel's ongoing series were losing their appeal, and they had yet to find replacements for them. In addition, the costs of production were steadily rising. The 2014 confrontations between the West and Russia over Ukraine exacerbated the problems at STS. As a NASDAQ listed company, some of the funding for the creation and licensing of programming was drawn from investors. Russia's increasingly nationalistic media laws forced the largest investor, Sweden's Modern Times Group, to consider selling some or all of their shares. As a result, STS' stock has fallen limiting its cash flow.[72] At the beginning of the crisis, the company's stock was worth about $13.69 per share. A year later the company's shares are worth only $2.02. This drop in

[71] Boletskaya, Vyacheslav Murugov Televidenie-Eto Ne Kanaly Eto Khity [Vyacheslav Murugov - Television is Not About Channels it is About Hits].
[72] "CTC Speaks out about Russian Media Law."

share price and inability to raise funds has made it harder for the company to afford high-quality programming. These difficulties prompted STS to cut the number of domestic series it produced, particularly following the failure of some high budget projects like 2015s *Londongrad* and purchase more Hollywood films and series, which are ultimately cheaper.[73]

STS has had two important and highly influential general producers Alexander Rodnyansky and Vyacheslav Murugov. Rodnyansky was the general director of the network from 2002 until 2008, its period of highest growth. He was the person who originally forged the partnership with Sony Pictures, and he is ultimately credited on all of STS' most popular programs during that period. When Rodnyansky left the company, its value had reportedly increased to nearly four billion U.S dollars making it the most valuable media holding company in Europe.[74] Murugov's time at the network was less successful than Rodansky's. The network still managed to generate several hit programs during his 2008 to 2014 tenure, but it is also in this period that the network held on to properties for too long allowing some of its rivals to surpass it. Programs like *Daddy's Girls* and *Ranetki* ran well into the three hundred episodes, despite peaking in the ratings much earlier. The network's ratings recovered between 2012 and 2014, with the hit shows *Kukhnia* (*The Kitchen*), *Molodyozhka* (*Youth League*) and the post-apocalyptic drama *Korable* (*The Ship)*. By 2015, however, the inability of the network to produce enough episodes of these programs to keep them airing regularly and the lackluster performance of some of their other programs, particularly unscripted reality shows meant that their overall ratings had dropped into sixth place nationally. Murugov left the company at the end

[73] Vladimir Kozlov, "Russia's TV Network CTC Media Re-Ups with Hollywood Majors," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 14, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/russia-s-tv-network-ctc-883910.
[74] "Aleksandr Rodnjanskij Pokidaet Posty Gendirektora STS Media I Telekanalov STS I Domashnij [Alexander Rodansky Leaves His Post as General Director of STS Media, Television Channel STS and Domashij]," *Newsru.com*, July 24, 2008, http://www.newsru.com/russia/24jun2008/rodnyansky.html.

of 2014 to work for a conglomerate creating programs for all the networks owned by National Media Group.[75]

The Kremlin Is Everywhere

What is clear from looking at the ownership structures of the six largest television networks in Russia is that the state through subtle manipulations of media law and strategic investment both by the state and its allies has made completely certain that television can never be used against them. They have direct or indirect ownership of large parts of the national television infrastructure. To summarize, Rossiya One is wholly owned by the Russian state, Channel One's closed holding shares are fifty-one percent owned by the state with the remaining shares in the hands of groups allied to the state, the most prominent being the twenty-six percent of shares owned by National Media Group. The third and fourth largest networks, NTV and TNT, are owned by a subsidiary of the state-owned oil and gas giant Gazprom. REN and Petersburg Channel Five, the latter which was discussed only in passing, are also both majority owned by Yuri Kovalchuk's National Media Group. The only company remaining that is not majority controlled by the Russian state is STS, which, still has Sweden's Modern Times Group holding about forty percent of the company's shares. Even in the case of this entertainment only network, allies of the Russian state, once again in the form of National Media Group, own about a quarter of the shares, giving them a blocking vote on the company's board of governors.

Every station in Russian is under some measure of control. Even the two entertainment-only networks, which at no time in their history ever showed any inclination to turn themselves toward political programming are under some limited measure of control. The fact that the state

[75] "STS Media Pokidaet General'nyi Prodyuser Vyacheslav Murugov [STS Media's General Producer, Vyacheslav Murugov, Leaves the Company]," accessed June 22, 2015, http://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2014/11/05/nacionalnaya-gruppa-kontenta.

allows the seven to operate normally most of the time suggests that it only wants to intervene if and when there is a particular problem. Marc Lorber, an international format consultant who worked almost a decade in Russia, essentially confirmed this fact when he stated in an interview that "if you're sitting in a cabin without much sun and not a lot of heat outside for six months of the year, television's a great way to be entertained… [as a result] I don't think there's a single channel that's under the radar, though. Not at all. From low to high."[76] The Kremlin, therefore, maintains as much control as it can, because television is so potentially disruptive.

The use of state allies to control the Russian media, while ultimately allowing it to be capitalist and seek a profit, is an essential aspect of authoritarian capitalism in its Russian incarnation. It essentially amounts to a system of control through cronyism. Trusted allies of the regime are given profitable or even critical companies, in exchange for always using their influence to advance the goals of the Putin-led Russian government. When the government's needs change, these elites use their influential media holdings to help sway public opinion in a direction that serves the state. Like other authoritarian countries, the media is used to tell stories to the population that serve the needs of a particular moment, help to promote a value the state is lacking or assuage a particular concern. Ying Zhu has noted this same trend in Chinese television in the 1990s and 2000s, suggesting that it is a key feature of states that both lack political freedom and where the state is heavily involved in the economy.[77]

The Production Companies: Their Cakes Are Exceptionally Dry

The system of production companies that exists in Russia is managed by a series of personal connections. Even globally networks and individual show-runners are likely to prefer

[76] Interview with Marc Lorber, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, June 30, 2014.
[77] Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China*.

working with people and companies that they ultimately trust. In Russia however, there seems to be an additional level of nepotism and/or cronyism. Probably the best example of this phenomenon can be found in Channel One's largest production company *Kracniy Kvadrant* (Red Square). Konstantin Ernst who heads Channel One was, until recently, married to Red Square's owner Larissa Sinelshchikova. As a result, Ernst benefited directly from the amount of business that Channel One sent to Red Square, which produced one-thousand-five-hundred and sixty hours of content in 2014, by far the most of any production company in Russia.[78]All of that content aired on Channel One.

This close connection between general producers and production companies and the series of kickbacks that often seemed to occur was something that many of the people that I spoke with observed. As Tucker, who owns the fifth largest production company in Russia, noted:

> I think a peculiarity with the Russian market is that a lot of general producers within channels will not just have their own favorite production companies, but they might even have a vested interest in that production company. Therefore, it's an even harder nut to crack because when we're pushing ourselves forward as a new production company, we're actually also saying to that general producer well yeah, you're not going to make so much money out of this production because you're not going to give it to one of your own, because we want to take it."[79]

There appears to be very little accountability on commissioning decisions other than the general director or producer. Dan Berbridge a British producer who worked at TNT told me that

[78] "Karta Na Stvol [Map of industry Connections]."
[79] Interview with Simon Tucker.

"basically, all the commissioning decisions were made by two people, and that was the CEO and the director of programs…, and all key commissioning decisions have to go through those two people."[80] He also observed that "that's a cultural thing. That's the same thing in every Russian company that I dealt with… there's a great tier of vertical power structure [sic], and if you put people in similar levels with the same job titles, as you would have them say in English stations, they fight."[81] As a result, he noted that Russian companies always had highly centralized decision making.

One of the more interesting comments I heard during my interviews of people who had worked in the Russian television industry concerned the fact that theft in the Russian television industry was endemic. Mike Montgomery, who worked as a consultant at TNT told me:

> Production Companies would get paid enormous sums of money, and I think it would be fair to say they would sometimes spend maybe thirty to forty percent of the budget on the show, the rest would go in their pocket. Almost nothing would end up on the screen, but because there was no competition, there was no comeback [sic]. Some of that money would then go back to the executives at the network, and then mutually they would agree that even though the show that they ended up producing was total garbage, there would be no consequences and no accountability for that because they had a nice little system going. There was none of the free market competition production companies experience in the UK or the US. [82]

[80] Interview with Dan Berbridge, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, August 11, 2014.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Interview with Mike Montgomery, interview with Jeffrey Brassard, August 30, 2014.

Another western format consultant echoed a similar sentiment: "[My boss] would periodically come through Moscow, and I'd be like 'you know, they're stealing from you guys,' and I think he thought I was joking at first. I mean, when you stay in Russia long enough, you realize somebody's stealing part of everything."[83] To drive home the degree of theft that takes place, he told me "I mean, their cakes, for example. They're very dry, and I kept complaining about it, and finally [my translator] says to me, 'they're dry because the people who are making it steal the flour and the butter and take it home.' If that's what's happening on a small level like that, it's happening here."[84] He also told me that "If you're looking at a hundred thousand dollars per episode on the show, by the time it gets to the stage it's probably seventy because people are stealing.[85]

One of the solutions to the problems of theft by outside companies in the early 2000s was to bring production in-house. Because they both lacked direct state funding and were expected to be profitable on their own, both STS and TNT were more conscious of the theft that was taking place in the early 2000s. A format consultant with TNT told me that one of the goals of the former TNT director Roman Petrenko, during the mid-2000s during the initial phases of the television production boom was to, as he put it, "whiten the business."[86] As he described it, the station was spending large sums of money particularly to produce formatted programs, often with very poor results. The production teams would not complete the shoots for the program and send footage back to TNT for editing that was, according to him, virtually useless. Berbridge, another TNT consultant, told me that despite his best efforts to give specific instructions to the production companies, TNT still had to fire several production companies because they would

[83] Interview with international format consultant, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, July 10, 2014.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Interview with Mike Montgomery.

deliver material that was incomplete. He eventually decided to take staff from the network, train them and put them in a senior position in the daily operations of the programs he was producing, in order for them to generate something he considered usable.[87]

Eventually, both TNT and STS seem to have come to the conclusion that to protect themselves from the possibility of outside theft they had to bring as much of the production as possible in-house. STS essentially started this trend in 2006 when it produced the series *6 Kadrov* (*6 Frames*). For the next six years, the network kept most of its biggest hit programs solely in the hands of their studio *Kostafilm.* They produced all of STS' high rating series from the late 2000s including *Daddy's Girl, Ranetki,* and *Margosha*. Since the studio was in-house, financial transactions could presumably be more directly monitored, and the quality of the programs could be the focus. TNT took a similar path. In 2010 under the leadership of Roman Petrenko they founded Comedy Club Productions which produced both their unscripted stand-up comedy programming and their scripted sitcoms. In 2013 TNT announced that it would buy a controlling interest in a second studio, Good Story Media, which produced all of the hit sitcoms on TNT that were not already being produced in-house.[88] By the end of 2014, TNT was essentially producing all of its content in these two studios. Presumably owning all the studios that produce their content gives them better oversight of their financial outlays.

By 2011 STS abandon this model because their series failed to draw in audiences. Its two in-house studios were merged into one and underwent a long reorganization, producing nothing until 2013. The new company renamed Story First Productions was shuttered shortly after the

[87] Interview with Dan Berbridge.
[88] "TNT Kupil Gud Stori Media [TNT Buys Good Story Media]," *Variety Russia*, June 5, 2014, http://www.varietyrussia.com/tv/06-05-2014/tnt-kupil-gudstorimedia/.

arrival of new STS Media CEO Yuliana Slasheva in 2014. Slasheva noted that the primary cause of the closure was disorganization and waste within the reformed company, which might very well mean theft.[89] All of STS' production are now external, but most of its hit programs now come from Yellow, Black, and White, a studio closely affiliated with former general producer Vyacheslav Murugov.

But It's Different In Russia

Another interesting cultural aspect of the Russian production market was the observation that I often heard of a type of nationalism that pervaded the production culture of the entire country. Several of my interviewees felt that Russians had a reflexive resistance to Western ideas. Berbridge, who worked as a consultant at TNT told me "I would describe it as a burning, seething, ferocious sense of national pride, which when faced with any production problem in which there's a foreigner telling you what you should be doing differently… your response is, 'Well, you don't understand Russians because we're unique, and we're different.'"[90] Mike Montgomery who also worked at TNT echoed much the same sentiments. He told me "The reason it's challenging is because Russians, culturally, have a very fundamental opinion that the Russian soul is unique… What that creates among young Russians … or Russians of any age … is that international rules do not apply to [them]."[91] In what was perhaps the funniest comment that I heard in any of my interviews, Montgomery added that "I had to ban the words, in my production company and at TNT…, 'but Mike, it's different in Russia.' because if I didn't ban those words, nothing would ever have [gotten] done."[92] This resistance is especially notable since Western genres continue to achieve a great success and clearly, following western models

[89] Timofey Kolesnikov, "B Dolyu i Poperk [In and Across]," *Variety Russia*, October 2014.
[90] Interview with Dan Berbridge.
[91] Interview with Mike Montgomery.
[92] Ibid.

has led to an increase in production quality. The resistance to Western ideas is so deep in the Russian psyche that even these successes were insufficient to convince Russian producers that they should drop their resistance to Western ways of making television.

Self-censorship Or The Fine Russian Art Of Keeping Your Head Down.

Almost all the interviewees that I spoke with commented that there is an uneasy relationship between the television networks and the state. They typically highlighted the takeovers of both NTV and REN as examples of what could happen to uncooperative producers. As Montgomery explained, "I think every TV network in Russia is absolutely under control…since NTV got bought up, there's no such thing as freedom on any of the networks in Russia…No doubt, we had to be incredibly careful about the balance that we struck."[93] So there was always the explicit threat from the state that networks could merely be taken away from the current owners and given to a Kremlin-friendly agent.

The actual way that the state manages the network is two-pronged. They control the network by exerting pressure on the head of the networks and partially through a system of self-censorship. As Russian production company owner Simon Tucker told me:

> various mandates come down like 'okay, we don't want to see anyone smoking on television, we don't want to have any swearing on television, we're not going to have any sex, even after midnight,' so those things come down. But I think at a broad level, the channels are told 'look; we want slightly more patriotic programming, or we're not going to have these types of shows anymore' and then that filters down to the general producer."[94]

[93] Ibid.
[94] Interview with Simon Tucker.

Thus, the state can pressure the networks through owners and general producers, many of whom are Kremlin loyalists.

Fear of some reprisal was something that many of the people I spoke to mentioned. As Berbridge told me "everyone understands what [should be on television], and it doesn't need to be regularly reinforced."[95] He added that "it should constantly be in support of Vladimir Putin. It should always be in favor of Russia, and it should be at the expense of NATO and the EU."[96] Others I interviewed essentially confirmed this view. A Russian creative director at a studio affiliated with STS told me that executives at Russian networks "feel very well the [political] trend, and as good executives, they go along with what they feel is the best thing to do now [sic]" adding that "I think people who are in top positions are used [to it], and they keep their position by understanding what the trend is and what the mood is, what the atmosphere is and what should be done [sic]."[97] There was a very strong sense among those that I spoke with that everybody knew what the rules were and followed them because they understood that this was the best way to avoid problems.

The rules, for the most part, seemed like they were relatively simple. As an international format consultant who worked with both STS and TNT suggested that religion and politics were strong taboos, as was anything that had to do with homosexuality. As he said "They already knew [that these things should be avoided]. Even if they didn't know, they wouldn't go near it out of instinct. We did pitch one joke in a room… it was at Putin's expense, and the one guy said, 'You can make that joke once.'" adding that "the show runners and the people doing the show,

[95] Interview with Dan Berbridge.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Interview with Russian Creative Director, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, August 11, 2014.

we'll self-censor. There's no office at the network [or] at the production company who were looking at script… but simply, you have to be an idiot to take that chance, because, you know, they'll just take your show away."[98] As a Russian producer affiliated with an influential studio told me, he had never known anyone who lost their company because they had made the wrong kind of programming. However, he admitted fear motivated compliance with unspoken rules across the industry. "I don't want that to happen," he said, and as a result he and the company that he ran never even considered producing anything even vaguely political.[99] When asked if Russian producers self-censor he responded very succinctly "I would say yes," before moving the conversation to a different subject.

Even if studios were willing to produce something that was on a taboo subject, there is virtually no chance that it would make it to the screen. Montgomery told an anecdote that highlighted the dangers of wandering into the realm of satire:

> I have two friends who are Russian animators… they made an animated political satire show for Channel One. You can imagine how dangerous this was. Ernst got approval for it, of course. But they were making this political satire show that included a 3D image of Putin that they were having to script week in and week out… They would have to deliver their tape to the Kremlin every week, and it would get taken inside, then they would come back down, and the official would be like, 'You're okay, that's fine.' Everything got signed off. You can understand that when it comes to political satire, it's going to be watched by the Kremlin.[100]

[98] Interview with international format consultant, interview by Jeffrey Brassard July 10, 2014.
[99] Interview with Russian Producer, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, October 17, 2014.
[100] Interview with Mike Montgomery.

Even with the consent of a figure as connected and powerful as Konstantin Ernst, the Kremlin demanded direct approval for anything that was at all satirical. The Russian state apparently takes no chances on political programming, even when the sources is unapologetically pro-Kremlin. On the whole, however, Russian producers have learned simply not to bother with politics.

Conclusion

The Russian state is, and will likely remain, in a dominant position with regards the production of television fiction and non-fiction in Russia. There is no venue outside of a few cable and internet stations that are outside of the Kremlin's direct or indirect control. The vagueness of the law and the overwhelming power of the state to apply it, along with an army of wealthy, powerful oligarchs ready to purchase an errant media property makes any active resistance extremely difficult. Russian producers have deeply internalized the idea that they should not, under any circumstances, risk alienating the government. The Kremlin, the police, and the oligarchs do not even need to apply pressure on television producers in Russia to keep them from making a joke at Putin's expense. Understanding that they could lose everything, they simply make sure that what they are making is light-hearted, apolitical entertainment.

The following chapter will look at the only fully state-owned and controlled channel in Russia, Rossiya One. This chapter speaks primarily to the conditions that arise from Russia's system of authoritarian capitalism. As I will discuss, Putin led government's control of the station has strongly shaped the kind of content that it has produced. The need to serve the interests of the state has made the station a bastion for drama programming that at its core is rooted in post-Soviet Russian nationalism and often refigures the past to serve the current Russian administration's ideological imperatives.

Chapter 3 Rossiya One: Putin's Lumbering Giant

As discussed in the last chapter, television channels in Russia essentially exist on a spectrum between authoritarianism and capitalism. Rossiya One is at the most authoritarian end of this continuum. In almost every way its fictional programming serves official state interests while, along with Channel One and NTV, the station broadcasts the official state versions of news and current events to the Russian-speaking population at home and abroad. In a subtle sense, the network is also responsible for disseminating an official version of collective memory and identity. The genres that tend to dominate Rossiya One are historical costume dramas, war dramas, literary adaptations and police and security procedurals. I have already discussed the general tenor of police and security dramas like *Streets of Broken Lights* and *Kamenskaya* in chapter two. While the genre is evolving on Rossiya One, shedding some of the confusing narrative structures that dominated early post-Soviet examples, the overall purpose of such programs remains relatively unchanged. As a result, instead of revisiting the police genre, this chapter focuses on the more historical genres that offer an officially sanctioned version of Russian identity. Much of the fiction on the state-owned giant's airwaves are not merely meant to entertain; they also help Russians create a new imagined community from the detritus of the Romanov and Soviet Empires. This task, to a large extent, involves reconfiguring the past and appropriating elements of Russian history to make them usable in the Putin-era. Notably, a desire emphasize the Orthodox roots of Russian culture links many of these series thematically. Images taken from several of the series are used to illustrate the importance of Russian Orthodoxy to these series.

One of the most important themes put forward by Rossiya One is the idea of Russia as a great nation, particularly as it relates to the cultural sphere. An emphasis on Russian culture and

its importance have been a key tenet of the Russian state's ideological project under its current president. For example, one year after he became President, Vladimir Putin, stated that "Russia's unity is strengthened by its inherent patriotism, its cultural traditions, and shared historical memory. Today an interest in Russia's history is returning to art, theater, and cinema. This is an interest in our roots, in what we all hold dear. I am convinced that this is the start of a spiritual renaissance."[1] When Putin moved into the Kremlin in 1999, there was a very real sense that perhaps Russia's importance, culturally, militarily and politically had peaked in the Soviet period. Not only had the promise of democracy, that felt so vital in the days of *perestroika* and *glasnost,* failed in Russia, but its economic and cultural reach were a pale reflection of their former glory. The country's attempts to reform the economy along market principles had ultimately ended in the rigged auctioning of important sectors of the Russian economy to allies of Boris Yeltsin in the early 1990s. The economic collapse of 1998-1999, left as much as thirty percent of the Russian population in poverty.[2] Its cultural industries, while never able to rival Hollywood in the Soviet period, had essentially shut down. The post-Soviet period's first decade had not produced any novelists with the impact of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak or Bulgakov. Its film industry, once the home of master craftsmen like Eisenstein and Tarkovsky, was now producing only occasional arthouse films, which struggled to find funding and audiences both at home and abroad.

It is, therefore, not surprising that when Putin came to power one of the projects that his government would undertake was to restore Russia's sense of itself. In fact, since that point, there has been a concerted effort by the Russian state to use its dominance in the Russian cultural

[1] MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today*, 13.
[2] Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin*.

sphere and its newfound oil and gas wealth to fund numerous important cultural undertakings. This project has largely been carried out on television since it is by far the medium with the greatest reach in today's Russia. The Russian government's funding and control of the television industry amounts to an explicit policy aimed not at defending cultural industries, but instead at rebuilding a sense of national security and purpose. The principle beneficiary of this cultural project has been Rossiya One, which has received a large share of the commissions for such projects.

The mechanisms for the Russian government's project to rebuild ontological security are best described using Michel Foucault's concepts of "technologies of the self" and "governmentality." Giang Nguyen-Thu, in his work on post-socialist television, synthesizes these two ideas in a way that explains a great deal about how the Putin government has used its influence on the media in the past decade and a half. He theorizes that governments often put forward a specific vision of the past on television to build support for their policies by reshaping memory. Foucault, according to Nguyen-Thu, theorized that "memory is an important 'technology of the self,' allowing people to understand themselves as meaningful individuals through the act of remembering or through the affect of being nostalgic," adding that "memory can also regulate the relations between individuals and those around them."[3] The importance of memory for Nguyen-Thu arrives when it combines it with Foucault's notion of governmentality. He suggests that "Foucault asserts that memory becomes an important site of struggle when it is taken up by large-scale institutions of power."[4] Foucault states that "if one controls people's

[3] Giang Nguyen-Thu, "Nostalgia for the New Oldness: Vietnamese Television Dramas and National Belonging," *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, 2014, 65.
[4] Ibid.

memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles… people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been."[5] Nguyen adds that "governmentality according to Foucault, is actualised at the contact between 'technology of self' and 'technology of domination'… when memory as the former is implicated into a large scale institution of power—in this case popular television drama—memory turns into a working site of governmentality."[6] Governmentality at its core is the use of particular strategies to govern people to achieve ends deemed helpful to society as a whole. In the Russian case, it is the Putin led state not society that ultimately benefits rather than individuals. Therefore, it is a different, state led form of governmentality whose purpose is to further the goals of the state which are seen as being for the benefit of society as well. Texts on television that seek to shape memory, and thus a perception of the present, and come from a state institution like Rossiya One are clearly forms of governmentality. These texts are used to mobilize the population of Russia and Russians that live in the former Soviet Republics into viewing their history in a particular nationalistic way and, as a result, supporting the policies of the Putin government. Since Rossiya is a state institution, when one examines its programs, particularly those that deal with the Russian past in some substantive way, one is essentially looking at the collision between a "technology of the self" and a large-scale government institution whose aim is to influence people.

Laura Basu uses the term memory *dispositifs* to describe the way that texts that seek to shape cultural memory are ultimately more than simple texts. She prefers the term *dispositif* to the common translation of Foucault's idea as "apparatus" because she argues that this English

[5] Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: (Interviews, 1961-1984)* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 92.
[6] Nguyen-Thu, "Nostalgia for the New Oldness," 66.

word implies too much mechanical fixity while Foucault's original intention was to suggest a certain fluidity over time. The relation between the elements of a *dispositif* in this reading are fluid not fixed. Cultural memory, according to Basu, connects the present moment to numerous other moments in history to help subjects generate concrete identities. She makes another important argument suggesting that "a single representation in itself can exemplify a mode of remembering; however, no text, genre or technology works alone to form a cultural memory."[7] She adds that "most cultural memories are made up of many different representations in a variety of genres and media… it is not only a collection of representations that makes a memory but their constellation: their positioning in relation to each other."[8] Therefore, no individual text ultimately shapes the whole of collective memory; they are merely part of a shifting whole that together ultimately form the collective memory of a group or nation. I argue, therefore that television series can be these kinds of *dispositifs* or apparatuses of memory since they can create a particular vision of past events. Especially in aggregate, several television texts can seek to reshape memories of the past for a large group of people. It then behooves anyone looking at media in the Russian Federation today to examine the texts that are being created that deal with particular aspects of memory and thus create a vision of Russian history.

Literary Adaptation: Bringing Russia's Pride and Joy Back into the Mainstream

Russia has a long literary history that Russians are rightly proud of, but one of the facts of post-Soviet life has been the overall decline of reading rates in Russia.[9] It should then not be surprising that one of the major trends in Putin's Russia has been an emphasis on bringing

[7] Laura Basu, "Memory Dispositifs and National Identities: The Case of Ned Kelly," *Memory Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 33–41.
[8] Ibid.
[9] MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today*, 40.

Russian literary classics to the screen. Of the Russian networks, Rossiya One has aired the greatest number of adaptations as well as the most successful ones. Three of their adaptations are particularly noteworthy: the 2003 television adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot,* the 2005 television adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita,* and the 2009 television movie adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *Taras Bulba.* The two television series have been particularly influential because of their source material, but also because they were the two most highly rated series of their respective years.[10] Both were also nominated for and won numerous Russian TEFI Awards, which are roughly equivalent to the American Emmy Awards. The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation funded the two series, and thus they fit into the two-fold category of being entangled in two large-scale institutions, making them tools of governmentality.

While all of the films and series below have to do with the Russian past, either in the form of literature or the actual historical representations, their real importance is as representations of present needs. As James Chapman notes:

> it is a truth universally acknowledged – among historians at least – that a historical feature film will often have as much to say about the present in which it was made as about the past in which it was set… In totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, propaganda films used historical stories to make explicit parallels with the present: *Jew Süss* and *Alexander Nevsky*, for example, were consciously allegorical films whose meanings were apparent to audiences at the time.[11]

[10] Kachkaeva, Kiriya, and Libergal, *Television in the Russian Federation: Organizational Structure, Programme Production and Audience*, 90.
[11] James Chapman, *Past and Present: National Identity and the British Historical Film* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005),

This statement essentially corresponds with television series made in authoritarian capitalist regimes. These regimes need to legitimate themselves in ways that are often not the case liberal democratic states. When one party, or group rules, seemingly in perpetuity as in China or Russia, as Zhu notes, officially sanctioned representations of the past become important points of justification.[12]

The literary adaptations that were produced by Rossiya One in the early 2000s are national television events similar to those describe by David Morley when he examined the formation of British national identity through the BBC. The Russian series are clearly important since each of them attracted nearly a third of Russian viewers, making them as significant to national consciousness as any major sporting or political event. He suggests that through mass television events "public values penetrate the private world of the residence, with the world of the house being integrated into the metaphor of public life."[13] In Morley`s estimation, this type of broadcast connects the center of the nation with the margins and allows for the transmission of identity. He adds that:

> through the accident of birth within a particular set of geographical and political boundaries, the individual is transformed into the subject of a collectively held history and learns to value a particular set of symbols as intrinsic to the nation and its terrain. In this process, the nation's "traditional icons, its metaphors, its heroes, its rituals, and narratives provide an alphabet for collective consciousness or national subjectivity;

[12] Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China*.
[13] Morley, *Home Territories*, 105.

> through the National Symbolic the historical nation aspires to achieve the inevitability of the status of national law, a birthright[14]

Essentially, it is this sense of a shared culture or a national birthright that the literary adaptations on Rossiya One are seeking to establish.

Both the adaptations of Bulgakov and Dostoevsky`s novels were directed by Vladimir Bortko, who is the most prominent director of literary adaptations in Russia. He helmed four of the most important adaptations: *Heart of a Dog* (1988), *The Idiot* (2003), *The Master and Margarita* (2005) and *Taras Bulba* (2009). Bortko's style of adaptations is one of extreme textual fidelity. His adaptations of *The Idiot* and Bulgakov's novel reproduce them virtually scene by scene, with large portions of the original dialogue transcribed verbatim onto the screen. Bortko's version of *The Idiot* is clearly meant to represent the literary text to a new audience in the most faithful way possible so that it is Dostoevsky and not the director's vision that is at the forefront. The series reproduces the tale of Prince Mishkin's ill-fated return to Saint Petersburg, and his attempts to navigate Russian high society in exacting detail with only minimal license taken to modernize the language. This approach makes sense in the context of the drive to strengthen the Russian sense of self. The creation of this series was primarily an act by a state-owned television company to bring the literary canon to the screen to introduce a new generation to the classic works of Russian literature.

Bortko would take the same approach two years later when he adapted one of the Soviet period's most acclaimed and beloved novels, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita.* The novel is set in 1930s Moscow at the height of Stalin's purges and keenly depicts the living

[14] Ibid., 107–8.

conditions, shortages, terror and paranoia that existed during the period. The novel itself follows the arrival of a Satan-like figure named Woland to Moscow. He has come to judge the progress of the Soviet project of creating a new socialist man. The book has remained one of the most cherished works of Russian literature, which is why it was adapted. [15] The decision was made to adapt the series for broadcast on Rossiya One, and it aired in December of 2005. Along with its production partner, Central Partnership, the channel was able to assemble a one-hundred-and-twenty-five-million ruble (five million US dollars) budget for the series, most of which came from the Russian Ministry of Culture.[16] The series' style of adaptation is quite similar to Bortko's prior work with Dostoevsky's novel, with most of the dialogue taken directly from the book and simply inserted into the series without very much adaptation. As a result, many scenes involve characters sitting around and having long discussions. Two scenes, in particular, are notable. The first occurs when the manager of a theater that has housed a performance by Woland, attempts to collect money that mysteriously disappeared after the performance. The scene is completely static, featuring the two characters sitting and talking. Its inclusion allows Woland to deliver one of the most famous lines from the novel. He denounces the Soviet doublespeak of referring to rotten food as "second-degree freshness" and excuse the country's failed economic system. The scene, while important to the novel does not fit into a televisual interpretation, since the discourse that leads to Woland's famous denunciation is quite static and does not advance the plot. Were it not for the desire to bring the entire novel onto television screens, thus passing one of Russian literature's most beloved novels onto a generation that does not read, one imagines the scene would have been cut as superfluous.

[15] Derek J. Hunns, *Bulgakov's Apocalyptic Critique of Literature: An Eventful History* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 1.
[16] MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today*, 42.

There are in fact numerous times that these kinds of scenes appear in the series. Another iconic scene in the novel occurs when two of the devil's minions, Behemoth, and Koroviev, invade the building that houses the Writer's Union. This scene adds little to the series as a whole, instead of lingering on an exchange where one of the characters delivers a short but famous dialogue protesting state bureaucracy and its inability to judge whether he is a writer. He maintains that an author should be judged by their work, noting that examining Dostoevsky's work confirms that he is a writer. The official chastises the minion suggesting that he is not the great Russian writer because Dostoevsky is dead. Behemoth protests that "Dostoevsky is immortal," which, in the context of the novel, is quite funny. The scene runs almost six minutes on screen and is very static. The line delivered by Satan's assistant, however, is part of the lore of the novel and as a result, the series goes to great pains to include it. There are at least three other examples where the director incorporates elements that are awkward on screen, including the delivery of the most famous line in the novel "manuscripts don't burn" which became the tagline for the series.

In 2009, following the success of the previous two adaptations, Rossiya One, again using a grant from the Russian Ministry of Culture, produced a television film version of Nikolai Gogol's *Taras Bulba* with Bortko once again at the helm.[17] The novel centers on a group of Ukrainian Cossacks, the titular Taras Bulba, and his two sons, and their struggle to drive the Poles out of Western Ukraine, where according to Gogol's account they were committing atrocities against its Orthodox peoples.[18] Bulba is, ultimately, a sacrificial figure: he is killed by the Catholic Poles and becomes a martyr for the combined Russian and Orthodox nation.

[17] Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, "Re-Visioning the Past: Russian Literary Classics in Film," *World Literature Today*, no. 6 (2011): 56.
[18] Ibid.

Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy asserts that the film "is ultimately a transparent reflection of the current geopolitical view of the Russian leadership which presents Russia as being constantly under threat from dangerous foreign enemies from the West."[19] *Taras Bulba,* therefore draws from literature to shape Russian memory and Russian consciousness, presenting the world of the past and present as being in continuity since Russia is in danger from external enemies from the West at both moments.

This anti-Western theme is most evident in the final act of the film, where Bulba, having been captured by the Catholic Poles, is being burned at the stake. Bulba defiantly pulls his hands away from the guard to make the sign of the cross while his guard ties him to a post. As he is burning, he mocks the Poles who have invaded "sacred Orthodox Russia" and instructs his comrades that they should escape so that they can see the invaders driven from Russian soil. The last scene in the film shows a large army of Cossacks, an ethnic group typically used by the Tsars to defend Russia's western borderlands, riding through an empty field. Voiceover informs the audience that what Bulba prophesied came true, that "a force of great strength did rise… with the great strength of Russia." As the Cossacks charge at an unseen enemy, they wave banners that feature prominent symbols of Orthodox Christianity and yell "Rus! Rus!" a term that

[19] Ibid., 57.

denotes early forms of the Russian Empire (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Cossack riders carrying Orthodox banners ride out to meet an unseen enemy

Each of these adaptations is similar in the sense that it presents a prestigious piece of the Russian literary canon to a new audience that likely would not have encountered it otherwise. These adaptations also bring to the fore numerous texts through which the Russian literary tradition a can be made fresh in the minds of television audiences. The adaptation of the literary canon is, therefore, a way of rebuilding a sense of ontological security for Russian audiences by showing them the heritage of which they might otherwise be only distantly aware. These adaptations also represent the use of technologies of the self on a national scale, since the canon is so closely tied to the way that Russians ultimately understand their place in the world. The adaptations are an act of governmentality; the state is trying to direct the people toward a particular view of Russia's past. Bringing these texts to the fore only serves to restore a sense of Russian importance in the world; since Russia has such a vast literary heritage, it clearly must belong at the center of global culture. That programs like *Taras Bulba* can also be used to reinforce an anti-western nationalism and focuses on Eastern Orthodox Christianity as a central

feature of Russian identity is a secondary effect, albeit one that is doubtlessly important to the Kremlin.

In fact, this emphasis on linking Orthodoxy and Russian nationalism pervades many of the series that Rossiya One produces. The two sections that follow each emphasize the way the station frames the Russian church as a key component of Russian identity. The desire to re-establish the traditional religion of the Russian people as a part of their identity seems to be in line with one of the defining characteristic of television in authoritarian capitalist countries. The particular articulation depends on the history of the country in question, but with the two largest authoritarian capitalist states, Russia and China, the state seems to be determined to restore a past religious system as the core of a new identity. Neither system can claim a legitimacy based on an idea of a social contract, or any other philosophy to justify the deep control of the state over many aspects of life. Since communism as a political and economic philosophy is no longer a plausible alternative, they seem to want to bring forward older forms of identity to justify their systems as an alternative to liberal democratic principles.

It is also extremely notable that television dramas have played a central role in both countries in promoting these older forms of identity. As Ying Zhu notes:

> The current Chinese government led by Hu Jintao has been calling for the building of a 'harmonious society' that will carry forward Chinese cultural traditions rooted in Confucianism. Chinese television has not missed the point. Television drama particularly the politically charged dynasty drama has been articulating an anti-corruption message,

> exploring options for political modernization, and echoing the call for a Confucian revival.[20]

He adds that the form these messages take has shifted over time, depending on the particular political needs of the party. For example, he points to the late 1990s and early 2000s as a period when television dramas "playing to popular disaffection with China's modern leaders, and despair about society's perceived loss of moral grounding… offer[ed] exemplary emperors of bygone dynasties."[21] These portrayals filled a particular need and therefore, we can conclude that reaching back for older identities is in effect a way of, making the past serve some present need. Elites in both countries are currently using these non-western, non-global identities and portraying them on television as a way to provide a viable alternative to Western liberal democratic ideals.

The War Film: Defeating the Nazis Over and Over Again

Much like in the Chinese case, Russia's past has been the focus of a good deal of identity discourse. It should come as no surprise that in seeking to shape the post-Soviet understanding of Russia, state television would turn to the Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany at the end of the Second World War. What Russians call the Great Patriotic War is still an important touchstone in Russian culture. As David Marples argues:

> For modern Russia, the Great Patriotic War stands out as the chief event of the past, partly because of the immense losses and sacrifices, but also as a defining moment for the

[20] Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China*, 1.
[21] Ibid.

> world as a whole faced—in this narrative—with a choice between the menace of Fascism and Russian-led resistance.[22]

Marples adds that "[i]ncreased control over the media… [has] permitted the Putin presidency a virtual monopoly over the narratives about the war."[23] One of the most significant instances of this control was the 2004 series *Shtrafbat* (*Penal Battalion*), directed by Nikolai Dostal. *Penal Battalion* appeared as part of the run-up to the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war and, in fact, was one of the first series that examined it in the post-Soviet Era.[24] Since it was on state-owned Rossiya, the Kremlin clearly sanctioned the message of the series.

The series follows the exploits of one of the battalions in the Red Army, composed of a mix of prisoners both political and criminal.[25] It focuses to a large extent on the exploits of the commander of the battalion, Vasilii Tverdokhlebov, an officer who was captured by the Nazis but escaped following a botched execution. Returning to the Red Army, he is arrested and treated as a traitor and a spy. Ultimately, he commands a penal battalion whose members are given a chance to fight as part of the Red Army in return for a pardon.[26]

What is striking about the series is that while it is about the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, it separates the idea of the Soviet from a narrower vision of Russian patriotism and the nationalistic desire to protect the Orthodox Russian fatherland. The series is anti-Soviet and pro-Russian, with battalion commander Tverdokhlebov standing in for Russia itself. The fact that he

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[22] David R. Marples, "Introduction: Historical Memory and the Great Patriotic War," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, no. 3/4 (September 2012): 288.
[23] Ibid., 389.
[24] Birgit Beumers, "The Serialization of War," *Kino Kultura* April 2006, no. 12 (2006), http://www.kinokultura.com/2006/12-beumers.shtml.
[25] Alexander Prokhorov, "The Shtrafbat Archipeligo on Russia's Small Screen," *Kino Kultura* July 2006, no. 13 (2006), http://www.kinokultura.com/2006/13r-strafbat.shtml.
[26] Beumers, "The Serialization of War."

is mistreated by the Soviet secret police and forced to command a penal battalion despite his loyalty acts as a sort of echo of the suffering of Russians in the USSR.[27] Nowhere is the connection of the battalion and its mission to save Russia, as opposed to the Soviet Union, clearer than in the final scene of the series, in which the battalion has engaged in a hopeless battle with the German army and has been all but exterminated. Only Tverdokhlebov and the Russian Orthodox priest, who was a fellow political prisoner, remain after they have successfully held off the German offensive. At that moment the priest looks up into the sky and sees, in the clouds, an image of the Russian Orthodox religious icon Our Lady of Kazan, commonly associated with Russian victories over foreign, and particularly non-Orthodox, invaders. This image accentuates the idea that the battalion has given its life, not for the atheistic Soviet Union, but instead for the Orthodox Christian fatherland (Figure 3.2). Tverdokhlebov and his cohorts frequently state that they are not fighting for the Soviet Union, but rather to protect Russia itself. It, therefore, becomes clear that what is at work in *Penal Battalion* is a straightforward appropriation of the Soviet mythos surrounding the defeat of the Germans that reworks the event's history from the defense of communism to one that is in service of present Russian nationalism.[28] The series is one of the earliest state-approved, post-Soviet representations of the war. As such, it is important in the context of the rebuilding of Russian memories in a way that supports a new nationalism based not on the symbols of Soviet power or in any of the ideologies

[27] Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Rulers and Victims* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
[28] Prokhorov, "The Shtrafbat Archipeligo on Russia's Small Screen."

of that period, but rather in a renewed pride in Russian accomplishments.

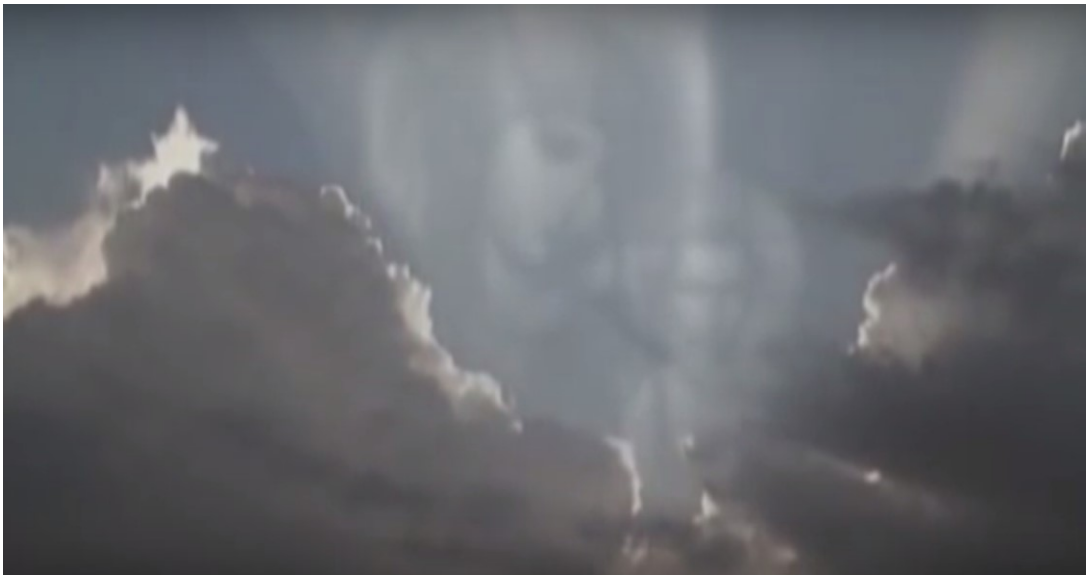

Figure 3.2 The Icon of Our Lady of Kazan appears in the sky above the battlefield in Penal Battalion.

The importance of such a reimagining should not be understated. By moving this event out of the realm of Soviet communism and making it about the present, it profoundly alters the meaning of the events in question. It also seeks to create a continuity of identity through Orthodoxy that would extend from 988 A.D, when the Kievan Rus formally converted to Christianity, to the present. The usefulness of such a continuous identity is important for any country that is experiencing the rapid changes brought on by globalization but particularly for a country like Russia that has had two massive shifts in its ideological center in the last hundred years. Both Russia with Orthodoxy and China with Confucianism also benefit from the fact that neither of those two formerly central cultural identities contains democratic ideas. Both, in fact, can tend towards strict hierarchies and obedience as core values and as such, they are ideal for an authoritarian system. The Russian Orthodox Church, in particular, is susceptible to being co-opted in this way because of its very close ties to the Russian state. The state still provides the Russian church with a good deal of the funding it needs to maintain aging churches in the

country, and there is no real separation of church and state. As Alicja Curanović and Lucian Leustean suggests, Putin has made a conscious effort to portray himself as a faithful follower of the Russian Orthodox Church, attending major services at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in central Moscow with the Russian Orthodox patriarch who maintains close personal ties to Putin.[29] As a result, the church serves the state. This control makes it ideal for an authoritarian capitalist system since it can be made to offer the messages that the state requires.

Historical Dramas: Bringing the Past to Life

Beyond the canon of literature and war film, the mission of rebuilding a sense of the grandeur and importance of Russia and the centrality of Orthodoxy on Rossiya One has also involved bringing stories from Russian history back to the forefront of memory, especially those that summon memories of great Russian achievements or important historical figures. This tactic is not uniquely Russian. Mara Panaita discusses a similar trend in her study of the Turkish series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (*Magnificent Century*). She states that "some scholars claim that collective memory cannot be considered as evidence of the authenticity of a shared past; rather, collective memory is a version of the past, selected to be remembered by a given community in order to advance its goals and serve its self-perception." She adds that "when we talk about collective memory, it is important to mention the identity aspect that plays an important role, especially when we talk about past events. In general, the identity secures a sense of self by the ways we are positioned by the past."[30] This statement corresponds to numerous historical genres, such as the Chinese palace dramas mentioned by Zhu or Western programs like *The Tudors.* A recent

[29] Alicja Curanović and Lucian Leustean, *The Guardians of Traditional Values: Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Quest for Status* (New York: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2015).
[30] Mara Panaite, "Collective Memory: Magnificent Century a Serial between TV Production and History. A Brief Case of Study," *Journal of Cinematographic Studies* 12, no. 16 (2015): 8–11.

Russian example that represents the confluence of state power and memory is the 2014 twelve-part miniseries *Yekaterina* (*Catherine*). The visual text was produced by Rossiya One and made with money provided by the state. As such, it further exemplifies ways of creating unified historical memories of the Russian past.

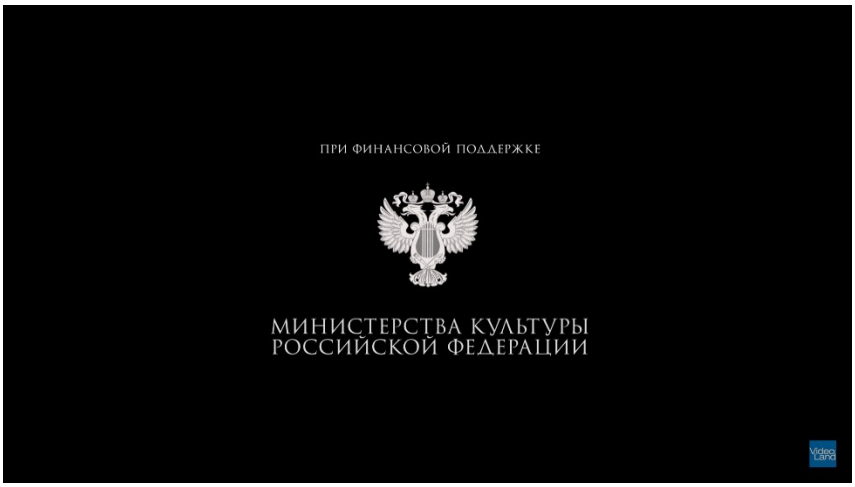

Figure 3.3 The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation's logo which appears at the beginning of each episode.

Yekaterina was produced with funds from the Russian Ministry of Culture, whose logo is prominently displayed during the opening credits of each episode (Figure 3.3). This prominent placement of an official state seal grants the series the stamp of officialdom and virtually marks it as a sort of state-sanctioned history. The series aired in late November and early December of 2014. It was fairly successful, drawing approximately twenty percent of viewers nationwide.[31] The series is a fairly straightforward retelling of the early life of Catherine the Great, who ruled Russia from 1762 to 1796. It follows her life and that of her family from the time she comes to Russia to marry Peter the Third, Peter the Great's grandson. Catherine successfully navigates the social circles of the Russian court of that time and manages to ally herself with forces that are

[31] Ksenia Genina, "Pobednoe shestvie Ekateriny: serial lidiruet sredi teleproektov nedeli [The Victorious March: Catherine Leads all series this week.]," *Vesti.ru*, November 27, 2014, http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2157007.

aligning against her husband, who is a weak but tyrannical ruler. Most notable among these is the Orthodox Church that would need to approve her as Empress for her reign to be legitimate. As she grows in her affection for the Russian people, a quality that distinguishes her from her husband who hates the Russian people preferring his native Prussia, her power grows. In what is probably the most telling moment of the series regarding the link between the Russian state and Orthodoxy, Catherine stands before the key officers of the Russian army who have been assembled to hear her proposal to help overthrow her husband. Without their support, her machinations will undoubtedly fail, and she would surely be imprisoned and eventually executed. After she makes her proposal, she asks any willing officers to step forward, and there is a long pause where nothing occurs. Catherine is then shown closing her hand over an Orthodox icon that she is holding behind her back (Figure 3.4). The audience is clearly meant to believe that she is asking God for his assistance. A few moments later one officer steps forward, followed quickly by the rest, a clear sign that Catherine has been chosen by God to lead the Russian empire.

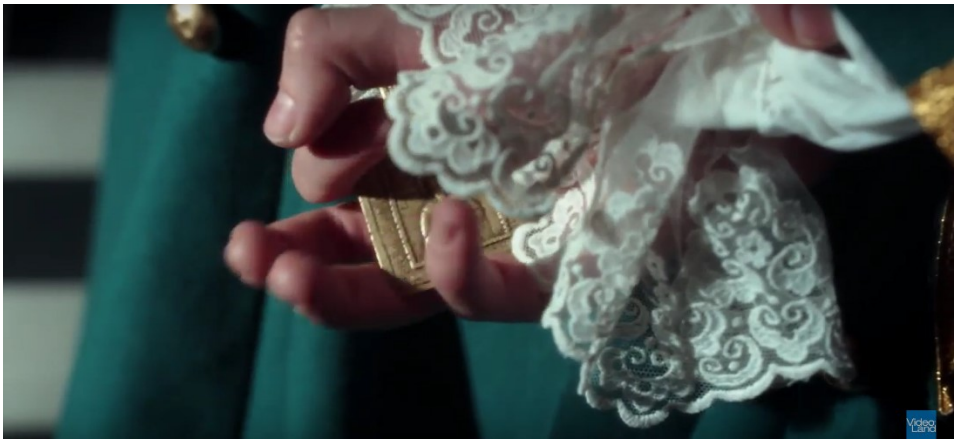

Figure 3.4 Catherine holds an Orthodox icon in her hand while waiting for the army officer's decision to support her

Catherine's faith contrasts with her husband's love of Western culture and ideas. The violin becomes the symbol of this corruption of the young emperor. Peter is often seen playing the instrument as a way to relieve stress. The scene that is perhaps most notable in this respect comes from the final episode of the series and occurs only a few minutes after the scene where Catherine holds the icon described above. The army confines Peter in the palace. Instead of praying or trying to negotiate his way out of the situation he picks up his violin and begins to play it (Figure 3.5). The scene evokes images of the Roman Emperor Nero who is said to have played his fiddle as Rome burned. Peter continues to play even as one of the officers walks up behind him and starts strangling him with a rope. The contrast between this behavior and Catherine's is striking and clearly meant to insinuate that the true ruler of Russia is the one who embraces the Orthodox church. Other scenes scattered throughout the series clearly meant to imply the continuity of Catherine with the other Orthodox rulers of Russia. In one of the most revealing moments of the series, a smiling Catherine winks at a portrait of Peter the Great as she is carrying out her coup against his grandson, implying a sort of fellowship between the two rulers and linking the two "greats" of Russia's imperial period (Figure 3.6). The series ends with a narration that states, "Empress Catherine the Second was crowned on the thirteenth of September 1762 and ruled the Empire for thirty-four years. After she had died, they called her Catherine the Great."

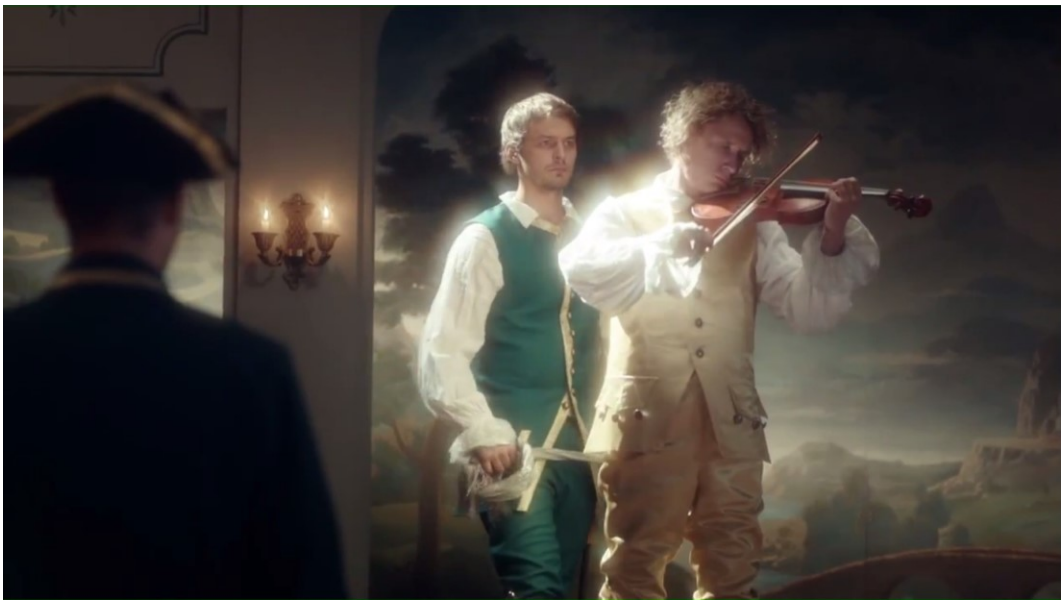

Figure 3.5 Peter III plays the violin knowing he is about to be assassinated

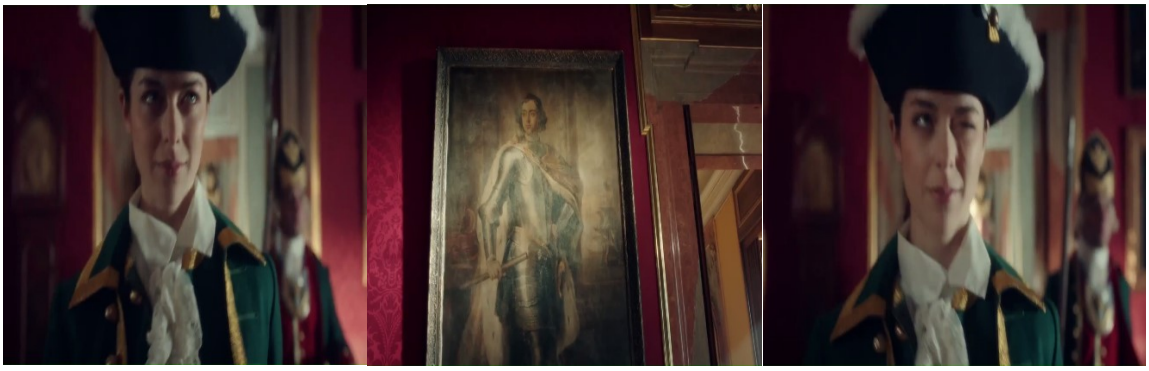

Figure 3.6 Catherine winks at a portrait of Peter the Great as she carries out the coup against her husband

The series and the associated manipulation of memory that it implies are clearly a way to bring to life an important figure in Russian history by giving the audience a sense of intimacy with her and particularly in her growth into a faithful follower of Russian Orthodoxy. They follow her love affairs and eventually take part in her triumph, thus attaining a sense of connection with the ruler. The series also traces her many struggles within the Russian court, particularly against her mother-in-law, who makes her life as difficult as possible even to the point of removing her children after they are born to shield them from her influence. She also

struggles against the indifference and infidelity of her husband who cares more about European affairs and culture than the welfare of his people. The series serves as a technology of the self in making one of the most famous and successful rulers of Russia into a highly personal figure. It gives the audience a tangible connection to the "great" Russian past, and they are therefore more likely to see the historical accomplishments of the Russian state as "our" accomplishments rather than just dusty historical oddities. Like the series that make up the constellation of programs that center on literature or the Second World War, *Yekaterina* is essentially about refiguring the Russian past to motivate people to be nationalistic and pro-Russian in a period where that is what the state needs.

Conclusion

The above examples are a small selection of the many series on Rossiya One that have nationalist overtones. What should be clear from the analysis of these series, however, is that Rossiya One is a tool that is used by the Russian State to shape collective memory in a way that ultimately serves the overall goals of Vladimir Putin's government. These examples are different from analogous examples in the West, for instance, series that air on the History Channel, because they come from a Russian state-owned institution, are often state-funded and, therefore, can be seen as presenting a quasi-official version of Russian history. Among these are promoting Russia's cultural heritage, particularly in literature and emphasizing the country's "traditional" values linked to the Orthodox Church. In the final analysis, this is very much an instance of the cultural elites, primarily in Moscow and to a less significant extent in Saint Petersburg, projecting a traditional, elite culture out to the rest of the country. Since Rossiya serves the Kremlin which is essentially the center of the country's political, cultural and economic life, these types of representations are not surprising.

The following two chapters examine institutions that are at the opposite end of the political and economic spectrum. Chapter four examines the work that Sony Pictures television did in assisting Russian television companies (particularly STS and TNT) during the initial phase of rapid growth in production in the 2000s. I will discuss the industrial conditions and the strategies that allowed the Hollywood studio to succeed in Russia, where many of its rivals failed. Sony's unique approach of embedding itself in the market and essentially letting its Russian operation become thoroughly Russified is at the center of its strategy. Particular attention is given to Sony's role in transferring various kinds of industry knowledge and practices from the West to Russia.

Chapter 4 Hollywood Goes to Moscow: Sony Pictures and the Modern Russian T.V Industry

As discussed in the previous chapters, the Russian state has used its resources, both in terms of coercive power and financial investments to control the television industry's ownership structures, to instill a culture of self-censorship, and assure the production of highly nationalistic programs that ultimately support its project to rebuild Russian nationalism. While the state has been using its resources to produce patriotic programming, the Western way of making television, as well as global themes, genres, and topics, have been increasing their presence on Russian screens. Genres like the sitcom and numerous reality television formats have had a major impact on the market. As a result, at the same time as the state has been pushing for a view of Russian identity in opposition to the West, the television industry that they worked so hard to control has been steadily adopting Western practices. This chapter examines the role that the Hollywood studio, Sony, has played in the development of the Russian television industry in the Putin era. Sony, more than any other Western major, has played a decisive role in shaping both programming and production techniques in Russia through its approach to production in markets outside the United States.

In fact, one of the most important factors in the transformation of the Russian television industry during the Putin era has been the influence of major Western studios in shaping the style and the types of programming that are produced. Fox, Warner Brothers, Disney, and Sony all attempted to enter the Russian market in the 2000s. Ultimately, most of them ended up finding limited success in Russia. The exception was Sony Pictures Television, which not only found success but in the end transformed the Russian market. My conversations with people who worked in this industry, interviews found in the Russian press and documentary film sources show that Sony played a central role in building the infrastructure of the two largest

entertainment-only networks in Russia. Sony achieved its success because it used a very different strategy than its Western rivals.

What makes Sony's move into the Russian market interesting is its approach to navigating the authoritarian capitalist system. Clearly, Sony's principal purpose for being involved in the production of television series is to make profits. The complexities of Russia's state-led economic system forced Sony to open a branch in Russia. The company used this same practice, in countries like Brazil and it ultimately served them well. Sony was able to introduce genres and production techniques from the global market into Russia by carefully balancing its role as a global company with the need to avoid the impression of itself as a Western, imperialist force. It did so by being deeply engaged in the market and committing resources long term. The tactics it used allowed it to operate in such a way as not to draw the attention of the Russian state or alienate its local partners.

According to Marc Lorber, an international format consultant, Sony moved into the Russian market because of structural factors in the American market. He suggested in an interview with me that there was increasing competition and a high risk of television products failing in the United States in the early 2000s. This shift was the result of the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) shifting much of their primetime programming to unscripted shows.[1] Courtney Brannon-Donoghue confirms Lorber's account in her study of Sony's expansion into Brazil.[2] At the time this meant that more of the pilots that Sony produced in America did not make it to air, and those that did were often canceled very quickly. Lorber

[1] Interview with Marc Lorber.
[2] Courtney Brannon-Donoghue, "'Lighting Up Screens Around the World': Sony's Local Language Production Strategy Meets Contemporary Brazilian and Spanish Cinema" (Doctoral Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2011).

suggested to me that "if you date it back, Sony got out of… the network television business in the US, so the only business left open to them before they got back into cable was expanding their foreign operations."[3] These foreign operations often involved taking properties from Sony's catalog of older programs and selling them to channels in other global markets. As Brannon-Donoghue suggests "the local language production represents an industry-wide experiment in systematic localization across the global televisual [market]."[4] This shift towards producing local content, though sometimes based on an American or Western formats, was a turning point in studio efforts toward local specialization.

Brannon-Donoghue, suggests that Sony was among the leaders in the development of new business models that reimagined the relationship between Hollywood and both local production companies and local audiences. In her study of the company's operations in Brazil and Spain Brannon-Donoghue shows that Sony's efforts in international markets consistently were focused on integrating into the local market. In Brazil, she suggests that the company's strategy involved incorporating itself in that market and recruiting local talent with strong connections in the local industry that could serve as liaisons. It also invested capital in local production. The company's Brazilian operation also distributed Hollywood films in the country which at times clashed with their role as a producer of local content. According to Donoghue Sony also brought in personnel from its American operation to augment the Brazilian industry and as such played an important role in building up additional human capital in Brazil. Her account suggests that, in Brazil, Sony was constantly negotiating market conditions and culture.

[3] Interview with Marc Lorber.
[4] Courtney Brannon-Donoghue, "Sony and Local-Language Productions: Conglomerate Hollywood's Strategy of Flexible Localization for the Global Film Market," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 4 (2014): 3–27.

Contrary to the expectations of political economists who assume that Western corporations impose their cultural practices on places like Brazil, Donoghue show that in Brazil there was a constant tension and negotiation.[5]

Donoghue's work on Sony's failed Spanish operation further attested to this conclusion. According to her account, the Spanish operation struggled precisely at the moments where the Los Angeles-based headquarters would interfere with local decisions. She also suggests that Sony's focus, repeating many of the tactics that it had used in other local language production scenarios, failed due to too much commitment to telling specifically Spanish stories. They preferred these types of products to those more universal themes that might have found wider distribution in Europe and Latin America. A subsequent decline in the Spanish film and DVD markets due to piracy, ultimately led to Sony's Spanish operation being unprofitable. The result was that Sony closed their operations in Spain to focus on more lucrative markets in Central and Eastern Europe. Donoghue's account, however, does attest to Sony's commitment to local markets, particularly their habit of establishing local offices to act as mediators between center and margin.[6]

Sony was not, however, the only company that decided to enter Russia and other emerging markets. Michael Curtin asserts that all throughout the 1990's and 2000's Hollywood studios and other major media holdings like Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation were looking for opportunities to establish a presence in some of the largest and most important media markets in the world.[7] These efforts took the form of co-productions with local companies. Part of this

[5] Brannon-Donoghue, "'Lighting Up Screens Around the World': Sony's Local Language Production Strategy Meets Contemporary Brazilian and Spanish Cinema."
[6] Ibid.
[7] Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 209.

movement towards creating a larger global presence has been driven by the increasing purchasing power of consumers in other parts of the world. As Curtin reports, Hollywood studios had ignored markets other than Europe until around the mid-1980s and early 1990s when the rise of China, India, and the Asian Tigers began to leave people with a greater degree of disposable income. By 2014 because of the long-sustained growth of developing economies, particularly Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, Hollywood was placing a greater emphasis on developing their assets in these markets. Brannon-Donoghue supports this assertion suggesting that "International markets now out-earn the North American domestic market by two to one for the major studios."[8]

Perhaps one of the key differences between the local markets in Latin America and Asia that Sony entered and the Russian market was the complete lack of production capacity in the latter. Russian studios and channels lacked both physical shooting space and, more significantly, writing talent. Donoghue suggests that Latin America and other markets that Sony explored had relatively robust and well-established television and film production cultures.[9] Russia, however, had failed to develop human capital in the sphere of television writing. Fictional programming in the country had mostly been in the form of short mini-series and the lack of production through the 1990s left it with a dearth of talented people who were able to work in the field. While it would not be totally accurate to suggest that the Russians were rebuilding their industry virtually from nothing, their infrastructure was clearly not up to Western or Latin American standards. As the documentary *Exporting Raymond*, which chronicled Philip Rosenthal's work to adapt *Everybody Loves Raymond* to the Russian market showed, Russian production spaces were low

[8] Brannon-Donoghue, "Sony and Local-Language Productions."
[9] Ibid.

quality. Lorber told me that when Sony arrived in the Russian capital, there were essentially two kinds of studios that were available to them. He recalled that:

> there were old, creaky horrid studios in Moscow that were really built in the 40s, 50s, 60s and maybe added onto in the 70s. They were perhaps sound proofed, but they were ugly, ghastly, [and] hot. The air conditioning and heating didn't work. They didn't have modern wiring, and they were dark in the hallways [sic]. They weren't built for comfort. They weren't built for glamour; they were kind of dungeons.[10]

These studios were essentially left over from the Soviet period. The studio that *Exporting Raymond* was shot in (Figure 4.1) is the iconic, by Russian standards, Gorky Film Studio where many of the most famous and culturally significant Soviet era films and television programs were recorded. Perhaps the most significant of these was the 1973 television miniseries *Seventeen Moments in Spring*. The image below illustrates the difficult conditions that Sony and its employees had to endure while working in Russia. Lorber recalled that the second kind of studios was "factories that were remade" adding that "the first one [Sony] worked in was a giant ball-bearing factory" that "contained twelve to fourteen studios, six to eight of which were occupied by Sony. These facilities were essentially assembled piecemeal as needed."[11] He suggested that soundproofing often consisted of nailing whatever soundproof material might be easily available, for instance, couch cushions or foam, to the walls and that construction was constantly ongoing.[12] He observed, however, that despite the serious shortcoming of the physical facilities "amidst that there are people going to editing, people dressed in period costumes, there

[10] Interview with Marc Lorber.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

were people dressed in modern costumes… There were a variety of shows going on, so it was like a crazy campus… it was a little like Hollywood in the 20s."[13] Because of these problems, many Russian producers were dependent on Sony's help to bring their productions in line with international standards.

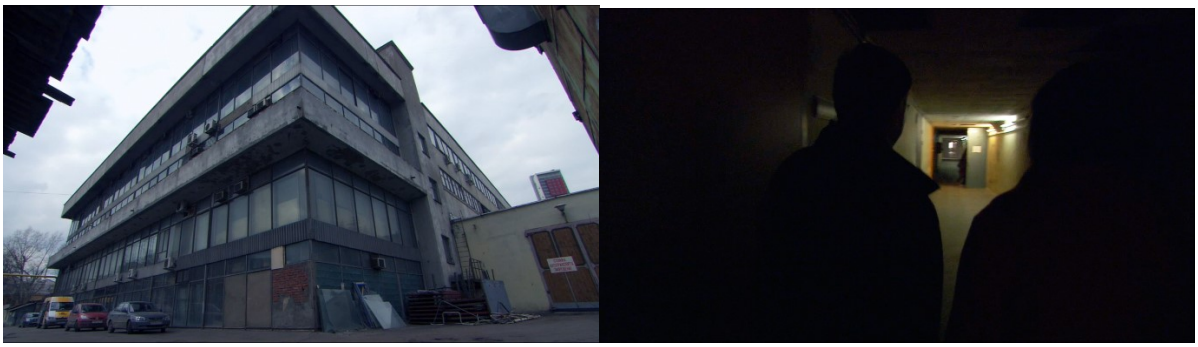

Figure 4.1 Gorky Film Studio exterior and interior shots from the film Exporting Raymond

Another area of weakness in the Russian television industry was in human capital, particularly writers. Several of my interviewees suggested that story writing was one of the weakest parts of the Russian industry.[14] Sony was forced to build the creative infrastructure for themselves. Difficult working conditions and a highly transient workforce complicated the situation. With regards to the labor condition in the Russian television industry, Lorber suggested to me that "they just have a different way of working. It's still not working by the same rules of guilds and unions [that] Western companies and countries operate on [sic]. It's not necessarily [about] the benefits of the worker. There's not a lot of protections for the workers or actors or things like that."[15] He added that:

[13] Ibid.
[14] Interview with Simon Tucker.
[15] Interview with Marc Lorber.

> they might work a very long day, and by the time they left, got all the way home then got all the way back, they wouldn't have any time to sleep. So they would sleep on the set, which got banned eventually. They would sleep anywhere they could: in cars, in the studio, in a variety of places and there were minorities from Moldova and other regions of Russia who were living in, effectively, shipping containers behind the studio.[16]

The impact on the workers of such difficult conditions was high turnover. The quality of the programs often suffered from both the *ad hoc* nature of the facilities and the lack of skilled workers. For example, during the first few seasons of *My Fair Nanny,* there are many instances when one can see the bottom of a boom microphone at the top of the screen, reflecting the lack of skill of the operators and poor attention to detail.

Staff turnover was not merely a result of the conditions in the industry. Rather it reflected general trends in the Russian labor market at the time. Lorber explained the problem with retaining staff as follows "because it was the job they [had] and if a bank paid them more to be a teller the next week that's where they were [even] after two years. Because a lot of it was about making money. It wasn't necessarily a career path; it was about how do I feed myself."[17] *Exporting Raymond* depicted this problem when the writers that were commissioned to make the series during Rosenthal's first trip to Moscow were no longer on the project when he returned at the beginning of production. This absence may have been part of the natural process of turnover, but as my interviewees suggested, regular Russian television producers consistently had problems with storytelling and writing teams were extremely overworked and understaffed. Those that were in place lacked experience and often took their inspiration from film and,

[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

therefore, often had difficulty understanding the basics of television. Simon Tucker who is part owner of a Russian production company suggested:

> When I got to Russia, it was like "voiceover, no, we don't do any voiceover, we want to confuse the audience… so they really have to think." I was like, "why? It's three o'clock in the afternoon; I'm not really watching. I'm either ironing or cooking something, and the [television] is on." You have to tell them where they are.[18]

His statement suggests that even those employed in writing and production had very little sense of the conventions of the medium when they started to produce television domestically. This ignorance was of course very problematic. The problems Russian television companies faced with regards to the production of television fiction led a few of them to seek help from Western producers, particularly the major studios.

While Sony collaborated with different Russian studios and television networks, their most important partnerships were with the two most Western-oriented television networks STS and TNT. Both networks were similar in looking to build themselves as entertainment brands in the former Soviet territories, but both at least initially lacked the physical and creative capacity to do so. They became two of the leading networks in Russia in large part because of the partnerships they developed with Sony. The most successful programs on both networks in the period from 2003 to 2009 were almost universally coproductions of either original programming or more commonly formats. Ultimately, Sony is responsible for building much of the creative talent, particularly on the writing side. The normal development of local talent, as Russian companies began producing more content, accounts for part of the growth, but it seems

[18] Interview with Simon Tucker.

undeniable that Sony's influence, particularly in guiding writing practices, was decisive in creating the shaping the programming on both STS and TNT.

Sony's success in the Russian market is notable when considered alongside the other U.S majors. Of the major Hollywood studios (Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century Fox, Disney, and Universal) all of whom attempted to have their programming widely accepted, only Sony was able to do so. Virtually all of the other studios' efforts were very short-lived and ended with the complete failure of their programs. Sony, conversely, was able to produce several hit shows, with a number of different partners. The Russian networks were particularly interested in working on sitcoms because of the compressed broadcast schedule that Russian networks tend to use. As a result, according to Lorber, the Russians wanted series that had more than one hundred episodes that could be adapted for the Russian market. Many sitcoms fit into this category, and Russian networks made deals with several Hollywood studios to license and adapt them.[19]

My interviewees attributed Sony's success and the other studios' failures to the culture that Sony brought to Russia and the model that it championed for the production of Russian language adaptations of their programs. Not all of the series that Sony brought to Russia were successful of course. One of my interviewees, for example, noted that Sony's attempted adaptation of *I Dream of Genie* cost the company more than two million dollars and failed to advance beyond the pilot stage. But on the whole, Sony succeeded, particularly with adaptations of *The Nanny, Everbody Loves Raymond, Married With Children, Who's the Boss* and the adaptation of the Columbian telenovela *Yo Soy Betty, la Fea.* In essence, Sony programs were a powerful force on Russian television from 2004 through the end of 2014.

[19] Interview with Marc Lorber.

This ability to produce a succession of hit programs and sustain them over a large number of episodes is what makes Sony's story in the Russian market such an impressive success. It is even more interesting when one considers failures of the other major studios. Lorber suggested that both Disney and Warner Brothers had struggled in the Russian market even in the rare instances when they sold programs to Russian networks because of their unwillingness to embed their personnel in the country. Disney sold *Golden Girls* and *Home Improvement* to Russian networks. Both programs failed to gain traction in the market. According to Lorber "Warner [Brothers] never got their act together… [there were] six comedies that they sold in [sic], three never made it to pilots, another two got piloted but never made it to air, and the other never made it very long [sic] beyond that."[20] Lorber's opinion was that many of the Western companies other than Sony provided only minimal consultancy services, as they did in other markets and likely did not understand that the Russian production companies had very little experience and therefore, tended to struggle with adapting scripted formats on their own.

Several of the people that I interviewed suggested that a major reason for Sony's success in the market had to do with their willingness to take significant financial risks. They gave Sony's consultancy strategy as an example.[21] Sony was willing to send consultants to work on the programs for several years. Most often these were Hollywood veterans with a great deal of experience working on sitcoms and other types of programs. An international format consultant that I interviewed put it simply stating that "Sony commits, has committed from the very earliest stages of writing through post production."[22] A Russian creative director who had significant experience working with Sony supported this statement. They confirmed that the key to Sony's

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.; Interview with international format consultant; Russian Creative Director, Interview With Russian Creative Director; Interview with Russian Producer.
[22] Interview with international format consultant.

success in most of their productions was "American consultants in the writing room, on stage. That's the secret. The secret of *Married* [*With Children*]… That's the secret of [the] *Nanny*… that's something which makes this difference [sic], why Sony is successful, and others are not successful."[23] The documentary *Exporting Raymond* shows a very good example of this on the ground engagement. In the documentary, there are several American consultants who are deeply involved in the process of casting and writing the first few episodes of the program including the president of Sony's international division Jeff Lerner. Lerner and consultant Richard Vaczy are present through all of the meetings, often mediating conflicts between the Russian writers, costume designers, directors and actors and the documentary's narrator and protagonist *Everybody Loves Raymond* showrunner, Philip Rosenthal. Lerner and Vaczy are both in Russia before Rosenthal arrives and during the year when the development of the program was on hiatus. Simon Tucker suggested in an interview that Lerner, in particular, had invested a substantial amount of personal time in the Russian operation suggesting that "Jeff's been getting on flights to Russia since time began" and that his Russian partners appreciate this commitment.[24]

In general, however, Sony's use of consultants allowed them to understand the production climate of the Russian market and to establish long-term relationships with many Russian producers and executives. Russian producers and American consultants interviewed for this project suggested that the embedding of consultants in the market represented *the key* differentiator between Sony and its Western rivals. They all agreed that what ultimately undermined both Disney and Warner Brothers in the Russian market was their unwillingness to

[23] Interview With Russian Creative Director.
[24] Interview with Simon Tucker.

keep their employees in the market long term. Tucker noted that Russian producers were particularly sensitive to Western companies coming to Russia in simply to extract money and then quickly departing. For example, Lorber and another consultant indicated that one of the central problems that Disney encountered when they attempted to enter the Russian market with programs like *Golden Girls* and *Home Improvement* was that they sent consultants over only for a short period, only about two weeks. Both of the programs struggled in the Russian market and ultimately failed to gain the kinds of the popularity of Sony-backed programs. *Home Improvement's* Russian version *Papa na vse ruki* (*Dad, the Jack of All Trades*) lasted only forty episodes, while *Golden Girls'* Russian version titled *Bolshie Zhenshini* (*Grown Women*) fared even more poorly and was canceled after only thirty-two episodes.

The presence of Hollywood writers was a key to bridging the cultural divide. The Russians provided the local context, while the consultants helped the Russians avoid the common errors that might damage a program's appeal since they understood the conventions of the genre. One international format consultant suggested that Russian writers "make the classic mistakes [that] every writer in a sitcom faces: 'This joke is hilarious, but it's not really in character.'" According to him "the pro says, 'well, we can't use the joke' [but the Russian writers], they'll go for one joke, that'll kill the character."[25] This phenomenon, in large part relates to the problem described above, Russians in general, but writers, in particular, did not have sufficient exposure to the sitcom genre to be able to successfully execute the work of localizing particular programs without substantial assistance.

[25] Interview with international format consultant.

The situations described above were not merely related to the sitcom genre either. Two projects that Sony co-produced with STS, both major successes were melodramas. Both these programs ran over one hundred episodes and were among STS' most popular offerings at the period in question. These programs benefitted from Sony's steadying hand and commitment to protecting the brand that they were bringing to Russia. In particular, with programs like *Ne Rodis Kpacivoi* (*Not Born Beautiful*), an adaptation of the *Yo Soy Betty, la Fea* format, Lorber told me that many times Sony struggled with the very common Russian practices of aggressive product placement. Particularly in the early days of post-Soviet Russian television, there was a desire to monetize programs as much as possible, and this led to the often clumsy inclusion of numerous products on screen. For example, in the opening credits of *My Fair Nanny,* the lead character, in cartoon form holds a case of cosmetics that bears the logo of the firm Avon (Figure 4.2). The figure below illustrates the crude way that product placement was integrated into television programs made in Russia during this period. Lorber suggested that often the Russian writers would do this at the expense of the characters, essentially having them use or showcase a product that directly clashed with a character's personality.[26] In the rush to make money, the Russian producers were not fully taking account of the core elements of the story and characters. It is worth noting here, that at least in the case of the Chinese adaptation of *Yo Soy Betty, la fea,* the possibility of aggressive product placement was one of the elements that made the series attractive. It is possible that this aspect also attracted the Russian producers.[27] While Sony was not completely able to stop this process, they tried to minimize how much product placement disrupted the overall story telling.

[26] Interview with Marc Lorber.
[27] Moran and Ma, "Towards a Cultural Economy of Chou Nu (Nv) Wu Di: The Yo Soy Betty La Fea Franchise in the People's Republic of China," 129.

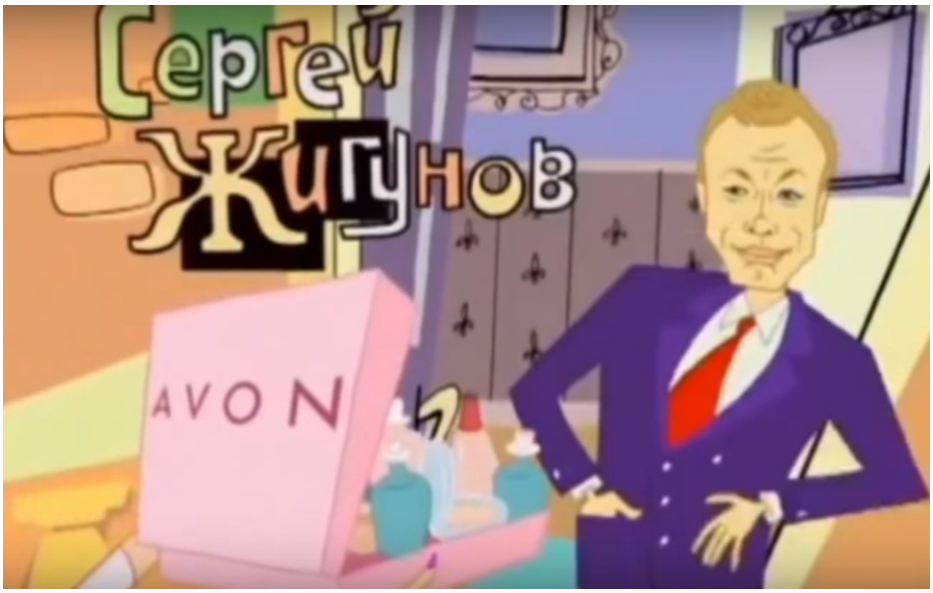

Figure 4.2 The opening credits of My Fair Nanny. Vika's cosmetics case bears the Avon cosmetics brand's logo.

Sony's commitment to embedding itself in the Russian market is evident in their willingness to invest capital long term in the market. In 2006 the company, which had primarily been cooperating with the Russian production company Amedia decided to purchase a controlling share in another studio LEAN-M.[28] By purchasing this company, Sony was able to acquire approximately five percent of the television serial production in the Russian market. Tucker, suggested that this type of investment is key in the Russian market because of the perception of foreign media companies as being imperialistic. He suggested that "if they think that you're just there to make money and to bugger off, then I don't think they're going to be interested in you."[29] For Sony to operate for extended periods of time in the Russian market and have the sort of success that they had, one of the keys was that they had to keep some of the capital that they generated in the country.

[28] Yulia Kulikova, "Sony Pictures vpisalas' v rossijskij format [Sony Pictures buys into the Russian market]," *Kommersant*, April 9, 2006.
[29] Interview with Simon Tucker.

Sony has created a business model in Russia that relies in equal parts on being part of the Russian television community and bringing Hollywood experience to Moscow. It is constantly negotiating the cultural demands of the market. They have even managed to avoid having to divest the company of its Russian assets under the country's increasingly stringent media ownership laws. Sony's approach to the Russian market is quite the opposite from what one might expect an American media giant if one were to adopt a cultural imperialist perspective. In this case, the Hollywood studio became more Russian in its local operations while its partners hybridized their approach, in essence becoming more American. In so doing it has played an instrumental role in training and preparing Russian staff and writers to be able to create television whose writing and production values are consistent with those in other global markets. Over time Sony has been willing to evolve its business model and the way that it collaborates with both its Russian divisions (Sony Television Pictures Russia and LEAN-M) and with the Russian networks and other production partners. From the early shows that Sony brought to Russia, there has been a substantially greater emphasis on building up local talent. This trend was especially notable when some of the Russian version of their programs were being extended beyond the original scripts. A vice president of international development at a major American studio related the story of the creation of the additional episodes of the Russian version of *The Nanny*. They told me that Sony commissioned some of the original staff who wrote the American *The Nanny* to create new scripts when it became clear, that STS wanted more episodes than the American original.[30] Essentially, according to this executive, Sony placed these episodes between the original's fifth and sixth season extending the Russian series by twenty-seven

[30] Interview with the VP of International Development and Programming at a US Studio, interview by Jeffrey Brassard, July 17, 2014.

episodes. These scripts were a mix of rejected stories from the original program and new concepts written by the L.A based writers who were reassembled to work on the extension.[31]

This process evolved eventually with both *Happy Together*, the Russian version of *Married with Children* and with *Voronini* the localized *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Both of these series were extended for far longer than *The Nanny*. Part of the longer run of both of those programs can be explained by their more open story format. As an international format consultant who had worked on *My Fair Nanny* stated, the plot and structure of that story are essentially a repackaging of the Cinderella story that has persisted for centuries. As a result of this, once the female lead marries "the prince" the story essentially has to come to an end.[32] With both *Voronini* and *Happy Together* Sony faced no such obstacles. The only theoretical limitation on the total length of the series was ratings and the general willingness of all the players to remain part of the program. As a result, with both programs, Sony took a very different approach to the question of creating new episodes.

With, *Happy Together* and eventually with *Voronini*, rather than commissioning scripts from American writers Sony kept the teams that had been localizing scripts on the original stories in place to develop new stories. The company felt that this was the next logical step for those productions, and the Russian networks and production companies involved were eager to take a greater role in the process of creating these sitcoms.[33] The U.S studio, however, was not satisfied with simply leaving and allowing its Russian partners to take over. To protect the brands of both shows, maintain a degree of creative control, and ease the Russians into a greater

[31] Clifford J. Levy, "Still Married, With Children, but in Russian," *The New York Times*, September 10, 2007, sec. International / Europe, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/10/world/europe/10sitcom.html.
[32] Interview with international format consultant.
[33] Interview with the VP of International Development and Programming at a US Studio.

creative role Sony kept their consultants in the writer's room. As a result, their consultants collaborated with the Russian writers to create new episodes.[34]

This hybrid approach of Americans and Russians writing together proved very successful. *Happy Together* aired one hundred episodes more than the original American series while *Voronini,* to date, has created an additional hundred and sixteen episodes from the time it ran out of American material. While the network that ran *Happy Together,* TNT, decided to end the series because the ratings had started to fall behind some of their original series, *Voronini* remains on the air with high ratings. It was among the leaders on STS until the studio that was helping Sony to produce it, Good Story Media, signed a five-year exclusivity deal, stipulating that they would produce content only for TNT. This realignment left the series in limbo, with Sony considering whether to move the production either back to its LEAN-M facilities or simply to end the series. The VP of international development at a U.S studio suggested that given the wide-scale shift in the Russian market away from more traditional three-camera sitcoms to single camera comedies, that *Voronini* seemed dated and that perhaps Sony needed to move with the market to programs that felt more contemporary.

While none of the people I spoke claimed that the growth in the number of Russian studios working in the sitcom genre was a direct result Sony's efforts in building up the country's creative infrastructure, Sony's legacy in the market is fairly self-evident. One of the Sony lasting contributions has been its role in teaching the basics of the sitcom and other Western genres to the Russians. This mentoring role is particularly true in the case of its collaboration with Good Story Media, the company which helped the American studio produce

[34] "Russia Goes beyond Raymond Remake," *C21Media*, November 30, 2011, http://www.c21media.net/russia-goes-beyond-raymond-remake/.

Voronini. The Russian company today is a medium-sized studio that along with Yellow, Black and White are the two most sought-after producers of sitcoms. Two of its original sitcoms *Fizruk* (*Phys. Ed*) and *Realnyi Patsany* (*Real Guys*) have become the highest-rated sitcoms for TNT. Apparently, the network and its parent company, Gazprom Media Holdings valued the studio highly enough that in May of 2014 they paid fifty million U.S dollars for a controlling stake in the company.[35]

The success of Good Story Media is built in large part on its two partnerships with Sony Pictures Television. The most prominent of these was the series *Voronini* which helped to establish the studio as a producer of quality programs. As I have outlined above Sony played a central role controlling and guiding the production of their *Everybody Loves Raymond* localization. Another important collaboration between the Sony and Good Story Media was an original Russian series that Sony developed for the Russian market called *Vociemdesyatie* (*the Eighties*). The series to date has run approximately seventy-two episodes and has been one of the leading series on STS. The American vice president of international development I interviewed told me that Sony created the series while looking toward its future in the Russian market. The company was at the time getting fewer request for localized series and, to maintain their active presence in the Russian market, they decided to develop an original Russian program. The project was a partnership between Sony, LEAN-M and Good Story Media. The series explores the culture and history of the 1980s and the coming of age of a group of young Russians against the backdrop of the perestroika era. While the series itself is a fairly standard comedy, Sony developed the concept and pilot with an American writer at the helm.[36] This practice of having

[35] "TNT Kupil Gud Stori Media [TNT Buys Good Story Media]."
[36] Interview with the VP of International Development and Programming at a US Studio.

an experienced writer at the helm of a Russian series that is primarily being written by and for Russians again proved to be very successful. This triumph suggests that the hybrid model of bringing Hollywood craft to Russian stories presents a viable path forward for Sony, even as the market for localized series, slowly diminishes.

Sony's partnership with Amedia also proved to be very successful for all parties involved. This partnership began in 2003 with the production of a series called *Bednaya Nastya* (*Poor Anastasia*). The series is a costume drama that follows a nineteenth-century Russian noblewoman in Saint Petersburg. The American studio provided consultancy services during the production of the series. This historical drama was one of the most successful programs of 2003 and ran until April of 2004 totaling one hundred and twenty-seven episodes. The program is also notable for the fact that it cemented a long-term partnership between the two companies. The work on *Poor Anastasia* also established Amedia as the premiere producer of period dramas in Russia, a reputation that endures to the present. The period drama mentioned in the last chapter, *Yekaterina* (*Catherine),* was also produced by the company.

Amedia was the company that worked with Sony on *The Nanny* and *Who's the Boss* as well as the adaptation of *Yo Soy Betty, la Fea*. These series allowed Amedia which was only founded in 2002 to quickly become one of the most important studios in the Russian market. This partnership with Sony also allowed Amedia to form a strong relationship with the channel STS for whom it still produces several programs. Today the Russian studio produces television programs for most of the major Russian networks except TNT which produces most of its content in-house. The success of their early partnerships with Sony clearly established the company as an attractive partner for other television networks and drove their growth going forward.

The Future of Sony in Russia

Given the decisive role that Sony played in shaping the Russian market through the 2000s, the future of the company in Russia is somewhat less clear. Obviously, Sony will remain in Russia long term, having invested in LEAN-M and committed a great deal of time and energy to the market. In many respects, however, the early successes that Sony achieved in Russia are unlikely to be repeated. The shift from localization to original programs aimed at only the Russian market presents Sony with challenges that its Russian arm has yet to face. The reason for this shift is likely twofold. First, as the television industry in Russia has grown, there is a greater interest in telling their own stories and creating series that represent Russian life. The second reason is that in their rush to adapt so many series following the success of *My Fair Nanny* the Russian industry more or less exhausted the supply of easily adaptable sitcoms from the American market.[37] There is a general feeling that there are not many sitcom formats that would still work in the Russian market, and there is little interest in returning to formats that had been unsuccessful in the past. This lack of back catalog material and the fact that the U.S television industry is no longer producing as many primetime sitcoms that managed to reach the hundred episode mark, at which point they are considered viable for adaptation, means that fewer sitcoms can be adapted.[38] These two factors have made adaptations far less appealing for Russian companies and ultimately weakened one of Sony's key advantages.

Sony's creation of *The Eighties* in partnership with Good Story Media and STS points towards a possible future for the company in Russia. It is apparent that the hybrid production model of having American writers help their Russian counterparts create an original comedy has

[37] Vladimir Nesterov, "Russia Is Running out of TV Shows," *Russia Beyond The Headlines*, December 24, 2012, http://rbth.ru/articles/2012/12/24/russia_is_running_out_of_tv_shows_21403.html.
[38] Interview with the VP of International Development and Programming at a US Studio.

been successful at least once. The series, centered as it is in the late Soviet period and reflecting the conflicts and social climate of the time is not easily localized to another country. Going forward Sony will doubtless continue to produce original Russian series and potentially bring in more American series for adaptation, and if it is attentive, it may even find a way to harness the infrastructure it has created to shape programs that might be exportable to the wider global market.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the importance of Sony's work in the Russian market. Not only has Sony played a critical role in bringing Western genres, and a great deal of industry knowledge to the country, its experience also shows that cultural imperialist theories do not correspond to the complexities of major American corporations working in a country like Russia. Most of the major Hollywood studios never established a successful presence in the country. Sony was only able to do so because it put a great deal of effort into integrating itself into the existing industrial order. This careful approach on Sony's part does not, of course, mean that the company has had no impact on the Russian television industry. As the above chapter argues, Sony's influence has been considerable, but it is not the story of Hollywood coming to dominate a foreign market. In fact, currently, Sony is struggling to maintain its position in the market, having been outflanked by people and companies who learned their craft under their guidance.

The company has also had to navigate the political situation in the country carefully. It is not surprising that the genres that Sony has brought to the country were mostly apolitical. All of those I spoke with who had worked for or were currently working for Sony, acknowledge that the company, like most of the other producers, carefully avoided any overtly political topics that might cause them problems. Sony and its Russian partners understand that the Russian state has a

tendency to eliminate actors that it perceives as threatening and therefore are very cautious. In authoritarian capitalism, corporations, even foreign ones, are allowed to generate profits as long as they do not ultimately criticize the state. Sony is subject to these rules as much as any Russian company. Sony could lose their considerable investment and years of work if they somehow found themselves in conflict with the state. Thus, resulting from Russian political and economic domination by the state, and its lack of the rule of law, we see the opposite of what imperialist theories suggest; we see a powerful American corporation bowing to the will of a foreign government, to protect its access to a profitable market

The next chapter examines Sony's most important partner in the market, the television channel STS. The privately-owned channel has been an important catalyst for introducing Western genres into the Russian market, particularly those that lacked analogs in Russian culture. The most important of these is the situation comedy. The channel also best exemplifies many of the trends in taking place in the global media industry, particularly the hybridization of global genres into local contexts and the creation of content aimed both at the domestic and format markets. I argue that following from its experiences working with Sony Pictures Television and other Western studios that STS has positioned itself as a bridge between Russia and the West and is well prepared to become a provider of premium content in the global arena.

Chapter 5 STS: Russian Television's 'Window to the West'

Sony's principal partner in the Russian market to date has been the entertainment network STS. The partnership between the Hollywood studio and the Russian television network in the 2000s was definitive in transforming the practices of the Russian industry as a whole. Because of its partnership the American studio, the channel has been one of the most important companies in the Russian entertainment industry since 2003. This chapter examines the station as an important site of innovation, responsible for the introduction of genres and programs that have become staples in the Russian industry. STS has through its engagement with Western companies and ways of making television brought Russian popular culture closer to that of the West. This innovation is primarily driven by STS' position as the most capitalist network in Russia. Because the state does not use STS for propaganda purposes, it has not received commissions to produce programming aimed at strengthening the state. It is also not attached to a large state-owned company that might cushion it from market realities. As a result, STS, like media companies in the West is completely profit driven, and its future is contingent on its ability to attract and keep audiences. Its orientation towards capitalist modes of production does not, however, leave it outside the reach of the state as it still has to negotiate the dictates of the ruling government.

The importance of STS to the history of Russian media is deeply tied to its embrace and emulation of western media practices. Those who have worked with STS praise them for how Western the company seems. An international format consultant told me "it's an entirely civilized place to work." [1] He compared it favorably to its competitors who he felt were much

[1] Interview with international format consultant.

more aggressive and less savvy. The VP of international development at a major US studio that I spoke with suggested that:

> To me, it felt American. It even felt cooler. Maybe European is the word. I went there for a pitch to save a show once. Everything [there] has to be about cool and look[ing] good and all young and very flashy. It was like a regular network… you go into [their building], and it's automatically like, the future, I'm in the future… It's very modern, and they're offering you drinks. There's no difference between being in that building and Universal or a Sony building.[2]

The importance of STS' ability to act like a Western network should not be underestimated. Clearly, for the American executives and consultants that work in Russia, it is precisely the familiarity of STS as a pseudo-Western company that makes it an appealing partner. In saying that it is "European," "cool" or "entirely civilized," they are essentially speaking to its ability to become a culturally proximate node for Western companies to deal with inside Russia. STS is a modern cultural version of the city of Saint Petersburg which acted as a transfer point between Russia and Europe in the Tsarist era. These observations from industry insiders attest to the importance of STS as being a relay point between Russian and Western culture.

In more recent years, before the crisis in Ukraine, the goal at STS under former general producer Vyacheslav Murugov was crafting products suitable for the global marketplace. STS represents the tendency towards westernization and seeking the approval of the West. This orientation was especially true in the period after STS' second general producer Alexander

[2] Interview with the VP of International Development and Programming at a US Studio.

Rodansky left the company and Murugov took the reins. Simon Tucker, who owns a large production company in Russia and who has worked with STS, noted that:

> Murugov would love to do a coproduction with BBC, that would be like 'Boom, look at me boys, I'm an international cosmopolitan TV producer.' He would love that to happen. It's that slightly schizophrenic relationship like having two heads where you do your business in a very Russian way, but you flirt with the international community because you want that recognition.[3]

As a result, the style of the programs on STS has more closely matched the general tone of a Western network that focuses on light entertainment. If Russian television products are ever to reach the West, it is likely that STS will be the source.

The movement towards returning Russian cultural products to the global stage in a serious and profit generating way has been a rapid but ultimately uneven process. As Roth-Ey noted, the Soviet Union never really managed to build a cultural export system that could rival the United States. There were some notable successes primarily in film, but for the most part, Russian popular culture, outside of the novels of some notable Russian dissidents have been outside the mainstream of global society.[4] In the post-Soviet era, STS has been aggressive in adapting different forms of Western content for the Russian market. The Russian entertainment network has developed programming in three distinct but overlapping phases. These phases are adaptation, hybridization, and cultural odorlessness. In each case, there are several programs that are emblematic of these specific phases. There are also programs on STS that do not fit this model and are aimed solely at the Russian market, though these are increasingly few. STS is still

[3] Interview with Simon Tucker.
[4] Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*.

a Russian network that has to make programs for a Russian audience. On the whole, however, it is very globally oriented and seeks to make programming that follows Western norms.

Making a Russian Sitcom or Making the Sitcom Russian?

My Fair Nanny, which was discussed in the previous chapter, was only the first sitcom to air on STS and represents the adaptation phase. The next phase began in September 2007, when STS premiered a program called *Papiny Dochki* (*Daddy's Girls*). The series was the first original Russian sitcom to gain genuine popularity. The series would eventually run for four-hundred-ten episodes before ending in early 2013. For most of its time on the air, the program had high ratings. At its highest point in 2008, about one out of every five Russian viewers tuned in four times a week.[5] The series follows the exploits of the Vasnetsov family that, at least initially, is made up of the father Sergei and his five daughters: Masha, Dasha, Zhenya, Galina, and Paulina. When the audience meets the family, the girls' mother Lyudmila has just left them to immigrate to Canada with a hockey player with whom she was having an affair. At the beginning of the series each of the girls represents a different cultural niche: Masha is trendy, Dasha is goth, Zhenya is sporty, Galina is brainy, and Paulina is a cute young child. Other characters include the girls' grandmother, the teachers at the girls' school, Sergei's philandering friend Antonov and his lazy, incompetent office assistant. The daily lives of the girls and their father are the source of most of the humor. Most of the plots center on problems at school, with boys and the frequent interfamily squabbles that result from five girls occupying a two-bedroom apartment. The father is mostly the butt of jokes regarding his incompetence as a family therapist, the most notable being the dissolution of his marriage. The series' focus on finding the humor in daily life

[5] "Papiny Dochki Vernutsya Na Tv S Kino Klishe [Daddy's Girl's Returns to Television with Film Cliches]," *Variety Russia*, May 6, 2012, http://www.varietyrussia.com/tv/05-06-2012/papiny-dochki-vernutsya-na-tv-s-kino-klishe/.

makes it a fairly typical sitcom and, like *My Fair Nanny* before it, even includes the once hated laugh track.

One of the most successful aspects of the show was the cast which many in the industry believe contributed to the success of the program, especially in its early days. A Russian producer I interviewed who had worked on the program suggested that "casting was a huge thing actually… all the young actors they were so cute, so appealing in different ways and they're so perfect for their roles, and the dad was so … you can sense empathy to him, and that actually made the show [sic]."[6] The program is also notable for the fact that it was one of the first Russian programs that used focus groups and test audiences to make adjustments to the actors during the casting phase. While this is a fairly standard practice in the West, *Daddy's Girls* was one of the first programs to be made in Russia that used these methods of audience feedback.[7] Given the success of the program, the practice was adopted more widely in the industry. For instance, at the end of the documentary *Exporting Raymond,* Phillip Rosenthal notes that the actor originally cast to play the Russian version of Raymond was replaced because the did not test well in focus groups.

Whereas *My Fair Nanny* and *Voronini* were emblematic of the adaptation and localization stage of global cultural exchange, *Daddy's Girls* represents the second phase of interaction with the global cultural economy called hybridization. The program is an example of hybridity because it took the form of the Western sitcom and made a Russian example of that genre. It is a Russian sitcom that mixes a global genre and Russian particularities. As a Russian producer told me:

[6] Interview with Russian Producer.
[7] Ibid.

> The whole concept by itself … it's a good concept, but it's nothing overwhelming… They are [Russian] stories dealing with the Russian reality rather than adapted American reality…I mean human is human everywhere, and the people are dealing with the same problems, but like the little nuances of the Russian reality was already here because the people were living that life [sic]."[8]

The nuances he refers to are problems either with school, the Russian legal system, corruption, struggles with housing, or the outsized role of oligarchs in Russian society. For example, the father, Sergei, is treating the wife of an oligarch who feels depressed about her marriage and who pays him large sums of money for his work, since she has little sense of the value of money. The oligarch in question does not appreciate a therapist poking his nose into his personal life and often arrives flanked by bodyguards to make his displeasure known. Later in the series, Sergei is rewarded for reuniting the couple with a series of an expensive gift, which also causes him trouble since he becomes the target of thieves. The program represented one of the first successful comedies of the post-Soviet era that told Russian stories in a humorous and engaging way. It did this, essentially, by using the storytelling and production techniques that STS had learned from working with Sony and other Western majors or what Kevin Robins calls structures of common difference. By this term, he means that as the media globalize, audiences across different national borders consume similar kinds of media products, but inflected with particular national or local variations.[9]

STS translated the success of the series into several other ventures, and it remains to this date one of the most comprehensive efforts ever undertaken by a Russian television company to

[8] Ibid.
[9] Kevin Robins, "What in the World's Going On," in *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, ed. Paul du Gay (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1998), 11–66.

generate other sources of revenue from a piece of intellectual property. The network licensed the sale of products based on the series, covering a substantial number of items including notebooks, sticker albums, kitchenware, apparel, book bags and a series of novels. Even more significantly, a Russian software company produced two video games based on the series under license. These games initially were designed to run on Windows-based PCs but eventually were adapted for phones and tablets running Google's Android operating system. A web-based version of the second game was also playable via the Russian social networking site Vkontakte. STS took a very Western model of franchising and licensing and applied it to the series.

Daddy's Girls served as a proof of concept that original Russian sitcoms could be a profitable venture for television producers. Following the success of the program, an increasing number of new Russian sitcoms began to appear. While several of STS' original sitcoms have run more than a hundred episodes, many of the most successful sitcoms produced after *Daddy's Girls* were made by rival network TNT. Programs like *Univer* (*University*), *Interni* (*Interns*) and *Deffchonki* (*Girls*) enjoyed long runs and at times dominated the ratings in their timeslots. All of these successful programs appeared only after *Daddy's Girls* proved that it was possible to make a popular original Russian sitcom. This fact speaks to that series' importance to the history of television in Russia.

The series is also significant because many people became important writers and producers at other companies. As a Russian producer who worked on the series stated, "there [were] so many talented writers who [met while working on *Daddy's Girls*]. The owners of different production companies and their founders or the creators of different shows, they [all]

actually worked on that show from the beginning."[10] He is not exaggerating in this regard. The founders of two of the most successful producers of sitcoms in Russia, Yellow, Black and White and Good Story Media, all worked on *Daddy's Girls*. There are other connections between them, for instance, many of them had appeared on an improvisation competition program called KVN and, thus, had some connection with STS general producer Vyacheslav Murugov who also appeared on the program but, *Daddy's Girls* seems to have been a place where many successful producers started their careers. It was, therefore, an important site of networking and learning for writers in the Russian industry. These people leveraged the lessons learned from that program to build their production companies and spread the production and writing techniques learned from Sony and *Daddy's Girls* to other points in the Russian television industry.

Another important aspect of the series is that it was sold as a format to the German television station *Das Vierte*. The Russian producer with whom I spoke suggested that the program was adapted in Germany because one of the owners of the German station was Russian and had some ties back to STS. As a result, they started the production hoping that it would be a hit.[11] The adapted program, called *A House Full of Daughters,* was a commercial, and popular failure and the German company produced only twenty episodes. Critics panned the series as being amateurish. They complained about several issues related to the series, the most prominent of which were the shallow character development and extensive use of stereotypes. The latter criticism likely relates to each of the girls representing a particular cultural niche (hip, goth, academic, sporty and cute) or the father's portrayal as a buffoon. Another central complaint was the use of the laugh track which German audiences apparently found as painfully inappropriate

[10] Interview with Russian Producer.
[11] Ibid.

as early post-Soviet Russians.[12] Critics also noted that the scripts were poorly localized, and the humor and situations seemed too Russian.[13] In other words, the series still embodied too many Russian idiosyncrasies or had what Iwabuchi refers to as "cultural odor."[14] These critiques and the failure of the program was a major setback for STS and the Russian television industry in general, but it also marked a significant milestone for the station and gave it a chance to learn about how to make a program that could later be formatted. Producing exportable programming is an aspect of the television business with which Russian companies have almost no experience. Excluding *Daddy's Girls,* only two other shows had ever been exported from Russia. Sony Television produced a variant of TNT's hit reality show *Dom-2* in Mexico, and the animated cartoon *Smeshariki* aired on the American CW network under the title *GoGoriki.*[15]

Regardless of the results, the attempt to adapt *Daddy's Girls* serves to illustrate both the ambition and the importance of STS and the series it finances to the overall Russian television landscape. With *Daddy's Girls,* STS created an original Russian sitcom, grew it into a multiplatform transmedia property and then sold the program as a format, albeit relatively unsuccessfully. This program and the surrounding transmedia products the network created all mark significant firsts for the Russian television industry. The series was also a major launching point for the careers of many Russian writers and producers who built their skills working on the program, networked and gained a 'track-record' of success. As STS continued its growth as an

[12] Jan Schluter, "Ein Haus voller Töchter oder: Schlimmer geht's nimmer [A house full of Daughters: It Could not Possibly Get Any Worse]," August 18, 2010, http://www.quotenmeter.de/n/43946/ein-haus-voller-toechter-oder-schlimmer-geht-s-nimmer.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Koichi Iwabuchi, "How 'Japanese' is Pokemon," in *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, ed. Joseph Jay Tobin (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[15] Katerina Kitayeva, "Russkaya Kukhnya Dlya Amerikantsev [Russia's The Kitchen for Americans]," November 26, 2013, http://rbcdaily.ru/media/562949989726542.

international brand, the lessons it learned from the successes and failures of *Daddy's Girls* led to a shift in its overall strategy especially with regards to the construction of future series.

The Odorless Kitchen

To move forward as a producer of programming that would be appealing to a global audience, at least as a format, STS had several problems to overcome related to what Joseph Straubhaar calls "cultural proximity." By this, he essentially means that people prefer to consume media from a culture that is similar to their own. This concept means that Russian cultural products would be successful in the countries with which it shares cultural ties but not elsewhere.[16] Straubhaar's concept is similar to the idea of the "cultural discount," which essentially suggests that the more tenuous the links between two cultures, the more difficult it will be for cultural texts to move from one to the other.[17] The program that marks STS' movement toward being the producer of not only original Russian programming but also programs that appeal and sell in the global marketplace, and thus overcomes these problems, is *Kukhnia* (*The Kitchen*). As noted above Russian programs do not have much of a track record of selling in the global marketplace, and this is no doubt due to the narrowly national way that programming is typically produced. For the most part, Russian series, particularly police procedurals or military dramas, are so culturally specific that they do not even appear outside of Russia. Russian comedies and melodramas have a degree of appeal, but they are still shown mostly in countries with large Russian-speaking minorities and lack a wider global appeal and must contend with the fact that humor is often very culturally specific. Most of them also eschew

[16] Joe Straubhaar, "Global, Regional, Transnational, Translocal," *Media Industries* 1, no. 3 (February 1, 2015).
[17] Hoskins and Mirus, "Reasons for the US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes."

action for dialogue and trade straightforward plots for the convoluted, multiplot stories.[18] As such they are not suitable for the international market.

As part of a rebranding effort that began in 2011 STS began working on a program that would both be a success in Russia and have the kind of global appeal that until that time had evaded Russian producers. *The Kitchen* appeared at a moment when STS was beginning to give up the ratings lead that it had built up over rival networks, particularly over Gazprom-media holdings' TNT.[19] By the spring of 2011, STS' television properties (particularly *Daddy's Girls)* were failing to draw significant audiences. The company needed a new hit show and overall strategy to differentiate itself from its increasingly aggressive and popular competitors. The new strategy seems to have been to produce higher quality programs than its rivals, particularly with regards to visuals. With this goal in mind, STS reorganized its two in-house production units (Kostafilm and Soho media) into a single unit, Story First Productions, and began upgrading the new firm's studios.[20] As a result, the reorganized unit produced no new series in 2012 or the first half of 2013. To make up for the shortfall in their in-house production capacity, STS contracted out a large amount of their production to the third-party studio Yellow, Black, and White with whom STS' general director, Vyacheslav Murugov had a prior relationship. This firm took over the production of many STS shows, most notably *Daddy's Girls* which was retooled into an hour long format, shifted from sitcom to dramedy and received a substantial boost in its production values.

[18] Konstantin Klioutchkine, "The Kamenskaia Television Series and the Conventions of Russian Television," *Kino Kultura* January 2007, no. 15 (January 2007), http://www.kinokultura.com/2007/15-klioutchkine.shtml.
[19] STS and TNT have been described roughly as the Coke and Pepsi of the Russian television landscape, in that their program offering is for all intents and purposes identical.
[20] "CTC Media Creates United Production Company Story First Production.," July 28, 2011, http://www.ctcmedia.ru/press-center/releases/?id=882#.U-KU90iKUhM.

The Kitchen was a program born from the partnership between STS and Yellow, Black and White and is notable in several ways. It has the highest budget of any Russian sitcom ever produced at approximately two hundred thousand dollars per episode. For those familiar with the high costs of American and other Western television industries this might not seem like a particularly large budget, but by Russian standards, it is very significant. The upgraded budget for the show allowed them to produce a program which in many ways is visually comparable with Western, single camera situation comedies. The strategy of increasing the quality of the program was successful, and through the first three seasons, *The Kitchen* was a ratings success, outperforming other programs in its time slot and helping to reinvigorate the STS brand as a whole.[21] The finale of the third season set an all-time ratings record for a Russian series, attracting about thirty percent of viewers in Moscow and twenty-five percent in the rest of the country.[22] A film based on the series called *Kukhnia v Parizhye* (*The Kitchen in Paris*) meant to bridge the gap between the third and fourth seasons dominated the Russian box office for two weeks following its release and earned over four times its production budget.[23] The success of the film led the network to announce that they would produce a second film, tentatively titled *The Kitchen in China* for fall 2016.[24]

While its popularity makes it a significant object of study, the series is indicative of STS' strategy going forward and how it intends to create programs that could help it become a

[21] "Kukhnya na STS Ponravilas Strane [The Kitchen on STS is the nation's favorite]," *Variety Russia*, October 25, 2012, http://www.varietyrussia.com/film/25-10-2012/kukhnya-na-sts-ponravilas-strane/.
[22] "Tretiy Sezon Kukhni Zavershilsya s Rekordnymi Reytingami [Third Season of The Kitchen End with Record Ratings]," *Variety Russia*, April 4, 2014, http://www.varietyrussia.com/tv/04-04-2014/tretiy-sezon-kukhni-zavershilsya-s-rekordnymi-reytingami/.
[23] "Rossiyskiy Prokat: Kukhnya v Parizhe Vnov Lidiruet [Russian Box Office: The Kitchen in Paris Leads Again]," May 12, 2014, http://www.varietyrussia.com/film/12-05-2014/rossiyskiy-prokat-kukhnya-v-parizhe-vnov-lidiruet/.
[24] "Sikvel Kukhni v Parizhe Otpravitsya v Kitay [Sequel to the Kitchen in Paris to Be Set in China]," May 27, 2014, http://www.varietyrussia.com/tv/27-05-2014/sikvel-kukhni-v-parizhe-otpravitsya-v-kitay/.

provider of premium content outside of Russia. *The Kitchen* is built to be exported easily as both a subtitled or voiced-over program, or even more significantly as a format. The removal of most of the significant cultural markers that would ultimately have signaled it as being Russian makes the series culturally odorless. The concept of "cultural odor" was originally proposed by Koichi Iwabuchi in his discussions of the Japanese cultural industry. Basically, Iwabuchi suggests that Japanese producers have long created cultural texts that are easily exported, by making sure that cultural markers that would signal the series as being Japanese, which he calls cultural odor, are removed.[25] He defines cultural odor as the elements which tie a cultural product "with widely disseminated symbolic images of the country of origin" often in a way that can be disconcerting to global audiences.[26] To avoid being too rigidly tied to the culture of their homeland and therefore unacceptable to global audiences, Japanese animators often draw characters that do not look Japanese, a style they call *mukokuseki*.[27] It is this type of approach, removing Russian cultural odor, that Yellow, Black and White and STS employed to make *The Kitchen* more exportable.

The setting is perhaps the most important aspect of this cultural odourlessness. The series is set in an upscale French Restaurant called Claude Monet, and though the series is obviously taking place in Moscow, it could easily be transposed into any global city, from New York to Beijing. The name of the restaurant, taking the name of the French painter, would be easily transferred to any cultural context. The design of the sets is fairly generic. The dining room mostly consists of high-end furniture typical of an expensive restaurant (Figure 5.1). The kitchen at the restaurant is industrial in its appearance; white tile and professional-grade kitchen

[25] Iwabuchi, "How 'Japanese' is Pokemon," 58.
[26] Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 38.
[27] Iwabuchi, "How 'Japanese' is Pokemon," 58.

equipment dominate (Figure 5.2). The images below illustrate the odorlessness of the mise-en-scene in the series. The only significant cultural marker that appears in the restaurant are the head Chef's fan paraphernalia for his favorite sports club, FC Spartak Moscow. As part of the localization of the program, these items could easily be changed to match the new context.

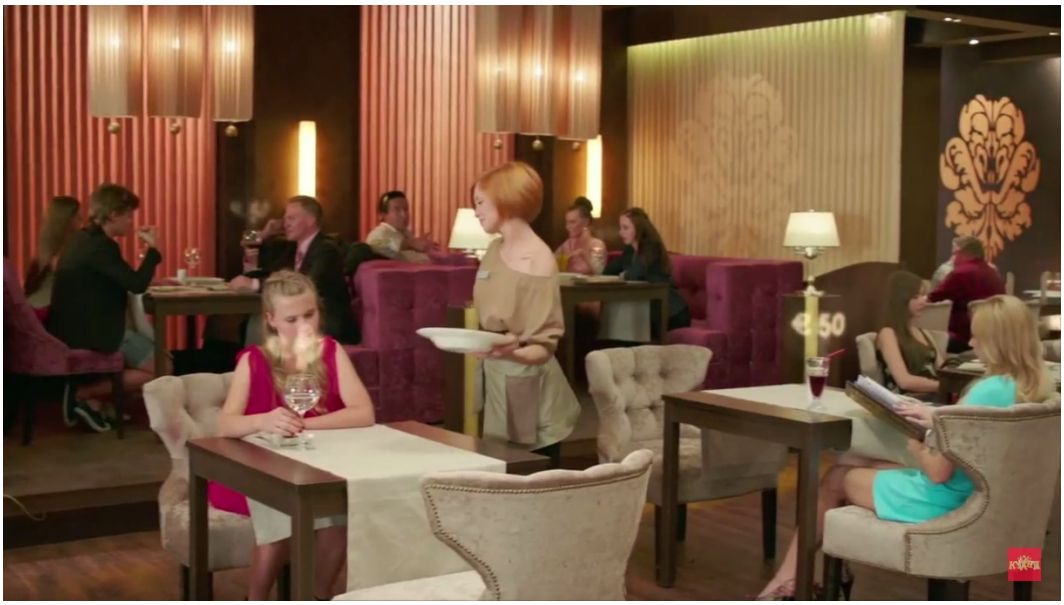

Figure 5.1 The dining room at the Claude Monet Restaurant

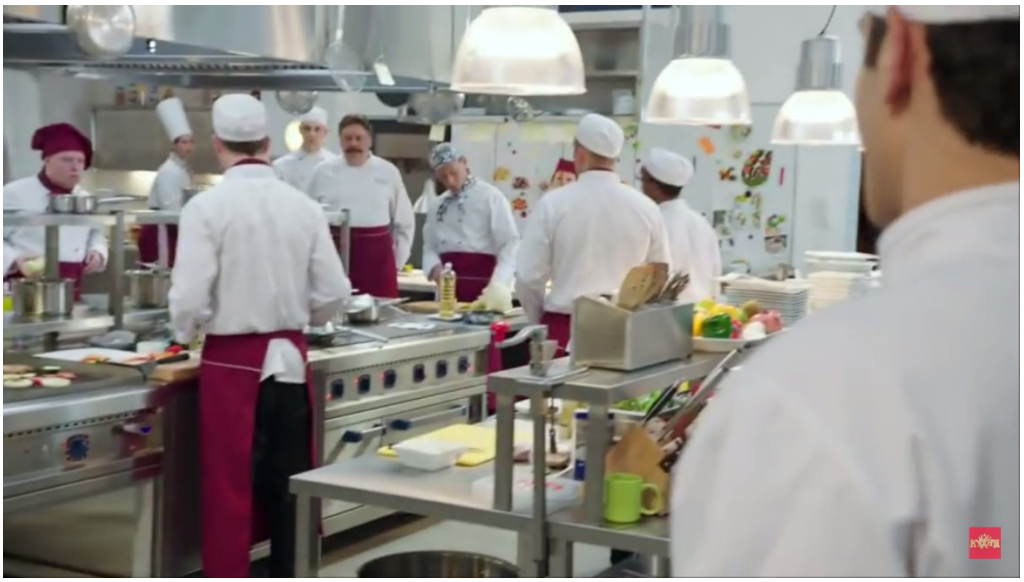

Figure 5.2 The kitchen at the Claude Monet Restaurant

The series' most striking removal of Russian cultural odor, however, is its use of non-diegetic music. Typically, Russian series that use music as theme songs or non-diegetically have licensed it from Russian artists. This practice is probably related to cost since licensing music from Russian artists is less costly than doing so from well-known Western bands. *Daddy's Girls,* for example, used music from Moscow-based band Uma2urman as a theme song while another popular series *Margosha* used a song from the Russian rock trio, Mummy Troll. *The Kitchen* for its part uses music almost exclusively from the cannon of global culture. Most prominently the program features songs from Beyoncé, Neon Trees, Enya and OK GO but virtually all the music used in the series comes from a host of English-speaking artists both well-known and obscure or the library of classical music. In fact, through the first sixty episodes of the series, non-diegetic Russian music is used in only three instances. The music used in the show is, therefore, already familiar to global audiences, adding to the series' odorlessness.

Most of the humor in the series revolves specifically around the conflicts that take place in the restaurant or relate to the romantic misadventures of the series' philandering protagonist Max Lavrov. The restaurant portion of the humor often has to do with the problems that emerge from the head chef's alcoholism and gambling addictions, which frequently undermine the work that goes on in the kitchen as the various staff members scramble to cover up their leader's shortcomings. Some comic situations also arise from the competition of the head chef with his counterpart at a newly opened, competing, high-end restaurant on the same block. Most often these situations, like reporting the neighboring eatery for immigration violations, backfire and end up embroiling the Claude Monet restaurant as well. In essence, much of the humor of the series is bound up in some of the conditions that make up the everyday experiences of globalization, such as the increasing number of people working in contingent service industry

jobs and the increased normalcy of work environments where men and women work together, creating the possibility of romance. For example, one of the central conflicts of the first season is that the lead character Max tricks the owner of the restaurant into hiring him, but must constantly be on guard, since a single misstep will get him fired. A good part of the plot of the third season deals with him trying to get his job back after being fired at the end of the second season, for helping the object of his affections, Vika, when she had made a bet with head Chef Viktor Petrovich.

Another frequent site of humor also deals with an essential phenomenon of the global era, undocumented migration. For example, in a first season episode the head chef at Claude Monet, Viktor Petrovich, noticing that there are many central Asian migrants working at the rival restaurant Arcobolleno, assumes that they are undocumented and calls the Russian immigration service. The officer who comes to check the workers at the restaurant finds all of their papers in order, praising Elena, the rival chef, for her unusual practice of only hiring documented workers. The officer, since he is in the area, then turns his sights on the Claude Monet. Viktor Petrovich, has, of course, not been nearly as conscientious as his neighbor and is "hoist on his own petard" resulting in two of his staff being deported. It is easy to imagine a similar situation taking place in a restaurant in New York. All one would have to do to adapt the situation would be to switch the migrants from Central Asian to Latin American. The problems of illegal migrants and government efforts to regulate their presence represent a theme that is universal in large economies. The series builds its humor on these types of globally recognizable situations.

It is notable that very little of the humor involves any interaction with Russian institutions in a way that would be hard to adapt to a foreign situation, or that might prove troublesome for the network domestically. Where there are interactions with state institutions, it is the type of

interaction that would be universally understood. For example, after the chef Victor Petrovich has a heart attack he is forced to remain in hospital and has to suffer through the horrors of hospital food, in this case, a Russian buckwheat porridge called *kasha*. The gruff head nurse repeatedly thwarts his efforts to save himself by ordering pizza using his mobile phone. She confiscates the food, while still forcing her patient to pay for it. It is safe to say that suffering through bad hospital food constitutes a more or less universal experience.

Perhaps the most important Russian institution, the police and security apparatus rarely appear in the series. In fact, excluding the film, the series has only two major interactions with the police. In one instance, Max, the series' protagonist, runs a fowl of a police officer whose wife has taken an interest in him. While the couple eats at the restaurant, the police officer catches his wife with Max, who has been unwillingly pulled into the bathroom and proceeds to fire his pistol repeatedly at the young cook who survives by taking refuge behind the bar. Again, this situation seems to be one that is universally funny and would not be difficult for a Western audience to understand. The second encounter occurs after the chef, seeking refuge from the dreaded hospital food, escapes out a window in his hospital gown to purchase a hot dog. The police mistake him for a mental patient since he is sitting in a hospital gown eating a hotdog in the middle of a Moscow winter. The only other moment where the series' protagonists encounter a state official is when they are forced to bribe a health inspector who annually threatens to shut down the restaurant. Their interaction, presented in the form of flashbacks, show the inspector noting health and safety infractions in the kitchen and being bribed to overlook them. The humor in this situation comes from the fact that the infractions which he is bribed to overlook involves moving a fire extinguisher from one place and then moving it back the next year. While corruption is endemic to Russia in a way that it is not in many other places, a corrupt health

inspector extracting bribes is not so unique to that country that it would be hard to translate to a non-Russian context. In fact, a corrupt health inspector in New York seems possible, if not likely. While these examples are hardly exhaustive, they do show the care taken in crafting comic situations that are not too specifically Russian. This tactic ultimately leads to a cultural product that, excluding the fact that all the dialog is in Russian, does not bear many traces of Russia itself.

The program is seen, as a landmark in terms of production and writing quality across the industry. The vice president of international programming at a US studio that I interviewed for this project put it the most bluntly stating that "*The Kitchen* has changed the game… It's one of the first shows, it's so bright and airy and not just mired down in dark, ashen Russia…. it could be shot anywhere. It feels like any country that I don't understand the language.[28] When asked if they believed the program might be viable on the international market they answered "seeing *The Kitchen*, I could, but before that, I didn't. To me it was, all derivative, it was all tropy and not well produced. Just because of experience and levels of quality control."[29] The fact remains that the series has drawn the attention of global media giants outside of Russia for its quality is a rare achievement for that industry.

The strategy of creating culturally odorless texts was apparently successful since on November 26th, 2013 Yellow, Black and White announced that it had reached an agreement with the international distribution arm of the American network CBS to distribute *The Kitchen* worldwide.[30] The deal leaves the former Soviet Republics under the control of STS and Yellow, Black and White, but allows CBS to use the series' format to create adaptations in all the markets

[28] Interview with the VP of International Development and Programming at a US Studio.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Kitayeva, "Russkaya Kukhnya Dlya Amerikantsev [Russia's The Kitchen for Americans]."

outside of that zone excluding Israel. Obviously, this is a very important agreement from the Russian point of view. The then general producer of STS Vyacheslav Murugov stated in an interview that reaching this agreement required a large investment from STS and Yellow, Black, and White. Among other things, the companies produced some promotional materials in English, including a roughly four-minute trailer with subtitles and English narration and an information book that breaks down the program's performance in Russia by market segment. He also said:

> It is impossible just to sit in a chair and hope that someone will call and say "Hey we want to purchase *The Kitchen.* To get CBS to purchase the format, we had to build huge displays in Cannes where we placed large billboards. It required a great deal of preparation. It seemed like the right moment to get into this market. The Americans and the whole world are waiting for new formats. There is a sort of stagnation of ideas which is apparent at international conferences. And for us, this represents an opportunity.[31]

The expense and effort to create promotional material for the series in Cannes reflect STS' willingness to take its products to the international market and invest heavily in getting its programs adopted. It also reflects the turn of at least one major producer of Russian content to the world market. *The Kitchen* is the result of a decade and a half of Russian producers, mostly linked to STS copying, hybridizing and experimenting with a Western genre, but also having a deep engagement with Western companies like Sony. Its themes are global.

If *The Kitchen* is successful in the West or anywhere, globally it would represent the first significant Russian contribution to global culture at least since the collapse of communism. It is a bold undertaking by STS that represents an intense desire by Russian producers and Russian

[31] Boletskaya, Vyacheslav Murugov Televidenie-Eto Ne Kanaly Eto Khity [Vyacheslav Murugov - Television is Not About Channels it is About Hits].

companies to be part of the global market and to gain recognition as an important cultural player again. STS and its partners, having westernized the bulk of their programming and their production practices, are seeking to do what Peter the Great did when he built the city of Saint Petersburg. They are building a "window to the West" with the hopes of bringing Russian and Western cultures closer together. That window is STS.

It is not clear what the outcome of this project will be. Currently, while CBS holds the right to *The Kitchen,* it has yet actually to commission a pilot for the program. It is possible that they purchased the rights simply to stop a competitor from having access to it. They may also be waiting for the series to have over a hundred episodes to start adapting it, which is a relatively common industry practice. The only sign of *The Kitchen* in the United States thus far is its availability for streaming on the internet-based streaming services Hulu and Amazon Prime.[32] Three adaptations of the program to date have appeared in Georgia, Estonia, and Greece. Given that those countries have cultural ties to Russia it is not altogether clear that this represents a great accomplishment.[33] While the success of *The Kitchen* globally remains somewhat unclear, this has not stopped STS and Yellow, Black and White, from pushing forwards with further efforts to develop programs for the global marketplace. The two companies created some other culturally odorless programs such as *Posledniy iz Magikan* (Last of the Magikans) which focuses on a multi-ethnic family, in this case, an Armenian man who is married to a Russian woman. The series catalogs his struggles to accept the different cultural norms of Russian society with regards to his three daughters. The series could easily be adapted to another context simply by changing the ethnicities involved. It is not hard to imagine a U.S series with a blended Mexican-

[32] Vladimir Kozlov, "Russian Broadcaster CTC Media Sells Content to Hulu," *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 7, 2014, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/russian-broadcaster-ctc-media-sells-716978.
[33] "Serial Kukhnia adaptiruyut dlya Gruzii [The Kitchen Gets a Georgian Adaptation]," *The Hollywood Reporter: Russian Edition*, July 10, 2015, http://thr.ru/news/7134/.

American family facing similar struggles. The two companies have also developed a program called *Angelika* about a severely overweight girl who gains the magical power to become thin, though she can't control it. Eventually, she learns to love herself and about her true self-worth by seeing that beauty is more than skin-deep. These series are part of an increasing number of international series such as the Swedish and Danish collaboration *Bron* (*The Bridge*) that as Isadora Avis suggests are structured around "universal" story elements that "in any given television series is what might enable its subsequent adaptations in different countries around the world."[34] Neither *Last of the Magikyans* or *Angelika* have achieved the success of *The Kitchen*, but they point to the fact that there is an interest in accessing the global market.

A Common Trajectory

Using ideas from Soviet semiotician Yuri Lotman, Michael Keane, Anthony Fung, and Albert Moran suggest that there are five main phases of textual transfer that cultures pass through. The story of the Russian television industry developed in the preceding chapters encapsulates each of them. It is worth examining them in some depth before moving to the last part of this work, which deals with some of the contradictory forces that will shape the Russian industry going forward. The first of the phases that they outline is that in which the foreign text holds a special aura and "the texts (or programs) of the host culture are devalued; they are considered inferior or coarse."[35] This phase describes the Russian experience of the 1990s where foreign texts from the West and Latin America flooded into the country, and Russian media

[34] Isadora Avis, "Adapting Landscape and Place in Transcultural Remakes: The Case of Bron/Broen, the Bridge and the Tunnel," *International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* 1, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 130.
[35] Keane, Fung, and Moran, *New Television, Globalisation, and the East Asian Cultural Imagination*, 49.

found itself unable to compete. In a sense, this period does not seem to have fully ended in since Russians remain fascinated with Western culture in many ways.

The second stage consists of one where "'imported' texts and the 'home' culture restructure each other" and distinguishable by the increased intensity of importation, adaptation, and imitation.[36] The early failed sitcoms that appeared along with the voiced-over programs in the 1990s would have been the beginning of this phase, which then intensified when *My Fair Nanny* became an overnight sensation. With that program's ascent came a period where many adaptations were produced, with differing levels of success. It was at this stage that Sony was able to establish such a strong presence in the market. This phase quickly gave way to the third stage, in which local adaptations of the global are considered purer and ultimately superior to those from the original context.[37] Hutchings and Rulyova, in their chapter on *My Fair Nanny,* found exactly these types of attitudes in the focus group members and online posting board discussants they surveyed. These people often felt the Russian version of the program to be more authentic and better than the American original.[38]

The fourth stage described by Keane et al. is that in which "the imported texts are entirely dissolved in the receiving culture" and "the culture changes to a state of activity and begins rapidly to produce new texts" based on the new imported cultural codes.[39] This description essentially corresponds to the moment in Russian television that began with the production of *Daddy's Girls.* It is worth noting that this phase also seems to produce a further movement of audiences toward local texts since as I described when talking about *Daddy's Girls,* audiences

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 49–50.
[38] Hutchings and Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin's Russia*.
[39] Keane, Fung, and Moran, *New Television, Globalisation, and the East Asian Cultural Imagination*, 51.

suddenly see their local realities reflected much more clearly in programs with formal conventions that are decidedly foreign. This intersection of local and global lays the foundations for the next phase.

The final state according to the trio of scholars is that in which the formerly receiving and adapting culture becomes a sending culture. They suggest that "the foreign text is absorbed, cleansed and localized. The host culture then becomes an originator. It can now export the renovated product."[40] Essentially, this is the stage that *The Kitchen* and all of its culturally odorless brethren on STS represent. Russia after two and a half decades of taking in, adapting and Russifying cultural texts, is apparently ready to take on the task of being an exporter again. It is worth noting that while Keane et al. present these phases as relatively linear in their unfolding, the reality on the ground in Russia suggests that there is a more complex situation at play. While all of the phases do indeed occur, many of them are occurring simultaneously both within a single media industry and more broadly across the Russian media landscape as a whole.

STS and Authoritarian Capitalism

Even though it is clearly an entertainment only network and there is relatively little engagement with politics, STS is still clearly vulnerable to pressure from the state and actively works to keep itself from running afoul of mandates coming from the Kremlin. This tendency is on full display in *The Kitchen.* In the first season of the program, Louis, a French dessert chef working at the Claude Monet, is very clearly depicted as being gay. At the end of the pilot episode, the series' protagonist Max has lost a bet with the head chef which results in him leaving the restaurant naked. Max leaves the restaurant wearing only a black garbage bag that he

[40] Ibid., 50.

has managed to fashion into a loin cloth. He signals a passing car to give him a ride, a fairly common practice in Russia, while two of the other chefs snap photos with their smartphones. Finally, a small SUV pulls over, and Max gets in. He then sees that the driver is Louis, who looks at him with a sexually charged expression (Figure 5.3).

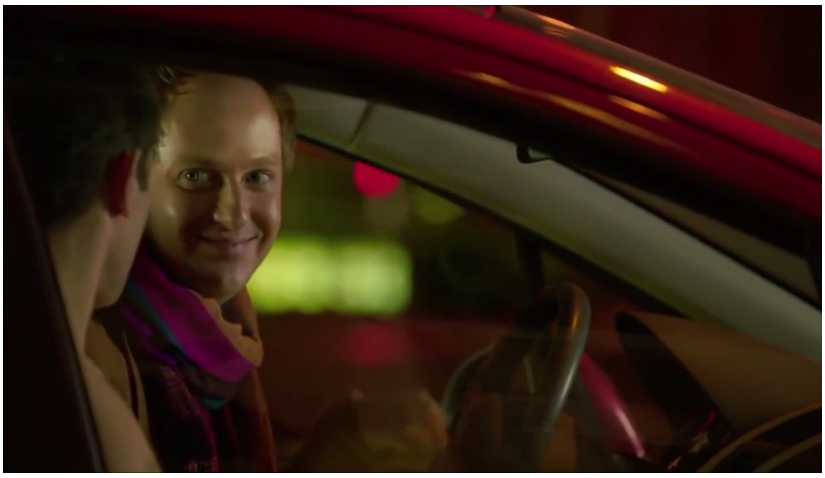

Figure 5.3 Louis stops to pick up a naked Max and gives him a telling look.

The above example is not isolated but is part of an ongoing series of jokes about Louis' sexuality. For example, in another first season episode, Louis wants help because he is having trouble keeping up with the dessert orders at the restaurant. Playing on the fact that he is French and sometimes makes mistakes when speaking Russian he tells head chef Victor Petrovich "Chef, I would very much like a partner." The chef smiles and replies that he is very flattered, but does not share Louis' sexual predilections. In another episode, Max is tricked into bringing flowers to Louis' apartment and is told that, while the Frenchman he is very flattered, Max is not "his type." Louis' gayness is a running joke through the first season of the program. The humor itself is a bit crass and suggests a degree of cultural discomfort with the idea of homosexuality, particularly among men. Other sorts of sexual innuendos, like a *ménage-a-trois,* are treated as unproblematic since several male characters engage in them over the course of the series.

The characterization of Louis and his sexuality, however, undergo a fundamental change during the second season of the program. A law passed in the State Duma, Russia's main legislative body, making all forms of gay propaganda illegal clearly caused these changes.[41] The law broadly defined "gay propaganda" as any representation that portrayed homosexuality in a positive light. Russian society and its media environment has never really embraced LGBT rights and being openly gay remains a taboo. The law, however, essentially precluded any possibility of speaking about the issue openly. The legislation seems very much in line with the overall project described in the chapter on Rossiya One to retrench Russian national identity into the framework set out by the Russian Orthodox Church, which remains staunchly opposed to the rights of sexual minorities. This type of opposition also allows the Putin government to distinguish itself from the "morally corrupt" West. As a result of the law, Louis' sexuality ceased to be a recurring source of humor, and he was reduced to being an effeminate pastry chef. Clearly, the reason for the change was that STS was afraid of running afoul of the new law and thereby incurring the wrath of the state.

STS also had to restructure its ownership following the passage of new media ownership laws in Russia.[42] Before the passage of the law, Sweden's Modern Times Group had owned roughly forty percent of the total shares of the television station's parent company CTC Media Holdings. At this time the Swedish company has been forced to sell part of its stake in the company, though that transaction has yet to be completed. The media law did not target STS. It seems to have been tailored particularly to push foreign companies out of the publishing sector since that seems to be the part of the media that had the highest portion of foreign ownership.

[41] Miriam Elder, "Russia Passes Law Banning Gay 'Propaganda,'" *The Guardian*, June 11, 2013, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/11/russia-law-banning-gay-propaganda.
[42] "CTC Speaks out about Russian Media Law."

The Putin government's reaction to the protests that swept their allies out of power in Kyiv was to try to make such a revolt impossible in Russia by forcing foreign-owned publications to shut down or to transfer ownership to a Russian company.

Whatever, STS' eventual fate regarding ownership, it is clear that the system of ideological and economic control in Russia, which I have been referring to as authoritarian capitalism has the potential to disrupt both its representational practices and its ownership structure. STS is particularly vulnerable to these kinds of problems because the network lacks strong ties to the state and must, therefore, always be cautious of anything that might raise the ire of the ruling elite. Louis' portrayal as a gay French pastry chef was fairly innocuous by Western standards. Even by Russian standards the jokes made about his sexuality were relatively mild, but as my interviews suggested, Russian producers instinctively try to avoid attracting the attention of the state. Even if the representation of Louis was not "gay propaganda" the fact that he was gay at all came too close to something that the state had explicitly banned. This type of risk was unacceptable for STS because of its weak ties to the state. I will argue in the next two chapters, that stronger ties to the state, sometimes allow a station to venture a bit further into contested representational spaces. There are limits, of course, since their close ties also keep them from overtly speaking against the state, but they do seem to have more latitude. STS has none, or at least cannot risk testing the limits of the state's tolerance.

Conclusion

While today STS is struggling more than it did a few years ago, its legacy within the Russian industry is clear. The network has been the greatest importer of genres and techniques from the West. The programs listed above are essential for understanding the slow but steady turn of the Russian industry toward accepted global media standards. It is also essential for

understanding the slow shift of Russian audiences towards genres that are, ultimately, Western in origin. STS has had the deepest and most sustained relationship with the West, primarily through its strong ties with Sony. It is also the network that is most likely to produce a program that might be widely exportable back to the West or other large global television markets. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to call STS a "window to the West" since it acts today, in a cultural sense very much like the city of Saint Petersburg did for much of its history. Whereas Rossiya One demonstrates the tendency to maintain a uniquely Russian way of storytelling, performance, and culture, STS represents the movement of Russians towards a culture more in line with global norms. Given the enormous popularity that its programs have sustained over the long term and the slow but steady spread of creative workers who have worked on its programs throughout the Russian industry, the influence of STS' westernizing impulse is only likely to continue to grow.

The next chapter examines STS' most important rival Gazprom Media Holdings' TNT. In many ways, TNT initially followed a similar trajectory to that of STS. In recent years, however, their ratings have diverged with TNT gaining a significant lead in viewer share. The next chapter explores the reasons for this divergence, which include a greater focus on uniquely Russian content, rather than content aimed at the global format market and a willingness to produce programming that is potentially offensive and which often shows an unflattering portrait of Russia in the Putin era. Both these trends seem to resonate strongly with Russian audiences. The fact that TNT has been allowed to produce programming that is at least tacitly critical of the status-quo in Russia points to the importance of close ties to the state in making critique possible in Russia. TNT has such ties, while STS does not. This fact seems to account for the latter's timidity.

Chapter 6 TNT: The Revenge of the National Ordinary

As discussed in the last chapter, through the 2000s STS grew exponentially, driven primarily by its collaboration with Sony, which brought new genres to Russian television. Later growth was a result of its investments in original Russian series. By 2010 despite its role as an innovator, STS was struggling to maintain its ratings just as its rival TNT was beginning to see greater success. While initially TNT's growth was spurred in part by copying STS' strategy, particularly *vis-à-vis* working with Sony to produce adapted sitcoms, its success post-2010 has come from its embrace of a very different approach than its rival. The last chapter explored STS' gradual shift from the producer of hybrid sitcoms aimed at the Russian market to its quest to become a producer of culturally odorless drama for the global market. This chapter will focus on TNT's efforts to produce very culturally specific drama aimed only at the Russian market. The focus on the local over the global has left TNT with virtually no products that are ready for adaptations in other markets but has allowed it to surpass STS in viewership and even challenge NTV and Rossiya One for second place overall in the market. Several images are included in this chapter to illustrate the foregrounding of the mundane elements of Russian life in the series discussed. TNT's success is, however, not merely a result of its focus on depicting contemporary life in Russia, but also hinges on the fact that it has embraced lowbrow humor and culture. Where STS has always focused on multigenerational family programming, TNT has often appealed to the lowest common denominator. This style has brought it into the types of conflict with state regulators that STS carefully avoids. This chapter explores the local focus of TNT as the root of its success and its role as one of the contradictions within the authoritarian capitalist system in Russia.

TNT's Ordinary Roots

From the beginning of its time under the stewardship of Gazprom Media Holdings following the 2003 ouster of former owner and Putin opponent Vladimir Gusinsky, TNT has focused on ordinary people and their experiences. One of the first decisions that Roman Petrenko made while at the helm of TNT was to send out head hunters to find experienced Western producers who could help the channel produce several unscripted reality formats. One of the earliest projects at TNT was the reality show *Dom-2* (*The House 2*). The program was a TNT original and is its most successful and longest running program. The series, which airs seven days a week at eleven in the evening has, as of July 2016, aired four-thousand-forty-six episodes, making it the longest running reality series in the world. It has a simple premise; contestants work together to build a house while also trying to find a romantic partner. They then compete for ownership. The program is virtually unknown outside the former Soviet Republics because other than a brief and failed attempt to localize the series in Mexico it has never been sold as a format. According to Mike Montgomery who was one of the Western consultants recruited to help the network create a new generation of reality shows, *Dom-2* is not exportable. He suggests that the program is not a format in the sense that Western companies think of formats, rather it is a form of barely organized chaos.[1]

Russian cultural critics have widely derided the series as a program that is inherently corrosive to the Russian moral character. In fact, it proved so controversial when it first aired that deputies in the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, debated whether it should be taken off the air. Deputies in the lower chamber even recommended that the general procurator, a position similar to the American attorney general, bring charges against the

[1] Interview with Mike Montgomery.

network. They argued that the program was obsessed with sex and that it was leading Russian youth who watched it down an inappropriate moral path. They even argued that in some cases putting these young people on television amounted to sexual exploitation.[2] Though the program was never officially censored, the controversy forced the series' host, Ksenia Sobchak, to answer its critics publicly. She suggested that instead of focusing on television shows, Russian deputies should instead focus on solving the real problems of young people, such as increasing their access to mortgage loans to buy homes and to scholarships so that they could educate themselves.[3] TNT eventually filed a lawsuit against the deputy for making false statements in the media. While the state never took strong action against the program, it was eventually moved from nine o'clock in the evening to eleven, a move which would have reduced the number of younger viewers and appeased the concerns of the deputies and other guardians of Russia's moral integrity.

It is worth noting that it is unusual for a Russian network to draw the ire of state officials knowingly. As I outlined in the preceding chapter, STS has been very cautious about depicting anything that might not be fully in line with the demands of the state. They rewrote the character of Louis on *The Kitchen* after the Duma passed a law banning positive portrayal of gays in the Russian media. TNT has never been nearly as careful as its rival entertainment network. Clearly, with *Dom-2* the network both drew the ire of state officials, but also refused to back away from their most successful program even when it was attacked. The programs on TNT continue to depict more adult themes than its rival network. While none of their depictions, particularly sexually themed jokes in their sitcoms, have attracted the attention that *Dom-2* did, it remains a

[2] Yulia Osipova, "Dom-2 Ob"javili Publichnym [Dom-2 Publicly Announced]," *Kommersant*, May 24, 2005.
[3] "Deputaty Mosgordumy Trebujut Privlech' Kseniju Sobchak K Otvetstvennosti Za Seksual'nuju Jekspluataciju Ljudej [Moscow Deputy Challenges Ksenia Sobchak to Answer Charges of Sexual Exploitation]," *Newsru.com*, May 24, 2005, http://www.newsru.com/russia/24may2005/sob4ak_print.html.

potential problem. It is likely that TNT is more willing to take these kinds of risks than STS because it has closer ties to the state. The network is a part of the state-owned oil and gas giant, Gazprom's, media operations and therefore the leadership at TNT could diffuse the situation more directly through a network of personal connections. Consequently, the comedy on TNT has always been more strident than that on STS, precisely because they do not need to be as careful.

Despite the objections of certain members of the government about the lowbrow nature of reality television and its corrosive impact on the moral character of Russian youth, the genre continued to grow unabated within the country. Montgomery and others were brought in to help TNT be a leader in the genre. The network at first was primarily interested in working with formats that could be easily understood. He suggests that:

> One of the things that they would look for was shows that … skew towards things being very, very simple and straightforward and in your face funny. They weren't as interested at that time… in shows, that worked on various levels. Those were shows for more sophisticated audiences who were very used to watching reality TV. They would tend to be drawn to shows that really played on a gimmick. Not necessarily shows that I liked, actually. One of the shows that we made out there that they chose … was a show called Robot Baby. You had a mechanical robot baby, which could puke, and cry, and pull faces, and poop, and whatever. They would just give this robot baby for a weekend to a different celebrity for each show. They would have to look after a fake baby… they were sure that this would be a good show for Russia, because… it's a fairly easy marketing strategy around it, and it would make the papers. [4]

[4] Interview with Mike Montgomery.

Among the formats that proved relatively successful were *Wife Swap,* a format wherein women from different socio-economic strata switch families for a period, and *The British Psychic Challenge,* a show that Montgomery proposed to TNT because he felt it would appeal to the Russian interest in mysticism. The latter program, which pits purported psychics against each other in a series of tests to gauge their supernatural abilities, has been very successful and is presently preparing to enter its sixteenth season on TNT.

Another major area of success early on at TNT were unscripted stand-up comedy programs. The longest running of these is called *Comedy Club.* The series essentially features numerous stand-up comedians performing at Moscow's premiere stand-up venue. The performances are comparable to those televised during Montreal's annual *Just for Laugh's* Comedy Festival. The program features a mix of stand-up and musical performances from comedians who are "residents" of *Comedy Club* as well as others who are merely visiting. The program which began airing Monday through Friday on April 23, 2005, remains a staple of the channel's programming. Its success has also spawned several copies and spin-offs on TNT: *Comedy Women* (2008-Present), *Comedy Battle* (2010-Present) and Standup (2016). Like reality television these programs are inexpensive, allowing the network to keep costs under control. Stand-up comedy is easily rerun when it eschews commentary on current events, adding to its value. Both *Comedy Club* and *Comedy Women* consistently rate in the top thirty programs in Russia.

The success of the standup genre is particularly notable since initially it was offered to STS. Former STS general producer Vyacheslav Murugov admitted in an interview with *Variety Russia* that the network's decision not to purchase the standup shows was a serious error that

they have been unable to reverse.[5] STS does have a similar program called *Uralskiy Pelmeny* (*Ural Dumplings*), which features mostly improvisation and sketch comedy. The program attracts good ratings, but it has been unable to match the audience of unscripted comedy on TNT. The inability to match TNT's standup and unscripted reality segments has meant that STS often has had to venture into the more expensive and higher risk areas of scripted dramas and comedies. Ultimately, this has resulted in STS' operations being much more capital intensive, especially when its programs have performed only moderately well or poorly.

The different starting points of the two channels have led them to different audiences, but more importantly different focuses. The TNT series, in particular, embody the same kind of everyday experiences depicted in their successful reality and stand up programs. STS is still, for the most part, creating multi-generational family programs, whereas TNT is still creating programming whose humor is coarse and not appropriate for younger viewers. Because their programming seems to connect more directly with the everyday experience of average Russian viewers and are representative of everyday life in Russia, audiences are choosing to watch TNT over not only STS but also over some of the major networks like Rossiya One and NTV.[6]

The Revenge of the National Ordinary

In previous chapters, I discussed the importance of adapted and original Russian series which enabled Russians to tell stories about the idiosyncrasies of daily life in their country. Sitcoms could not become a popular genre in the Russian market until local versions of Western programs appeared. The localization process, especially under Sony's steadying influence

[5] Boletskaya, Vyacheslav Murugov Televidenie-Eto Ne Kanaly Eto Khity [Vyacheslav Murugov - Television is Not About Channels it is About Hits].
[6] "TNT Oboshel Po Vyruchke Rossiju 1 I NTV [TNT's Ratings Pass Rossiya One and NTV]."

allowed the genre to grow, precisely because it became Russian enough, overcoming the problem of the cultural discount. The success of sitcoms on either network would not have been possible had they not been made to fit the national context. There is nothing uniquely Russian about this process, audiences widely prefer television in their own language and populated by people who are recognizable to them, which is precisely why the format industry has continued to expand globally.

The fictional programming on TNT has followed a very similar progression to that on rival STS, in fact, the network has been fairly nimble in responding to the successes of its rival while continuing to build on own its strengths. The success of *My Fair Nanny* on STS in 2004 led TNT to begin its own partnership with Sony, the result of which was the adaptation of the American Sitcom *Married with Children* called *Schastlivy Vmeste* (*Happy Together*) which premiered in March 2006. The series was at least as successful as *My Fair Nanny* and aired three-hundred-sixty-five episodes. TNT never managed to create series in the melodrama genres to rival the popularity of either *Not Born Beautiful* (The adaptation of *Yo Soy Betty La Fea*) or *Margosha* (adapted from the Argentinian telenovela *Lalola*), both of which were highly successful on STS. However, their dominance in the reality and stand-up genres meant that that STS' advantage in melodrama had limited impact on TNT. When STS started creating original sitcoms with 2007's *Daddy's Girls*, TNT was quick to follow, launching their first original sitcom *University* only 11 months later. As a result, the station never lagged too far behind its most significant competitor.

What eventually set TNT apart was their intense focus on depicting the humor that takes place in everyday life in Russia. While one might argue that *Daddy's Girls* and *University* are equally grounded in humor that comes from the everyday struggles of Russians, clearly later

sitcoms on STS are more aspirational and globally focused while those on TNT remain in roughly the fourth phases of Lotman's taxonomy which I outlined in the last chapter. In fact, by the time the network created *Real Guys* in 2011, their sitcoms had become so local as to make them appropriate only for the Russian market. Frances Bonner suggests that global formats are undoubtedly very important in global media industries since they allow proven programs to be used by local channels that would not have the resources to develop them on their own. Despite the usefulness of the format, she argues that programs anchored in a particular national context are also very important. She contends that:

> the 'imagined communities' that in Benedict Anderson's famous formulation are how nations are constituted require evidence from which to be built. Television is a principle provider of this evidence in telling us what other people in similar and different situations are like, how they live, how they act in public, what they aspire to, what they fear and how they react under unusual conditions.[7]

She cites what she calls ordinary television and the "national ordinary" as important aspects of this formation of a national consciousness. She suggests that ordinary television "provides a less romanticized view of the nation… by its very inclusion of ordinary people and its greater mundanity."[8] Bonner is primarily interested in reality programs that bring average people to the screen and thus represent the nation in a more organic manner than TV fiction. The depiction of ordinary people certainly takes place in Russian reality television programs, but I contend that this idea of the "national ordinary" also explains the success of TNT in the 2010s. This focus on nationally specific experiences is a reflection of what Joseph Straubhaar discusses in his

[7] Frances Bonner, *Ordinary Television: Analyzing Popular TV*, 0th ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 187.
[8] Ibid., 174.

examination of Japanese and Brazilian media. He notes that both nations adapted foreign formats into something specifically national that resonated in particular ways within their national contexts.[9] In particular, he notes that it was only when the soap opera was localized and transformed into the telenovela that it started to reflect Brazilian culture.

Serra Tinic offers a somewhat similar reflection in her examination of the Canadian television market and the role of international co-productions. She notes two particular instances where Canadians seemed to respond to texts that were more culturally proximate with their experiences than the American programs that were on offer. This preference is particularly significant since the vast majority of programs that English Canadians tend to view come from either the United States or the United Kingdom. Tinic suggests that "the CBC dramatic series *Street Legal*, about a group of lawyers in a small storefront office in Toronto, was rated "more enjoyable" by Canadian audiences than the U.S hit program *Dallas"* adding that "Canadians want quality dramatic programs that both entertain and reflect the socio-cultural specificity of their community at the national and regional levels."[10] The trend of Canadians wanting to see representations of their own political and social institutions was also prevalent in comedic programming. Tinic notes that "there are in fact, several television programs that receive extraordinarily high ratings (in Canadian terms)… This has been particularly apparent in the case of comedy programming… [such as] *The Royal Canadian Air Farce* and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*… these comedies reaffirm a collective sense of Canadian identity vis-à-vis Britain and the United States to the extent that a viewer must be an insider to understand the references

[9] Joseph D. Straubhaar, *World Television: From Global to Local* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 150.
[10] Serra Tinic, "Going Global: International Coproductions and the Disappearing Domestic Audience in Canada," in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. Professor Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 181.

inscribed within the cultural codes to 'get the joke.'"[11] Other local comedies like *Corner Gas* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* that locate their humor in fundamentally Canadian experiences have gained a measure of success since Tinic wrote her article.[12] The same preference for local jokes that only insiders would fully understand is present in the comedies on TNT. Admittedly, even having watched more than four hundred hours of Russian television for this project I still sometimes struggle to understand the humor of TNT's programs.

Graeme Turner for his part locates the appeal of local programming in the sense that viewers have a co-presence with other people in the national audience. He states that:

> the co-presence of the national audience is implicated in the consumption of news soap opera, locally produced drama [and] sport… the centrality of the television audience's connection to the national community and its acknowledged locations is also implicated in the general preference for local programming over imported programming, in the standardization of the practices used to indigenize international formats and in explaining why the globalization of television has proven such a powerful force, against all predictions, in reviving local production industries.[13]

Following the same logic, we can suggest that Russians enjoy the programming on TNT precisely because it connects them to others in the Russian national community and that it is this force that has allowed Russian domestic television to rise, despite the fact that much of it follows Western forms and paradigms.

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Michele Byers, "Speaking about the Nation: Critiques from the Canadian Margins," *Critical Studies in Television: An International Journal of Television Studies* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 2011): 141–53.
[13] Graeme Turner, "Television and the Nation: Does This Matter Any More?," in *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, ed. Graeme Turner and Tay (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 62–63.

TNT has created sitcoms that are both hybrid and firmly rooted in the ongoing development of the sitcom genre internationally, but also depict the daily realities of living in Putin-era Russia. Perhaps the best illustration of this phenomenon is the program *Realniye Patsiany* (*Real Guys*). Global sitcoms clearly influence the program, which has a similar visual style to the British and American versions of *The Office* and the ABC comedy *Modern Family*. Those three programs are all staged to look like someone is shooting the interactions of the characters as in a documentary, often using filming techniques that resemble a handheld or other mobile camera. They also feature non-diegetic interludes where characters are interviewed providing a glimpse into their thoughts and feelings. *Real Guys* borrows this format, and the whole of the series is meant to follow the exploits of a group of young men living in Russia. Like its Western cousins, it breaks away from the action periodically to interview the young men who are the protagonists. The series is, however, grounded in what the vice president of international development at an American studio that I interviewed referred to derisively as "ashen Russia."[14] By that statement, they seemed to be referring to the often depressing everyday realities of living in Russia in the Putin era. What *Real Guys* depicts is often the ugly, run down, overcrowded and broken aspects of Russian society. Far from living a life of glamor and working in the best restaurant in Moscow, or some equivalent place, the characters mostly have menial jobs, and many of them are living with their parents in cramped, dilapidated apartments. Along with *Real Guys,* the most notable program on TNT has been *Univer* (*University)* and its spinoffs *Univer: Novaya Obshaga* (*University: The New Dorm*) and *Sasha/Tanya,* all of which have been very successful and in their own way reflect particularities of Russian life. Their representations of

[14] Interview with the VP of International Development and Programming at a US Studio.

Russian life center on Bonner's "national ordinary," depicting the lives Russians really live. These series mock the incongruities of Russian society, particularly life in Moscow.

Life in the Dormitory Old and New

University began airing in late August 2008, roughly one year after STS premiered *Daddy's Girls*. The original series aired two-hundred-fifty-five episodes in five seasons on the air, while the spinoff *Univer: Novaya Obshaga* (*University: The New Dorm*) has aired over two-hundred. The original series also spun off a second sitcom *Sasha/Tanya*, which featured two of the lead characters after they have graduated from university, married and had a child. The series began airing in early June of 2013 and produced two forty episode seasons. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that the *University* franchise is a cornerstone of the growth of the network into a powerful producer of scripted comedies.

The original series is, for the most part, rather unremarkable. It is set in a Moscow dormitory that houses the main characters, all of whom are students in different faculties of the school they are attending. The cast of the series is composed of two young women and three young men who share a small student apartment. The set is fairly simple. (Figure 6.1) Most of the action takes place in the common room that the characters share where they cook, eat meals, wash their clothes and otherwise socialize. Shared bedrooms adjoin the two sides of the dormitory's common space. The common space looks to be very much in need of repair. One gets the impression that generations of students have shared the space. It appears to be poorly maintained, which is consistent with the benign neglect that one consistently sees in many places in Russia.

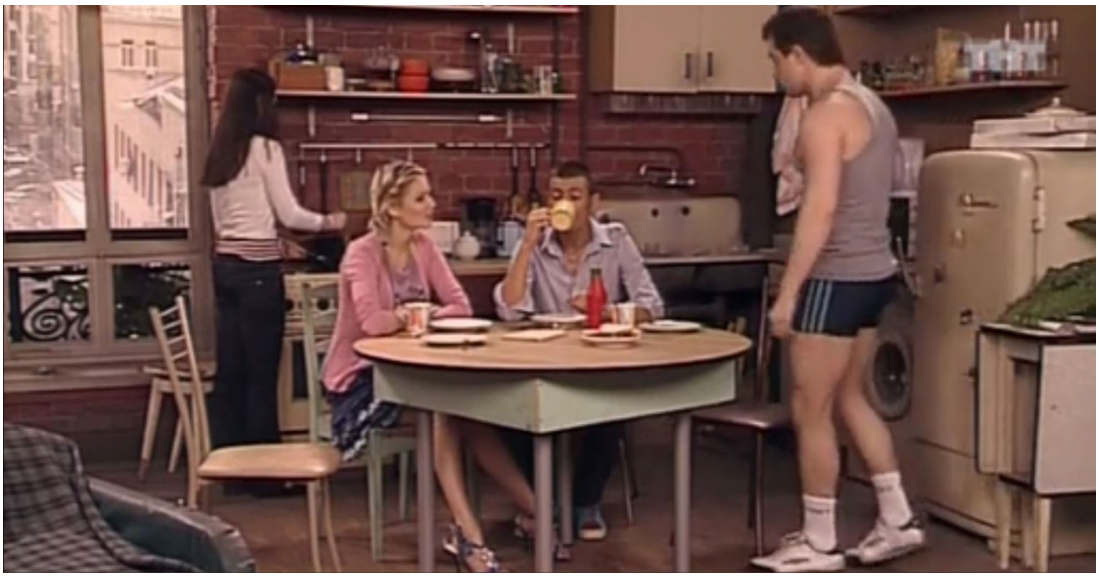

Figure 6.1 The common space shared by the characters in TNT's University

The characters fit into a few broad stereotypes: Sasha the spoiled rich kid, Tanya the morally conservative prude, Kuzia the athletically obsessed jock, Alla the sexually permissive girl and Gosha the sexually obsessed male. Much of the humor comes from the clash of these very distinct character tropes. For the most part, each one remains firmly within the bounds of their expected roles, all of which are quite exaggerated. Kuzia, for example, is not just an athlete, he embodies the notion of the "dumb jock." He is completely obsessed with sports, trains constantly and can barely string together two sentences because of his below average intelligence. As a result, he often does not understand what others are saying or misconstrues statements that have potential double meanings.

The humor in the series is, for the most part, a mix of slapstick and coarse bodily humor. For example, in the opening episode, when Alla learns that Sasha's oligarch father is coming to try to convince his son to return to England, she puts on a revealing outfit, a low-cut top, and mini-skirt. Once the wealthy businessman is in the room, she proceeds to drop several items on the floor and in the process of picking them up she displays her cleavage and posterior, clearly

hoping that he will fall in love with her and that he will sweep her away. This very coarse level of sexual humor pervades both *University* and its spin-offs. Other sources of this kind of sexual humor include jokes at Tanya's expense. Since she is morally conservative because of her religious convictions, she is often portrayed as a prude, particularly when she starts dating Kuzia, but is unwilling to have sex with him. This type of humor is not merely a result of the relative novelty of the genre in Russia. It is plausible that, in the beginning, given their inexperience, the writers of *University* simply opted for the most straightforward jokes during the early seasons of the program. However, even in some of the latest episodes *University: The New Dorm* a female character, Kristina, torments one of her male peers, Anton, by constantly appearing naked in his dorm room and offering him sex while he is trying to study for an important exam. Thus, humor based on bodily coarseness is consistent throughout the course of the two series.

Some of the humor of the series results from the close quarters in which the characters live. The following dialogue from the first season episode "Fast-food" gives a good overview of these types of interactions

> Alla: Kuzia, why did you come to breakfast in your underwear? Is it so hard to wear pants?
>
> Kuzia: They're not underwear. They're sports shorts.
>
> Alla: Ok. Are you wearing underwear under your sports shorts?
>
> Kuzia: No!
>
> Alla: Then your shorts are underwear!
>
> Gosha: Alichka (Pulls on his jeans) By your logic, I'm also wearing underwear.

Kuzia: But Gosha, you're wearing pants!

Jokes about underwear, or the lack thereof and sexual innuendos are what make up the core of the humor in the series as the characters who all occupy very different niches culturally have to learn to live in a small common space. The humor, derived from the run-down living quarters that many Russians experienced, is an important element of the series' humor. While the humor of the series is fairly base, it likely resonated with Russians because many of them would have experienced precisely these types of conditions at some point in their lives. It is this very commonness that made the program successful.

Other aspects of the series' humor revolve particularly around Sasha as he struggles to adapt to a life without privilege, after refusing to allow his father to pay for anything at the Russian University, wanting to be independent of the family's money. Sasha takes a job a fast food restaurant that, not unlike the American chain KFC, serves fried chicken. As part of the job, he has to wear a hat with chicken feathers on it and welcome every customer with a pre-set greeting while beating his arms like chicken wings (Figure 6.2). He does so with extreme enthusiasm, except when his mortified father comes to berate him for lowering himself to such conditions. The humor here, of course, comes from the ridiculousness of the demands that his service industry job forces upon him. These become defamiliarized and funny because, as someone who has never had to work in the service industry and endure the demands of customer service, Sasha undertakes all of the aspects of this menial job with extreme enthusiasm. It is the very commonness of the type of work that he does with its ridiculous uniform and packaged interactions with customers, that people in Russia have had to endure on a daily basis, either as providers of services or consumers, that makes the situation funny.

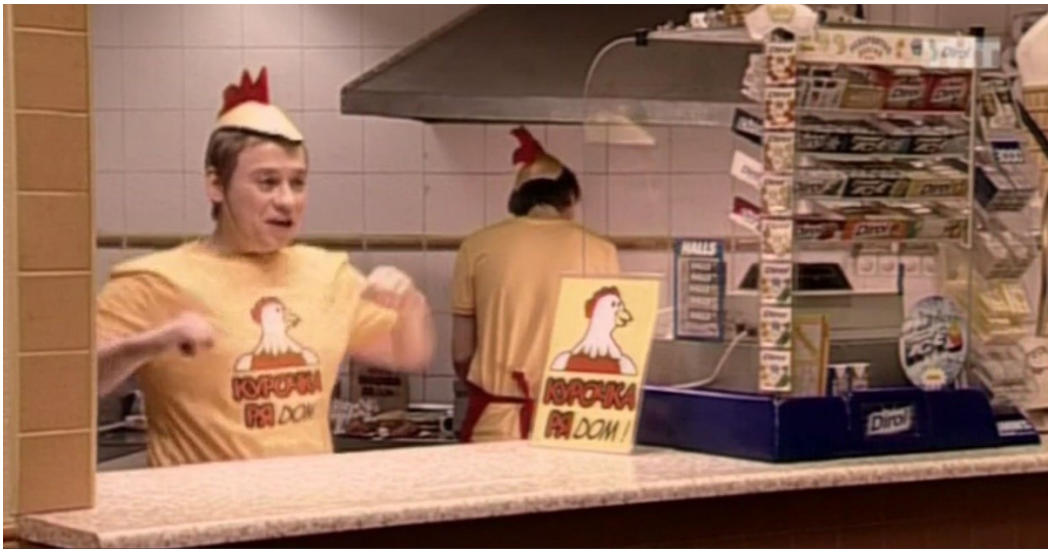

Figure 6.2 Sasha in his work uniform performing the fast food restaurants pre-approved greeting.

While there is a great deal of the humor in *University* and its spinoffs that resonate with the lived experiences of Russians, particularly around going to school and navigating romantic relations, the series are still much more stylized than later examples of TNT's sitcoms. These series all mimic the style of the slapstick sitcoms that were common in the three-camera comedies of the 1990s. Most notable amongst these are *the Nanny* and *Married with Children* which, not surprisingly, were the most popular sitcoms on Russian television once they were adapted. As TNT continued to produce sitcoms, it started to emulate the newer exemplars that Russian producers saw in the global market. The shift to the style of sitcoms that blends documentary with comedy would produce one of TNT's hits, *Real Guys*, specifically by anchoring the stories, setting and characters in the common experiences of Russians living in the Putin era.

The National Ordinary: Real Guys, Real Life

The program that is most grounded in the everyday realities of Russian life is the program *Real Guys*. The series follows the lives of three 'real guys' who live in Moscow. As I suggested earlier, the series is similar in format to western mockumentary programs like *The Office* and *Modern Family*. In terms of its format, the series is hybrid, taking a fairly modern form of the sitcom from the West and adapting it to a Russian series. The series, however, does not seem particularly derivative of those series other than in its general form. *Real Guys* has been successful in its own right; its first season it drew approximately twenty-two percent of viewers aged eighteen to twenty-four.[15] Subsequent seasons of the program have drawn about fourteen percent of viewers in Russia, which does represent a decline, but still made the series the third best-rated program on TNT overall.

A close inspection of the program is helpful in understanding its appeal to average Russians. For example, one of the early episodes of the series, entitled "*The Friendship Bracelet*" focuses on one of the main trio's relationship problems. The young man, named Kolyan, works at a small mobile phone store in a suburban shopping center in Moscow (Figure 6.3). This is not either of the shopping centers in central Moscow such as the famous *GUM*, which sits on Red Square or *Okhotniy Ryad* that sits one block south of the Kremlin. In other words, Kolyan is not part of the Moscow elite. In the episode, the shop has started selling rubber friendship bracelets, which they advertise with a large sign. This placard attracts the attention of a rather attractive young woman who wanders into the shop. Kolyan's co-worker bets him that he cannot get her phone number. The stammering Kolyan manages to trade one of the shops bracelets for the woman's phone number. He is still staring at the piece of paper she wrote it on

[15] "Real'nye Pacany I Interny: Pervoe Mesto v Rejtingah! [Real Guys and Interns: First Place in the Ratings Battle!]," *Televesti.ru*, May 21, 2011, http://www.televesti.ru/analitikatv/11553-realnye-pacany-i-interny-pervoe-mesto-v-rejtingax.html.

when his loud and somewhat garishly dressed girlfriend walks into the shop. When she asks for a bracelet, she is informed by Kolyan that they cost eighty-nine rubles.

Figure 6.3 Kolyan in the mobile phone shop where he works.

As the episode proceeds, Kolyan struggles with two problems. First, he must keep his liaison with this new girl secret from his girlfriend. Second, that the girl, coming as she does from a higher socio-economic stratum, has certain demands about where she should be taken, in this case, a fancy restaurant that Kolyan cannot afford. At the restaurant, the forlorn-looking young man looks on in horror as his date orders some of the most expensive items on the menu. Looking at the high prices, he chooses only to order juice. He is saved when one of the young woman's other paramours interrupts their date. This situation gives Kolyan a reason to storm out of the restaurant and thereby saving face. He throws his small sum of money on the table to pay the bill and leaves. The girl later comes and apologizes to him at work, and they agree to see each other again.

The episode also goes to great pains to show Kolyan's position as a Russian from the working class. Several scenes in the episode take place in his family's apartment which is run down. Many aspects of the apartment, like the Soviet era wallpaper, wood paneling and cheaply built kitchen show signs of wear. The main conflict that occurs in the home during the episode is that the apartment building is chronically short of hot water and as a result, Kolyan's parents are constantly checking the temperature and rushing to bathe and wash dishes when hot water is available. The camera also shows how cramped the apartment is, with Kolyan constantly having to dodge his parents in their frantic movements through the apartment. All of which simply show the class position to which the series speaks. The series does not display the aspirational life of the elite as shown in *The Kitchen*; it anchors itself in the working-class drudgery of post-industrial, suburban Moscow.

Other aspects of the series also foreground the often-harsh everyday lives that Russians deal with, finding comedy in the disjunction between expectation and reality. For example, in a first season episode of the series, one of the secondary characters Igor, who serves as a first lieutenant in the police force, encounters a former female classmate outside a Moscow cinema. She is clearly a prostitute, though she claims to be on coffee break from her job at the movie theater. Igor visits her a few times bringing her flowers or coming simply to talk with her. His affection hampers her prostitution since he arrives in full police uniform. At one point in the episode, he scares off a potential customer when he greets her at the moment where she is about to come to an agreement on the price of her services. When she is arrested for solicitation, she uses her connection to Igor to have the charges dropped. This sequence of events, though obviously exaggerated for comic effect, does illustrate what might be an everyday struggle for average working class Russians. An attractive female classmate turning to a life of prostitution to

support herself is not out of the realm of possibility for working class Russians. This kind of humor is grounded in the most mundane realities of life in Putin's Russia.

This is the kind of situation that an average Russian man in his twenties might encounter. Moscow is certainly a diverse city with many wealthy people who form the elite, but also a substantial number of people who are middle and lower class. A person from a working-class background like Kolyan would not get to mingle with the elite in a high-priced French restaurant. The setting of *Real Guys* speaks directly to this fact. I have already noted Kolyan's modest living accommodation and place of work. The city of Moscow itself also plays a part in the lives of the three young men at the center of the narrative. In particular, the city that the main character inhabit is characteristically run-down and full of detritus, both old and new, Soviet and post-Soviet. Far from the polished avenue of central Moscow, *Real Guys* depicts the Soviet era block apartment buildings, pothole-laden roads and gravel lots and alleyways that are common sights on the outskirts of the capital. These are the places where average Russians live. For example, when the audience meets the young men whose lives they will be following it is in an alleyway. The backdrop is a dirty looking building with a white brick façade. This decaying suburban landscape is the place where many real Russian youths grow up and live.

Even the costume design for the characters speak to their averageness. The audience's first introduction to the lead trio has two of them wearing tracksuits and one in a golf shirt and track pants (Figure 6.4). Even the female leads in the series tend to wear plainer clothes than one might typically associate with stereotypes of glamourous Russian women. The first introduction the audience has to Kolyan's girlfriend has her in a denim skirt and V-neck t-shirt. Especially when considered beside the high fashion of the characters from its rival networks leading programs, the averageness becomes even more notable. *My Fair Nanny*, for example, has fairly

stylized costumes, and Vika, the nanny character, despite coming from a lower socio-economic stratum is dressed in flamboyant clothes that, while slightly garish at times, are still fashionable. Later STS sitcoms are even more striking in this regard. *The Kitchen*'s many female characters dress in what amounts to high fashion. Even the male leads in *The Kitchen* attire themselves in the latest male fashions. This costuming fits the aspirational, globally oriented nature of those programs, and sets them apart from the national ordinary that one finds on TNT. Walking down a street outside the Moscow city center, you would be far more likely to encounter men in tracksuits than men dressed in the latest global fashions.

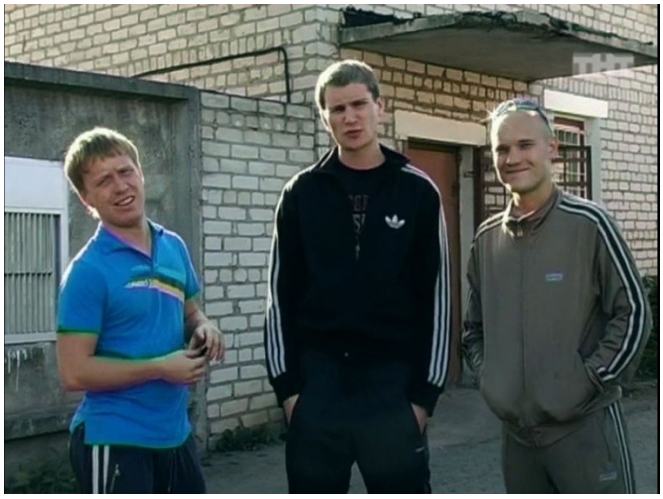

Figure 6.4 Kolyan and his friends in as Moscow alleyway, wearing tracksuits.

It seems sufficient to say that the series' visual aesthetic and humor are grounded not in a stylized Moscow, but in the Russia experienced by the majority of urban Russians. The series does its best to simulate the conventions and norms of reality television in the sitcom, presenting seemingly realistic people in everyday situations. The series is a depiction of the "national ordinary" and one that seems to appeal to Russian audiences broadly. The series though is so grounded in the realities of Russian life that it would be extremely difficult for it to be exported. While the situations depicted, the clothing and the sets probably could be adapted; it would likely

take a great deal more work than what is ultimately attractive to the global industry. It also stands in sharp contrast with the typical western sitcom in its focus on the working class. While there certainly have been numerous sitcoms that focus on this social stratum in the West such as *The Jeffersons*, *Rosanne*, *Married with Children*, and more recently *Two Broke Girls*, the average Western sitcom is much more focused on the American middle class. Therefore, *Real Guys*, which appeals to the large Russian working class would be a very awkward series for adaptation. To put it succinctly, it bears more resemblance thematically to *Jersey Shore* than it does to any middle-class American comedy program.

Conclusion: Hybridity and the National Ordinary

My contention in this chapter has been that what has attracted viewers to TNT over rival network STS has been the presence of recognizable everyday experiences on the network. The depiction of the national ordinary that appears in the series on TNT runs through most of its programming from reality television to their most successful sitcoms. The fact that these series depict the world of working-class Russians does not automatically mean that they are not affected by trends in the global television industry. The series that TNT has created respond to global processes and trends. *Dom-2* was a response to the growing popularity of reality television. For their part, all of the sitcoms that the network has created are also influenced by larger global trends. *Happy Together* was a response to the successful adaptation of Western sitcoms on STS. The *University* franchise was a response to the success of the hybrid original sitcom *Daddy's Girls* also on STS. Other successful series, some which I have not mentioned, like *Interns* and *Fizruk* are all part of a dynamic where the Russian networks take elements of global culture and rework them to make them profoundly recognizable to Russians.

It does, however, seem that the element that has given the Gazprom Media owned entertainment network its distinct advantage not only over STS but indeed over its sister network NTV and more recently Rossiya One is the fact that their programming is so distinctly Russian. Rather than stylize or sanitize what life looks like for Russian "real guys" or students in University, TNT depicts the reality of the national ordinary, while also finding humor in its contradictions. The laughter that this produces results from depicting the little absurdities that take place, rather than satirizing them. Thus, where Rossiya One shows a preferred reading of the greatness of the Russian state, and STS presents an aspirational globalized version of Russia as part of the wider world, TNT shows the country as it is and delights in finding humor in the peculiarities of everyday Russia.

The final chapter examines Channel One, the most important and perhaps the most contradictory case in the Russian television landscape today. The station's ties to the state are nearly as close as those of Rossiya One, but at least to some extent, the station operates without significant constraints producing programming that is often highly critical of the status-quo in Putin's Russia. Channel One's portrayal of the country typically presents it as a decaying post-industrial landscape devoid of hope. It is a very different inflection on the national ordinary than the one present on TNT. Channel One has invested heavily in programs that emulate a new form of Western television the so-called "quality drama" or "narratively complex television." While these programs are very popular, they also seem to be at odds with the Putin government's nation-building project. The explanation for why a state-controlled television company produces such programs seems to lie in one of the key features of Russian authoritarian capitalism, namely a type of cronyism that allows individuals closely aligned with Vladimir Putin to pursue their interests and goals at the expense of the greater national project.

Chapter 7 The Contradictory Case of Channel One

My examination in the last chapter of TNT's programming points to one of the most perplexing realities of the Russian television industry today; stations with closer ties to the Kremlin can, to a limited extent, produce programming that represents post-Soviet Russia in a negative light. This possibility seems to be tied to the nature of Russia's political and economic system. The seemingly contradictory aspects of the industry which allow those with close ties to the Russian leadership to produce content that is critical of the status-quo discussed in the last chapter find their greatest expression in the case of Channel One. The station presents the most complex and contradictory examples of how the Russian media system and authoritarian capitalism work. This chapter examines how that channel is able to produce the kind of programming that it does and includes images that show the post-industrial visual texture of series on Channel One and the image they create of a lawless, hopeless, decaying Russia. The following chapter also explores the role of Channel One's enigmatic General Producer, Konstantin Ernst and his centrality to the negative portrayals on Putin's Russia on the country's leading station.

Channel One has the largest audience share in Russia. A majority of Russians favor its news and current events programming over both the state broadcaster Rossiya One and Gazprom Media Holding's NTV.The news and current events programming essentially follow the dictates of the Putin-led government in Moscow. As I outline in chapter two, the Russian state maintains a controlling interest of fifty-one percent in the channel. The remainder is divided between two Kremlin-aligned oligarchs Roman Abramovich and Yuri Kovalchuk. Unlike Rossiya One, whose non-news content also plays a role in the nation-building project of the Putin government, Channel One's role is more complex. The network acts as an official disseminator of state news;

a traditional commercial network focused on ratings and the equivalent of an American cable channel that produces high quality narratively complex dramas to draw in a "quality audience." Channel One combines all of these things into a single network, often paradoxically bringing different visions of Russia to the screen in different parts of its broadcast schedule.

The focus on creating quality television on Channel One seems to have begun around 2010 when the network produced the sixty-nine-part series *Skhola* (*School*) directed by avant-garde, indie filmmaker Valerie Gai Germanika. One of the central themes of the complex series, which I will examine in more detail later, is the slow collapse of Russia and its social and institutional infrastructure. The picture is that of Russian society that has entered its terminal crisis. This theme of Russia in a state of impending collapse, where state institutions offer little solace, is one that runs through several series on Channel One. Throughout these series, the decay of the Russia's physical and social infrastructure, as well as its moral core, are shown in careful detail. While it is set in and around Moscow, the characters virtually never visit the elite parts of the city. They always depict the city's Soviet-era block apartments and dismal deindustrialized outskirts. These series contrasts with the nation building, glamourous, culturally revanchist dramas on Rossiya and the polished, glossy, aspirational comedies on STS. While TNT's comedies and Channel One's dramas both depict Russia without the artifice of either nationalism or aspirations to global cultural relevance, the difference in the vision of Russia that they present is very noticeable. The decaying Russia of TNT's comedies is a place where the characters, despite the challenges of living in such a society, generally get on with their lives. They go to school, graduate, find love, get married, have children and lead productive lives. We see this in the progression of the characters Sasha and Tanya on *University* and its spin-off *Sasha/Tanya.* The characters of *Real Guys* show the humor of everyday life in the post-Soviet

era. They can live their lives, and the audience finds humor in recognizing of the absurdities of Russian life. Channel One's complex dramas offer a completely different vision of the country, one where hopelessness is the norm. The dramas portray people crushed under the wheel of social forces beyond their control.

This style of programming is similar to many complex programs in the West. Programs like HBO's *The Wire* and AMC's *Breaking Bad* feature portraits of America where institutional factors destroy characters. Consequently, if it is complex television that Channel One is attempting to emulate, it makes sense that this might be the types of depictions that would emerge. In fact, given Ernst's statements about his philosophy of television, it is clear that the programs he produces emulate complex television coming from the United States and the United Kingdom. In his keynote address to MIPTV in 2011 Ernst noted that in all television markets, attracting affluent viewers is growing increasingly complex:

> We've been suffering from dramatic loss of the high-quality audience. This audience is attractive because it is the smartest one and our advertisers like it because it is most capable of paying for their products… If we don't keep the large part of this high-quality audience, television will become the activity for the poorly educated, lower income, and elderly people. If this happens, we are doomed.[1]

He then suggests that some of the American cable channels (Showtime, AMC, and HBO) have started to make progress in this regard by producing compelling dramas that appeal to this high-quality audience. He suggests, however, that their status as pay channels means that their

[1] Konstantin Ernst, "Media Mastermind Keynote: Konstantin Ernst, Channel One Russia" (Keynote Address, MIPCOM 2011, Cannes, France, October 3, 2011), http://www.my-mip.com/RM/RM_MIPWORLD/2011/pdf/transcripts/mipcom-2011-media-mastermind-keynote-konstantin-ernst-transcript.pdf?v=634545306489206315.

products are limited to the higher socio-economic classes that can afford to pay for television, which means that they cannot be broad social experiences the way programs on over-the-air broadcast television had been in the past. He laments this fact stating:

> Literature, cinema, and TV help people understand the times they are living in and help them to understand how they should react. It shows them what is good and bad and how to maintain a balance. People learn things from the characters they observe while thinking they are just being entertained. Only the dominant culture is capable of providing the society with these kinds of examples.[2]

From the above statements, we clearly see that Ernst is interested in his channel creating these types of high-quality programs, not only as a way to help them attract this quality audience and thus increasing profits but also to create the kinds of 'myths' that he suggests are absent in mainstream popular culture.

The Three Faces of Channel One

Before venturing further into the discussion of Ernst's vision of Russian quality television, it is useful first to explore what airs on the channel. I argue that Channel One's programming operates is three main spheres: News, commercial programming, and high-quality programming. In a sense, this makes the network more similar to an American network like CBS, which airs many reality and mainstream television series meant to garner a profit, as well as news and current events programming. CBS also has some programs that are often categorized as high quality such as *The Good Wife*. Like its American counterpart, high-quality programming is clearly becoming an important part of Channel One's programming, but it

[2] Ibid.

remains only one piece, whose creation is possible only because of other programs on the network which keep it financially viable.

The focus of this project is primarily on scripted fiction on Russian television in the Putin Era. In the case of Channel One, it is, however, also important to look briefly at the unscripted programming on the network in order to get a fuller sense of its programming as a whole and to emphasize the contradictions in its central role in the Russian media sphere. Outside the current events sphere, where Channel One's *Vremya* news program and the talk-show *Pust Govoryat* (*Let Them Talk*) dominate, the next most watched programs on the station are a number of unscripted reality programs. These programs are mostly formats purchased from abroad. The most popular of these programs for years have been one of a number of music competition formats. At present, the most popular music competition on Russian television is Channel One's *Golos* (*The Voice*) which is licensed from Dutch companies Talpa Media Holdings and Endemol. For the purpose of clarity, I will continue to refer to the Russian version as *Golos* so that it is not confused with its Western analogs of the same name. The program is nearly identical to the American version of the program. *The Voice* is an evolution of the earlier *Pop Idol* and *Star Academy* formats of a few years earlier. It features a panel of four celebrity musicians who volunteer to work with aspiring singers chosen through a process of auditions. Contestants must present themselves to the panel who face away from them while they perform. If the celebrities are interested in acting as a coach, they turn their chair around. Once each coach has the requisite number of protégés they have them compete in a series of musical competitions with each other until each coach has only one remaining pupil. The remaining four then compete against each other, performing an original song. The winner is named "the voice" of that season and given a recording contract. The Russian version of the show airs immediately following the

network's main news program *Vremya*, which likely helps it by carrying over that program's audience.[3] *Golos* which began on October fifth, 2012, regularly tops the ratings for the network, attracting nearly thirty percent of Russian viewers.[4] Channel One also launched a variation on the program *Golos:Deti* (*The Voice: Children*) which achieved similar ratings.

Golos was not the first musical competition format that Channel One aired. From October 2002 to July 2012, the channel aired nine seasons of a program called *Fabrika Zvezd* (*Star Factory)* based on the Endemol format *Star Academy*. The series was a very conventional music competition series with celebrity judges assessing the merits of a particular singer's performance. The audience would then be allowed to vote for their favorite. Interestingly this format proved far more popular in Russia than the *Pop Idol* format which aired on Rossiya One for three seasons from 2003 to 2006 under the title *Narodnii Artist* (*The People's Artist*). However, it never achieved the wide popularity that *Star Factory* did on Channel One. Rossiya, despite repeated efforts, has generally struggled with reality programs.

The second most important reality program on Channel One is a series called *Toch-v-Toch* (*Exactly the Same*) an unlicensed version of a Spanish format owned by Endemol called *Tu cara me suena* (*Your Face Sounds Familiar*). The program challenges celebrities to perform as different iconic music artists every week. This includes dressing (or sometimes cross-dressing) as that artist and performing not only a song but also an associated dance. The performances are judged by a panel of celebrity judges who award points to each contestant. Whichever celebrity has the most points is awarded a cash prize that is donated to a charity of their choice. *Exactly*

[3] With few exceptions *Vremya* is consistently the programs that draws the highest ratings on television. Occasionally, as during the Olympic games in Sochi or the FIFA World Cup it is overshadowed by a sporting event, but these instance are quite rare.
[4] Elizaveta Suragonov and Anastasia Zhokhova, "V Ocheredi Za Pervym [In Line For Channel One]," *Forbes Russia*, accessed July 25, 2016, http://www.forbes.ru/sp_data/ernst/.

the Same competes with a licensed version of the program that airs on Rossiya One called *Odin-v-Odin* (*One and the Same*). That series originally premiered on Channel One in March of 2013. The network had signed a one-year distribution deal with the Russian studio that owned the rights to the format, VaiT Media. The program was attracting approximately thirty percent of viewers in its time slot and was judged to be quite successful.[5] Given the success of the series, VaiT Media wanted Channel One to pay more for the second season but when the network refused they sold the rights to Rossiya. The former was unwilling to give up on a successful format since they felt its success was more linked to their channel's clout than the product itself. As a result, they created their own unlicensed version of the program. Channel One's version of the program drew approximately twice as many viewers as the original.[6] Endemol and VaiT Media sued Channel One in Russian court alleging that *Exactly the Same* violated their intellectual property. Despite obvious infringement, the Russian court found in favor of Channel One, ruling that the concept of a format is not actually recognized by Russian law. [7] Since Channel One did not copy the name or the logo from the original format, there were no grounds to sue the channel for copyright violations.[8]

The above incident speaks, to the unusual nature of authoritarian capitalism in Russia, particularly in its media industries. The dispute was between two state-owned media giants, both of whom receive large parts of their funding from the Russian government. Both were, in this

[5] "Shou Toch'-v-Toch'! I Odin v Odin» Srazilis' Za Auditoriju [Exactly the Same and One and the Same Compete for Audiences]," *Kinomail.ru*, March 3, 2014, https://afisha.mail.ru/tvshow/articles/42357/.
[6] Ibid.
[7] "Endemol Podala Isk K Pervomu Kanalu O Zaprete Teleshou Toch'-v-Toch' [Endemol Has Filed a Lawsuit against Channel One to Ban TV Show Exactly the Same]," *Gazeta.ru*, September 6, 2014, http://www.gazeta.ru/business/news/2014/06/09/n_6217413.shtml.
[8] Yekaterina Brizgalova, "Pervyj Kanal Vyigral Sud U Ispanskoj Kompanii Za Peredachu [Channel One wins lawsuit over Spanish Company alledging copyright infringement related to Exactly The Same.]," *Vedomosti*, October 2, 2014, http://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2014/10/02/pervyj-kanal-vyigral-sud-u-ispanskoj-kompanii-za-peredachu.

context, acting like commercial television networks. In this case, Rossiya poached a successful program from Channel One which retaliated by simply making a nearly exact copy of the program. When the case went to court, it was Channel One that prevailed despite the fact that their program was a clear copy of the original to which they lost the rights because they tried to negotiate aggressively with the copyright holder. Almost as clear is the fact that, given the lack of the rule of law and transparency in the Russian judiciary, Channel One likely won the case because their general producer, Konstantin Ernst, and two of the owners of the non-state shares are close Putin allies. The case demonstrates that in the Russian system a partially state-owned and fully state-owned company can act like commercial networks, fight, sue each other, but that ultimately the resolution reflects the standing of the relevant players within Putin's inner circle.

The last of the important unscripted series on Channel One is sketch comedy and improvisation program *KVN*. This program is based on the iconic Soviet series of the same name that I discussed in chapter three. The program, which was canceled during the Soviet period re-emerged in the *glasnost* era and has been a staple on Channel One ever since. Without delving too deeply into the program, which has many different aspects, KVN is a comedy competition where teams apply to compete. Their tasks may be simply giving funny, improvised answers to a series of questions posed by the host, or performing numerous recurring challenges. A jury of celebrities judges these challenges. The program is an institution in Russia in the way that American game shows like *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy* are iconic in America. The program is so beloved that it even has its own holiday, on November twelfth, the anniversary of the first airing of the program. Former teams gather on that date to celebrate the history of the program. An independent body called the KVN Union regulates the competition's rules and format. It also

organizes the competitions. The program remains highly popular with Russian audiences with the 2015 version attracting roughly eighteen percent of viewers in its time slot.

What these programs suggest is that along with its function as probably the most important outlet for official state news, Channel One has a second function as a commercial channel that operates, at least to some extent for profit. The unscripted programs listed above are central to the station's brand and often as in the case of *Golos* are scheduled immediately following the station's most important news programming in an attempt to keep the audience from changing the channel. Since Channel One runs advertisements like any for-profit network, keeping an audience, and thus, being able to charge more for ads is vital. Pairing a program like *Golos* with the news to maximize audience is what one would expect from a commercial television network anywhere in the world. Even more importantly, this means that Russia's largest broadcaster is also integrated into the system of global exchanges in formats and other materials from the global cultural industries. Despite its importance to the Russian state with regards to disseminating important information, when it is not needed for this official purpose, the network is allowed to act as a profit-making tool for both the state and the oligarchs who own the closed shares not directly controlled by the state.

Konstantin Ernst: The Eccentric Visionary

The above section outlines the main unscripted formats that are broadcast on Channel One. While these are extremely important to the network, not only helping it to keep its status as the most-watched television channel in the country, but also generating a significant amount of advertising revenue, scripted programs are also important to the network. With few exceptions, these programs are original Russian series that are commissioned by the network. Occasionally,

a Western series, such as AMC's *Mad Men,* airs on the network outside of prime time, but even this is relatively rare. Some Hollywood films still air on the station as well, since even the largest Russian networks are not always able to produce enough content to fill twenty-four hours of programming seven days a week. Channel One, outside of its unscripted programs has also tended to favor the traditional short run serials that are similar to the iconic series from the Soviet period, making reruns more difficult. Despite the cost of producing these short running series, the station airs mostly Russian originals and only rarely, as in the case of the short-lived *Hot in Cleveland* adaptation *Troe v Komi* (*Three in Komi*), does it use formats from the West. Its scripted programming is also primarily aimed only at Russian speakers either in Russia or the diaspora. Channel One has high production standards, and their programs are generally marked by good visual quality, at least by Russian standards.

As I state in the second chapter, it is quite impossible to talk about anything that happens at Channel One without first speaking about the man who is in charge of the network, Konstantin Ernst. Ernst started his career with the network on its news and current events programming. Notably, he served as a panelist on a *glasnost* era program called *Vzglyad* (*Point of View*) speaking on political issues. Eventually, he was appointed general producer at the network and survived the transfer of control from oligarch Boris Berezovsky, who fell out of favor with Putin and his inner circle in the early-2000s, to the state. Today Ernst essentially has unencumbered control of the network. In an article penned for the New York Times Magazine, American expatriate journalist Michael Idov outlined his time as a screenwriter in the Russian television and film industry. He stated that "At Channel One, as long as its news division is in line with the latest twists in Kremlin policy, the eccentric visionary Konstantin Ernst, who presided over the heady opening ceremony of the 2014 Sochi Olympics, does pretty much whatever he wants"

including "handing prime time over to the indie director Valeria Gai Germanika, which would be a little like entrusting ABC to Harmony Korine."[9] Idov contends that Channel One is, along with STS and TNT, an island of quality content that is slowly forming among a "sea of pap."[10]

Ernst is very well connected. As indicated, he was put in charge of producing the opening and closing ceremonies of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, a position that Putin clearly would not have given to someone other than a trusted associate. Clearly, Ernst has an artistic sensibility since the opening, and closing ceremonies of the Olympics games are typically meant to be lavish visual and audio experiences. Even more telling of how well regarded the Channel One head is among the Russian elite is that fact that after the end of the opening ceremonies of the 2014 winter games, Putin went to personally thank Ernst for the work he did, as well as wishing him a happy birthday.[11] One assumes that the Russian president does not do that for most of the oligarch in his inner circle, let alone someone who is simply the head of a television network.

As Idov suggests the loyalty that Ernst has shown to the government means that when it comes to the production of television fiction, Channel One has relatively free reign. Ernst has used this freedom to great effect, producing several series since 2010 that come close to what in the West is called 'complex television." Ernst is also well respected in the international television market which is evident from his treatment at the two major television trade fairs that take place in Cannes France each year: MIPCOM and MIPTV. There are three things that are worth noting about Ernst that are relevant with regards to his international reputation. In 2011 when Russia was the country of focus at MIPCOM Konstantin Ernst was the person chosen to

[9] Michael Idov, "My Accidental Career as a Russian Screenwriter," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/magazine/my-accidental-career-as-a-russian-screenwriter.html.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Suragonov and Zhokhova, "V Ocheredi Za Pervym [In Line For Channel One]."

give the keynote address at the conference, a clear sign that he is held in higher regard than any other Russian television executive. In 2015 he was given the *Médaille d'Honneur* award along with three other prominent media executives at MIPTV.[12] Finally, his face appeared on the official program for MIPTV at the 2016 version of the event with the caption "Just like Konstantin Ernst, thousands of talented people bring content to life; come mip them [sic]" (Figure 7.1). It is clear that Ernst is a major figure in the global media market, certainly to the extent that his presence is an attraction for other media executives. This appeal is not surprising since he does have a very prominent position at the largest station in what was one of the fastest-growing television markets in the world until the 2014 collapse of the ruble and dramatic fall in oil and gas prices.

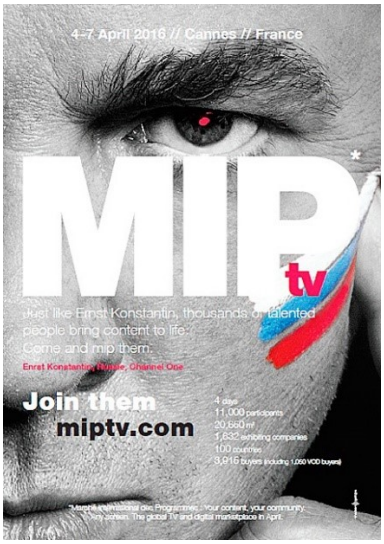

Figure 7.1 The Cover of the 2016 MIPTV event program

[12] Elsa Keslassy, "MipTV: Marion Edwards, Konstantin Ernst, Herbert G. Kloiber And Tim Worner Tapped for MipTV Honor," *Variety*, March 24, 2014, http://variety.com/2014/tv/global/miptv-marion-edwards-konstantin-ernst-herbert-g-kloiber-and-tim-worner-tapped-for-miptv-honor-1201144462/.

Ernst's philosophy with regards to the production of television fiction is particularly interesting and directly results in the third role that Channel One plays in the Russian market, that of the producer of experimental and complex television programs. Two of these are of particular note: 2010's *Shkola* (*School*) and 2015's *Metod* (*The Method*). Each of these series falls into the complex category since they broadly bend the rules of traditional genres. I have selected these two programs for discussion for several reasons, the first being that both of them were recognized as being high-quality television series, albeit for different reasons. *School* is seen as high quality for its indie filming techniques and because of the difficult social themes that the series tries to address. With its large cast of characters and relatively vast story world that expands as the sixty-nine episodes progress, the series' narrative is what Jason Mittell calls a centrifugal story.[13] *The Method,* for its part, is more of an analog of Western, complex television series like *Dexter, Luthor,* and *Breaking Bad*. The series gradually draws the viewer deeper into the psychological histories and progressions of the characters and is what Mittell identifies as a centripetal narrative.[14] These series are exemplars of different kinds of quality television. Both series also list Konstantin Ernst as a producer, suggesting that his involvement in the project was more substantial than on other quality series that have appeared on Channel One, such as 2013's highly acclaimed *Ottepel* (*The Thaw*). Both series are also set in contemporary Russia, whereas *The Thaw* takes place in the Khrushchev-era Soviet Union. Consequently, they better reflect the manner that Channel One and Ernst chose to portray contemporary Russian society.

Defining Complex Television

[13] Jason Mittell, "The Qualities of Complexity: Vast Versus Dense Seriality in Contemporary Television," in *Television Aesthetics and Style*, ed. Steven Peacock and Jason Jacobs (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 52.
[14] Ibid.

Complex television like any other term in media studies is highly contested, but Jason Mittell provides one of the better if slightly ambiguous definitions of complex television suggesting that "complex television is not a genre… [it is] a storytelling mode and set of associated production and reception practices that span a wide range of programs across and an array of genres."[15] He adds that "complex television is a site of tremendous genre mixing, where conventions and assumptions from a range of programming categories come together and are interwoven, merged and reformed."[16] Mittell suggests that most of the programs today considered to be complex or high quality in terms of their narrative form are a blend of melodrama and another genre. He notes that "melodrama… should be construed as a narrative mode that uses suspense to portray 'moral legibility,' offering an engaging emotional response to feel the difference between competing moral sides as manifested through forward-moving storytelling."[17] Melodrama's ability to illicit emotional responses, and thus to draw the viewers into affective relationships with the morality implied in the narratives is, according to Mittell drawn specifically from forms of storytelling normally associated with female viewers. These modes are coupled with "more conventionally masculinist pleasures of procedurality, systems analysis, political critiques, and homosocial bonding in the workplace, producing a vibrant mixture of gendered responses that appeal both to a wide range of viewers and a wide range of affective engagements."[18] The power of complex television then is linked to its mixing of genres, along with its abilities to engage the viewer and create moral maps that let them associate with the characters or events that are taking part in the narrative.

[15] Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 233.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 246.
[18] Ibid., 248.

The qualities that Mittell notes above have begun to appear in programs in Russia, particularly on Channel One. In the same way that sitcom creators at STS and TNT took the norms of the sitcoms and created a hybrid version of them for Russian stations, producers linked to Channel One have taken the norms of the complex melodramas from American television and started to create their own versions. The remainder of this chapter examines *School* and *The Method* as exemplars of this trend. Both of these series match Mittell's various definitions, but most notably they both are blends of two different genres, and they use the emotional responses created to transmit particular messages about Russian society. Both depict relatively pessimistic visions of post-Soviet Russia and the physical and moral decay that afflicts the country. Regarding genre, *School* mixes melodrama with the social commentary of the documentary genre while *The Method* combines it with the police procedural and detective drama. Both create, engaging stories that use the various conventions of the genres involved to paint their pictures of Russian society.

School: Russian Institutions on the Edge of Collapse

In January of 2010, the *School* premiered on Channel One. The series almost immediately started a controversy in Russian society. The series portrayed Russian schools in such a negative light that several deputies in the State Duma called for the series to be banned and one even demanded that Ernst be brought before the Duma to answer for his role in producing the series.[19] Putin himself was drawn into the controversy when he was asked by the media whether he thought the series was appropriate for Russian airwaves. Putin declined to

[19] "Serial Shkola Vozmutil Deputata Gosdumy [The Series School Outrages Duma Deputy]," *Vesti.kz*, January 13, 2010, http://vesti.kz/media/36867/.

answer saying that he had not seen the series.[20] When the series was put on hiatus during the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, so that the channel could devote more of its airtime to the sporting event, many assumed that it would not return. The series did, however, return after the Olympics and concluded its sixty-nine-episode season. Channel One decided not to renew the series for a second season.[21]

Valeri Gai Germanika who until that time was mostly known for her work in the indie film scene directed the series. It aired in prime time at six-thirty in the evening, immediately after the early edition of the station's *Vremya* newscast and again at eleven-thirty at night. According to Stephen Hutchings, Channel One went ahead with the series because "concerned about perceptions that its staid schedule disregarded younger tastes, and that its rival,… NTV remained closer to viewer preferences; Channel One saw the edgy Gai Germanika as promising a boost to its performance in the ratings war."[22] The strategy was successful, and the series drew relatively high ratings during both time slots.[23]

School is fairly broad in terms of its characters and themes bringing in many plots and subplots. The audience regularly sees acts of random violence perpetrated by students against each other, even culminating in one female student nearly being raped. Numerous scenes depict young Russians consuming alcohol, and on more than one occasion an inebriated young man assaults a female peer, forcing her to flee or risk sexual assault. Physical violence frequently erupts in the presence of an authority figure who does almost nothing to stop it. In the first

[20] "Putin O Seriale Skhola: Ne Nado Delat' Obobshchaiushchie Vyvody [Putin on the Television Series School: I Do Not Need to Give My Opinion]," *Ria Novosti*, January 25, 2010, http://ria.ru/culture/20100125/206194022.html.
[21] Stephen Hutchings, "Serializing National Cohesion: Channel 1's 'Shkola' and the Contradictions of Post-Soviet 'Consensus Management,'" *The Russian Review* 72, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 475.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

episode, for example, one student assaults another, leaving him bleeding in the hallway while the school security guard sits only a few meters away. There are also plot lines involving racist teachers, parent-faculty love affairs and students who attempt to seduce teachers. *School* presents the viewer with a vast array of problems taking place within a "typical" Russian school. Three characters, however, are most central to the series: Anya, Vadim, and Timur. Each of their struggles focuses on a particular aspect of Russian society that is failing.

Anya is the tragic heroine of the series. She begins the series going into secondary school after being educated at home by her grandparents, who variably dote on her and physically abuse her. Unfortunately, upon entering the school, she becomes the victim of nearly constant bullying. At one point, she is attacked in the street by her peers, who strip her down to her undergarments leaving her both physically and psychologically vulnerable. In another instance, a particularly violent student grabs her by the throat and starts strangling her before being stopped by a male teacher. She finds temporary acceptance in the "goth" subculture, which she embraces. The frequent physical and verbal abuse of her peers, causes her to lash out at them. At one point in the series, she comes into the school brandishing a Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifle and threatening other students. After the goth subculture rejects her, she briefly embraces Orthodox mysticism, before being sent to a psychiatric ward because of her suicidal thoughts. During the sixty-sixth episode, in what is perhaps the most heart-wrenching five minutes of television watched as part of this project, the audience watches Anya film her suicide note on a hand-held camera. The scene is filmed as though Anya has laid the camera on a chair (Figure 7.2). She records her goodbye to the world and then climbs into her bed and dies of an overdose of pills she stole from her grandmother.

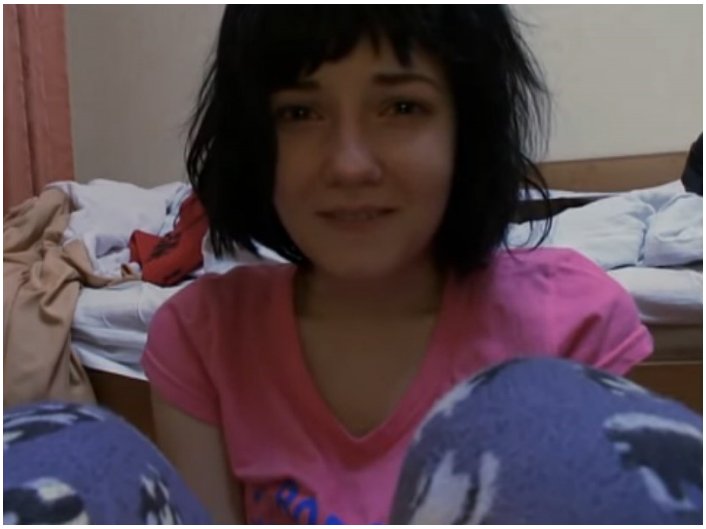

Figure 7.2 A distraught Anya films her suicide note

Her suicide is the event that ultimately brings the series to its denouement. Her entire story arc, however, acts as an exclamation point to the breakdown of civility that the audience has witnessed through the course of the series. The students abuse Anya almost without any serious adult intervention. Even when it is clear that the abuse she is suffering is having serious impacts on her mental health, as is evident when she brings a gun to school, the feckless and uncaring educators are essentially powerless to help her. When she retreats in rapid succession into a goth identity and then Orthodox mysticism, it raises no questions among the staff. Even when another student begins stalking her and recording her with a video camera, her only real recourse is to attack the young man and take his camera. She acts as a cipher through which the audience can see the corrosive effects of institutional incompetence on Russian youth. Importantly, she seems relatively well-adjusted when she, for the first time enters this Russian institutional structure, but within only a few months she is destroyed by it.

Timur and Vadim for their part emphasize two problems that loom large in Russian society: xenophobia and the increasing isolation of minorities in Russia. The pair starts the series

as friends, but their relationship degrades. Timur is from the predominantly Muslim region of Dagestan which borders the restive Chechen Republic that was the focus of so many problems through the 1990s and 2000s. People from this region are citizens of the Russian Federation. Ethnic Russians, however, treat them as inferior. Racism becomes the focus of the relationship between the two young men after Vadim falls under the influence of the geography teacher at the school who is openly xenophobic. Vadim eventually tries to align himself with local skinhead gangs and is frequently seen abusing minorities by shouting slogans like "Russia for Russians" a phrase associated with far-right nationalism. As the only minority student in the school, Timur becomes the target for most of Vadim's violent outbursts.

The young Muslim does not, however, retaliate violently, choosing instead to withstand his classmate's scorn. When his older sibling suggests that they get together a group of young Dagestani men to throw Vadim in the trunk of a car and drive him out of the city to be beaten, Timur declines the offer. He also begins a romance with a Russian girl named Sonya who he meets on stage while starring in a school production of Romeo and Juliet. Timur tries in vain to keep their relationship going, despite peer pressure from both sides by inviting her to his brother's wedding. There she is rejected by his Dagestani relatives, who refuse to speak to her in Russian, though they are all fluent, and talk to each other in Dagestani. The subtitled conversation allows the audience to share Sonya's sense of isolation. The relationship ultimately serves a symbolic representation of the mutual discord and mistrust between the majority Russians and ethnic minorities in the country.

Eventually, the racist teacher is fired by the acting headmaster of the school and following Anya's suicide Vadim and Timur establish an uneasy peace. However, this only pushes the problem of widespread racism into the background. Their accord does not solve the

ultimate problems. In fact, while the series presents some reconciliations in the final two episodes triggered by Anya's death, the sense of institutional failure lingers. Succinctly, Anya's entrance and interaction with Russian state institutions, first school and then a psychiatric hospital destroy her psychologically. It ultimately results in her suicide. Vadim for his part is indoctrinated into Russia's semi-official xenophobia by the geography teacher, whose racist views were tolerated by the school's former headmaster. For a series airing on the Channel One, with its close ties to the state, this portrayal is fairly exceptional. That Gai Germanika was able to produce such an unflattering portrait of an important Russian institution, even when Russian lawmakers object, points to one of the contradictions of the Russian system. Specifically, that a well-connected actor, like Ernst, can execute a vision that enhances his artistic and commercial credentials over the needs of the state for a strong nation building message. Consequently, we see the importance of these personal connections, particularly Ernst's to Putin allowing a state actor to act against the interests of the state.

The Method: The Future of Russian Quality Television

This unflattering portrait of modern Russia on Channel One continued with 2015's *The Method.* The series, even more than *School,* seems to be a reflection of Ernst's vision of complex television. In his discussion of the importance of quality television at MIPCOM 2011, Ernst observed that:

> Another surprising fact is the protagonist [in complex dramas] has been a freak [sic] in the most prominent projects. No matter in what social environment he is the viewer is always trying to identify himself as the protagonist, but a freak [sic] seems a surprising person to identify oneself with, but in contemporary society, it is actually quite logical… Plenty of social rules do not make too much sense today [sic]. But most people just can

> not break them in their everyday life. A freak on the screen will do things a viewer would love to do. Let's remember Dr. House or Dr. Lightman from *Lie To Me*, Monk, or Michael Scott from *The Office*, Nancy Botwin from *Weeds* or Hank Moody from *Californication*.[24]

This idea of a hero that can transcend the normal rules of society, who takes actions that no one else could, is at the very heart of *The Method.* The male lead of the series is Rodion Meglin, played by iconic actor Konstantin Khabinsky. He plays a major in the Ministry of Internal Affairs or MVD (police) who runs a special department, made up of only himself and a secondary character that serves as his computer guru. The second protagonist is Esenia Steklova, a recent graduate of the MVD's Police University and the daughter of a prominent lieutenant colonel in the MVD. She seeks an internship with Meglin after seeing him solve her friend's murder in a nightclub. Esenia is impressed by the major's ability to discern the killer's identity by his actions. Seeking to solve her mother's long-unsolved murder she asks Meglin to take her on and teach her his method. To the surprise of all the major characters in the series, he accepts despite having never taken on an intern before.

The Method is a serial that progresses through the eight weeks of airing towards a final climax in the last episode. But its narrative complexity and the structure of the storytelling that it uses to engage the audience is built on a series of elliptical manipulations of the diegetic plot. The framing device for each episode has Esenia being interrogated by two unnamed men in black suits who are investigating the events that took place during the period of her internship (Figure 7.3). From this plot device, the viewer can conclude three things: that Meglin is dead,

[24] Ernst, "Media Mastermind Keynote: Konstantin Ernst, Channel One Russia."

that his death was traumatic enough to warrant an official investigation of Esenia, and that her psychological state is very different from what it was at the beginning of the series. All of these bits of knowledge encourage the viewer to keep watching the series to find out exactly what happened. This narrative strategy is certainly not a technique unique to the series. It is also found in television series like *Lost* and films like *The Usual Suspects*, but it is effective and is one of the storytelling devices Mittell identifies as being a marker of what he calls complex television. After asking some questions about the next case that she investigated with her mentor, the viewer enters the events that she is recounting via a dissolve.

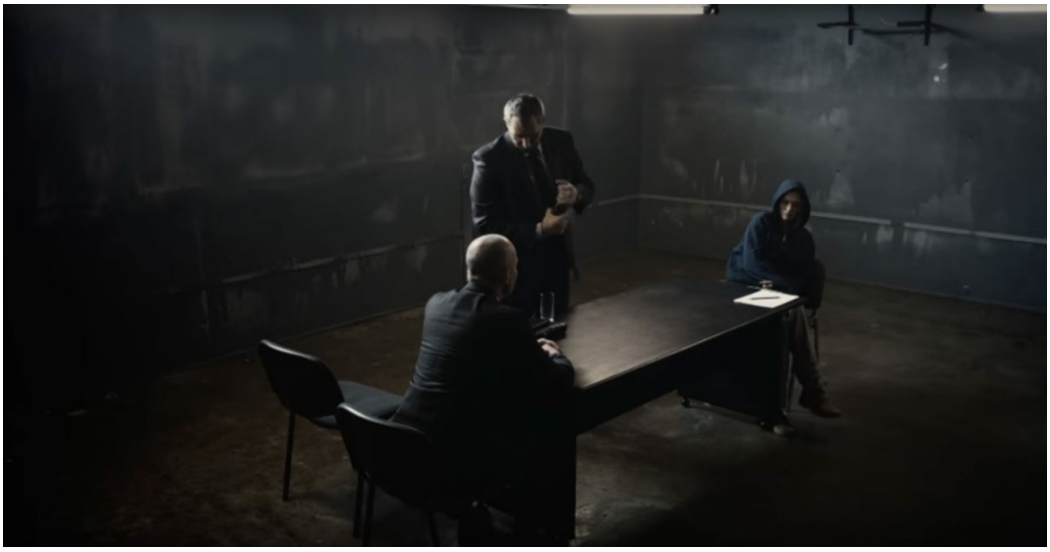

Figure 7.3 Esenia is questioned by two unnamed Russian detectives as part of the framing of each episode.

The series is an example of the high-quality serial that has what Mittel calls a centripetal plot. This story structure slowly draws the audience into the deeper aspects of the character and story development. Mittell gives the example of *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White, who the audience accompanies as his morality slowly decays over the course of the series.[25] In *The Method,* the

[25] Mittell, *Complex TV*, 151–62.

audience is principally invited to attend to the psychological procession of Esenia as she slowly transforms from an idealistic cadet in the first episode, into a psychologically damaged mirror image of Meglin by the end. There are many stages of this transformation, but it culminates in a few critical details. When she first starts to work with her new mentor, she dresses in a variety of clothes, including some that are impractical for police work. For example, she sometimes wears a long gray dress and high heeled shoes. By the middle of the series, like Meglin, she adopts a single outfit: khaki cargo pants, a V-neck t-shirt, and a hooded sweatshirt or leather jacket. Therefore, the audience can see her move from a stylish young woman to a seasoned plainclothes officer. At the beginning of the series, she rarely drinks or smokes cigarettes. During the interrogation scenes that bookend each episode and occur after the main events of the story, she is constantly taking drinks from the flask that she inherited after Meglin's death and chain smoking.

The audience also sees a dramatic change in her psychological state after she has several traumatic experiences. The first of these occurs when she lets her guard down and is abducted by a suspect and placed in the trunk of her car as it fills with exhaust fumes. This incident leads her to ask Meglin to help her prepare for another such incident. In the next episode, she is used as bait to lure out a taxi driver turned killer. He rapes young women before stabbing them with a screwdriver as revenge for having been abandoned by his fiancée when he was a young man. Because the killer takes the bait early, Esenia is forced to defend herself. Using the pencil that she uses to tie up her hair, she gouges the killer's eyes out. However, she loses control of her emotions and continues stabbing the killer even after he is disabled. The pencil becomes her weapon of choice, and on two other occasions, she uses it to attack killers after she has been used for bait. In those instances, she also loses control of her emotions and keeps stabbing them until

Meglin physically restrains her. Her continued involvement with Meglin leads to her increasing violence and psychological decline.

Two events in the last episode of the series highlight her transformation from a bright, somewhat naïve university student to a hardened investigator. After Meglin's psychological condition renders him permanently catatonic, Esenia kills him by stabbing him in the heart with his knife. She tries to make it look like suicide by putting the knife in his hand. This event is the one the men in black have been investigating during the series. Then, after being interrogated, the police give her the opportunity to continue Meglin's work which she initially declines. She reconsiders after she receives a call from one of the killers whom they thought they had stopped during the series. In a symbolic move, she takes Meglin's signature brown trench coat, puts it on and stares out the window. Her image flickers and Meglin appears in her place, showing her symbolic transformation into the new wielder of the "the method."

Meglin is what Ernst refers to as "a freak." As a young child, he watched the murder his parents by one of the Soviet Union's most infamous serial killers. The event scarred his psyche leaving him with a form of sociopathy. It also gave him the ability to understand the psychology that drives serial killers. As told in a flashback, in his early twenties he hunted down the man who murdered his parents by getting inside the mind of the killer. When he finds the man, he butchers him with a knife, which will become his signature weapon. He is arrested for the crime and thrown into prison. The police colonel who investigated both his parents' murder and his crime recognizes that Meglin has a "gift." Instead of sending him to trial he recruits him to join the police and investigate the crimes of other serial killers. Both Esenia and the audience's

relationship to Meglin is what Mittell refers to as "lengthy interactions with hideous men."[26] These characters "can come in a wide range of variants, from misanthropic, selfish but ultimately redeemable heroes… to arrogantly superior, destructively flawed, but moral figures… to outright amoral villains."[27] Meglin is more likely in the middle category, given his tendency towards being self-destructive and the fact that his actions while repugnant are always in the interest of a greater good, specifically stopping a serial killer.

The use of his gift, which other characters refer to as his "method" has a slowly corrosive effect on Meglin's psychology. He has a progressing dissociative personality disorder that frequently causes him to have seizures which require that he take medication. He also self-medicates with alcohol, often while driving his car. During his seizures, he often gains his insight into the traumas of the killers. Once he returns to his normal state, the images he saw while he was catatonic allow him to anticipate and stop their next murder. It becomes clear as the series progresses that his condition is deteriorating and that soon he will be completely unable to function. He frequently checks himself into a psychiatric hospital on the outskirts of Moscow for treatment. These stops also give Esenia a chance to learn from his doctor about Meglin's past as well as to consult him on the current crime that they are investigating.

The series executive producer Alexander Tsekalo explained Meglin' gift as follows "the foundation of Rodion Meglin's method, which he teaches to the heroine Esenia, is to try to find out what childhood trauma caused the person to become a serial killer. Because it stems mainly from something that happened when they were children."[28] The series is often a reflection of the

[26] Ibid., 149.
[27] Ibid., 142.
[28] Alexander Tsekalo and Paulina Andreeva, Ne huzhe HBO? Novye russkie serialy [As good as HBO: New Russian serials], interview by Elena Afanaseeva, Radio, October 25, 2016, http://echo.msk.ru/programs/tv/1645048-echo/.

breakdowns in Russian society that produce the evil that the heroes are trying to stop. For example, in the seventh episode of the series, they investigate a series of murders that are being filmed and placed on an online video sharing site. The killer, in this case, is a young man who became a killer as the result of constant physical abuse by his father following his mother's death. The boy was forced by his angry, alcoholic, and devoutly religious father to pray as he was beaten. The scars on the boy's psyche lead him first to beat his father until he is in a catatonic state and then commit other random murders to quench his bloodlust. He nearly kills Esenia, before being stopped by Meglin.

At least three of the other criminals have disorders as a result of domestic abuse. In the second episode, a young woman is used by a pedophile trying to build a "family" of young women to lure other girls to his home. She was the victim of severe physical abuse by her mother, while her twin sister was left untouched. Another killer whose father abused him after remarrying targets couples where the man has remarried after the death of his first wife. He climbs into their window at night and kills them then tries to frame their children for the crime. Another killer, scarred by a blow from her abusive father, targets models to strip them of their beauty. It is safe to say that the series portrays the Russian domestic sphere and particularly the family not as a place of safety for children, but rather as a dangerous space where many of them are traumatized.

Meglin is a sort of classic anti-hero. He clearly believes that the ends always justify the means and has no qualms about handing out justice himself. The way the series deals with questions of law and order is particularly noteworthy. There is no faith that the killers will face justice, and as a result, Meglin takes matters into his own hands. In the second episode of the series, for example, a killer is targeting young women who are alone in Moscow's Izmailovsky

Park. Meglin uses Esenia, who has just started her training with him as bait without her knowledge. He abuses her verbally until she leaves the apartment they have been using as a site for their stakeout of the killer. As she walks through the park she realizes that she is being followed, she then boards a trolley to try and escape the killer. He, of course, follows her and attempts to strangle her. Meglin jumps aboard the trolley, but rather than trying to subdue the killer and arrest him he stabs him in the neck. After explaining the killer's psyche to a gasping Esenia and taunting the killer, he removes the knife, tosses the man off the trolley and simply allows him to bleed to death.

This type of brutal punishment for the killers is the norm rather than the exception for the series. Two other particularly brutal incidents come to mind. In the fifth episode, Meglin and Esenia travel to the city of Mikhalovsk in southern Russia to investigate the disappearance of numerous boys dating back several years. Their investigation leads them to the headmaster of a local children's group, similar to the Scouts of America, which focuses on camping and other outdoor skills. Each of the boys who disappeared was a member mentored by the headmaster of the group. The local authorities had concluded that the boys had run away from home since all of them were the victims of severe domestic abuse. During Meglin and Esenia's investigation, they find that the headmaster has been hanging the boys from a tree in the forest while he takes pictures of them. This act gives him an erotic thrill. Despite his close association with each of the victims, the police had never suspected him because of his status as a beloved figure in the community. When his crimes are discovered, the townspeople turn violently against him, tie his arms to two pillars at the entrance of the building and light the structure on fire (Figure 7.4). No police are present to intervene. The resolution of the serial killings of the children is entirely a matter of mob justice. Meglin and Esenia simply stand by as this vigilante justice is carried out.

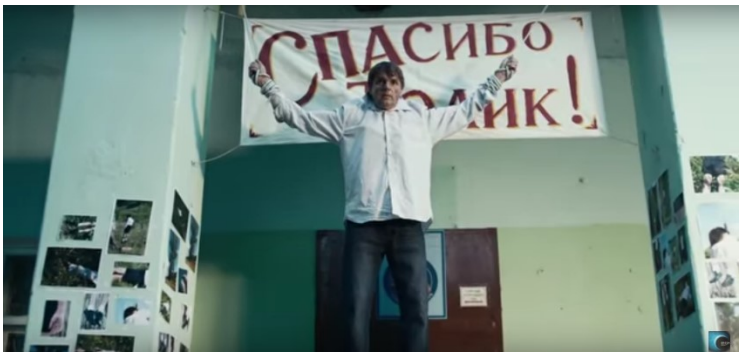

Figure 7.4 The killer from episode 4 of The Method hangs from the pillars of his building before being burned alive

The series goes even further than simply portraying justice as occurring only outside of the law. It frequently presents the law as being, essentially unable to provide real justice, forcing Meglin to meet out true justice himself. Two incidents are of particular note. In the sixth episode, Meglin and Esenia confront a university professor who has been seducing, drugging and murdering female students before hanging them in a park with a sign reading "partisan" on it. The detectives stop him from murdering his latest victim. Once he subdues him, Meglin repeatedly slams the professor's head with a car door. He then enlists the help of two passing truck drivers to punish the killer. They strap his arms and legs to the front of their trucks and start moving in opposite directions. He is literally about to be torn in two when Esenia intervenes to stop the grizzly punishment. Once the police take him into custody, it becomes clear that due to the brutality of his arrest he is likely to be released, despite his obvious guilt. In his bloodied state, the killer even winks at Meglin, indicating that he believes he will be able to continue his killings later. Since the criminal justice system cannot be trusted to keep him locked away, the major intervenes. He surreptitiously stabs the man in the neck with a syringe filled with the drug the killer was using to subdue his victims, but the dose is lethal.

The series explores the inability of the justice system to stop killers in the last two episodes. Esenia's father, concerned with his daughter's obvious psychological decline, uses his connections in the MVD to have a serial killer, who is a former police academy rival of Meglin's, released. The two have a *quid pro quo* agreement that before he disappears, he should kill the major. The plan goes badly awry when, to attract his target's attention, the killer murders a family. He films their deaths so that Meglin can see it when he comes to investigate. The killer then goes to Meglin's apartment to ambush him. With Esenia's help, the major subdues the killer, but she begs him not to take justice into his hands. This mercy proves to be a costly error. The killer escapes police custody and intensifies his campaign against Meglin.

After the killer breaks out of custody, he murders another forty people and abducts Esenia, setting a trap for Meglin by threatening to kill her. Even after Meglin and the authorities manage to recapture the killer, the only real solution that the series proposes is that Meglin enacts his own brand of justice. Meglin and Esenia break the killer out of police custody, by ramming the transport truck he is in with a stolen cement truck. Once they have the killer in custody, they take him to a cemetery where Meglin nails him into a coffin and buries him alive. Esenia protests and asks him to stop, but this time takes no action to save the man. She feels guilty about having saved his life which enabled his latest killing spree. The dual failure of the justice system, letting the killer out because of her father's corruption, and also failing to keep him in custody leads to Meglin's actions seeming justified.

To summarize, the series depicts Russia, not as a relatively modern nation governed by the rule of law where disorder and breakdown are the exceptions but instead as a country that is on the verge of institutional and social collapse. The series is set mostly in the deindustrialized hinterlands of Moscow and other Russian cities. The physical environment is in a severe state of

decay. Domestic abuse that scars children's psyches enough to turn them into serial killers is so commonplace that it appears in virtually every episode. Children are routinely the victims of violence. A police officer who acts as much like a vigilante as a keeper of law and order is the only agent of justice. High ranking officers in the security services release serial killers to achieve their personal goals. This representation of modern Russia is very different than news program like *Vremya* portray. *The Method* shows a country that in virtually in every sense is teetering on the verge of collapse, where even the best social institutions: the police, the scouts, and even the family are essentially so broken that they consume average Russians.

Conclusions

Channel One remains the most important media property in Russia today. It also epitomizes some of the central contradictions of the authoritarian capitalist system. It no longer exists in a totalitarian system where it could count on being the only station available and that audiences would, therefore, watch its programming. It is in competition not only with other Russian television stations but also with media products from the global market. Though it draws part of its revenue from the state, it also has a commercial mandate and sells advertising during its programs. The network, therefore, needs to offer a wide variety of programs that appeal to Russian audiences. As a result, the station now airs many unscripted reality programs based on western formats.

The fictional programming on the network has also gone through a series of changes. Driven by trends in the international marketplace that is increasingly interested in high quality, narratively complex programming, Channel One has started to imitate this style of programming. While one might quibble about the relative value of these Russian series compared to their Western counterparts, it is notable that in their quest to attract the quality Russian audience, the

one that is attractive to advertisers, they have seized on much the same strategy as many American cable and broadcast networks. While part of this trend no doubt driven personally by Konstantin Ernst who clearly wants to produce programming that is recognized globally in the same way that complex American television is, it is also clear that hybridity is at work. The Russians who write, produce and act in these kinds of complex melodramas are, essentially imitating what they have seen abroad. They are bringing Russian "freaks" to the screen to attract the audience.

In so doing, however, the producers of these series, especially those on Channel One are telling stories that undermine the narratives about Russia that Putin and his inner circle are so careful to cultivate in news and current events programming. While this disparity was noted and clearly irritated members of the ruling government in the case of *School*, the station, under Ernst's careful watch has been allowed to continue making such programming, likely as a result of his personal connections. This phenomenon shows one of the central contradictions of the Russian version of authoritarian capitalism that proximity to the ruling elite and the degree of trust that they place in a particular figure can nullify the ideological needs of the state, even on a state-owned broadcaster.

Conclusion: Authoritarian Capitalism and its Discontents

This project has offered a look in depth at the television industry in the Russian Federation, one of the most important and powerful authoritarian capitalist states in the world. The preceding chapters have looked at a variety of themes and actors in Post-Soviet Russia. These included state-owned networks like Rossiya One, strongly state-affiliated actors like TNT and Channel One, independent Russian companies like STS and globally integrated multinational firms like Sony. What has unfolded during this research project is a broad, multi-faceted exploration of how a media system operates outside of a typical liberal-democratic political system. To conclude, I will revisit my findings briefly before commenting on the larger implications for further studies of both Russian media and other systems in authoritarian capitalist countries, as well as the parameters of this project.

Almost inevitably people tend to view the Russian media system through the pre-existing lens of both the old Soviet state-dominated system and their broader notions of what an authoritarian system means for media in the present. Impressions of the Russian media system are almost universally viewed through the lens of the state, because it plays a central role in the economy, and controls many of the networks. As a result, all media messages on Russian television are assumed to come from the state in some form. As this project has shown, the realities of the Russian media industry are strikingly different from this expectation. Russian television frequently depicts the country in ways that are unflattering and do not support the image of Russia as a great power. The dominance of the state is important and certainly can limit what is depicted on Russian television, especially when the state is the sole owner. However, ownership, or most importantly, the connection of the people who run the networks to Putin's

inner circle can play an important role in enabling the creation of content that might undermine the greater cultural project of the Putin-led state.

Two aspects of the Russian system are important for understanding this mixed model. The first is that all Russian networks today are essentially managed according to capitalist principles. All major channels run commercial advertisements and even those that are partially state funded, like Rossiya and Channel One, ultimately have to compete with each other and with global media products to attract audiences for their advertisers. This competitive environment has broadly forced the important actors in the Russian television industry to adopt principles and techniques drawn from global media industries. Russia no longer exists in isolation, if it ever did. As a result, Russians now expect their media products to be at least as good as those from other parts of the world and are likely to tune out if this is not the case. While bulky, poorly constructed and confusing series may have been the norm in the early days of the industry's renaissance after Putin came to power, the influence of global programs and genres means that Russian television is now similar to media products from other parts of the world.

Along with the rise of competition both with other channels and with global media, has come the rise of ambitious Russian producers who want to make programs recognized for their quality. Preceding chapters discussed three of them, Konstantin Ernst, Vyacheslav Murugov and Roman Petrenko. Clearly, these people want to be part of not just the Russian media elite, but more importantly the global media community. To do this, they have brought Russian television closer to the global industry by working with global companies, using global genres and greenlighting projects that share more in common with the best programs in the West than anything produced in Russia in the Soviet and early post-Soviet periods. This trend seems to be driven primarily by ego.

This desire, especially from Ernst, has meant that one of the most closely state-affiliated networks is producing the content that most discredits Putin's vision for the country. Where networks are less connected to Putin, as in the case of STS, they are far more cautious about producing controversial content. The removal of a gay character from *The Kitchen* demonstrates this fact. One of the greatest contradictions of authoritarian capitalism unearthed by this project is that power does not move in a dispassionate, bureaucratic manner. Rather it flows primarily through a system of patronage and personal connections that make limited acts of resistance on screen possible. *School's* return to television and completion of its first season after generating so much controversy attests to this fact. These personal connections, exemplified by the fact that Putin and his inner circle trust Ernst, makes some negative representations of the country possible. That is not to say that Ernst has unlimited power to put anything he wants on screen, merely that has more than others in the industry.

This account then should influence the way scholars look at authoritarian capitalist systems going forward. It points out the importance of how power is distributed in the system. The state is the most powerful actor, and its mandates and requirements give the system its overall direction. Where political economists looking at Western media environments usually focus on the role of the most powerful corporations or individuals in relation to what is produced on television, in Russia, even the most powerful corporations or oligarchs must serve the state's interests first or risk being replaced by other more loyal actors. As a result, in authoritarian capitalist states, mapping power relations must begin with state actors and then moves to other powerful actors such as the economic elite, commonly referred to as oligarchs. This insight is no doubt true in other authoritarian capitalist systems as well.

Neither have the predictions of political economy that view international studios like Sony as agents of westernization and cultural destruction proven completely accurate. Even in the early days of the Russian television industry at the beginning of the 2000s, when both the Russian state and the Russian television industry were relatively weak, several factors stopped Western firms from simply taking over. The first was the almost innate sense within the culture that it was being attacked from without, which led members of the industry to act defensively and no doubt slowed the acceptance of Western culture and forms. The second was the ineptness of Western firms themselves. For all of their supposed omnipotence as ideological colonizers, with the exception of Sony, all of the major Hollywood studios and many smaller ones failed to establish a strong basis for working in Russia long-term. I have shown, particularly in the chapters on Sony, STS, and TNT, that Hollywood was, for the most part, relatively clumsy when entering the Russian market. The major studies seemed more interested in quickly extracting capital from the market to strengthen their bottom lines, than being involved in the production of culture for extended periods of time.

My approach of blending the perspective of political economy with some techniques from cultural studies, particularly those of Havens, Lotz, and Tinic's critical media industry studies proved extremely fruitful. This method allowed for the examination of the links between companies, the structure of the industry and the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of individuals who are running the stations. This type of approach, which goes beyond understanding every program in authoritarian capitalist countries as being a reflection of the will of the ruling elite is one that more scholars looking at industries in China, Vietnam and increasingly authoritarian states like Hungary and Turkey need to recognize. In particular, the

cronyism that is prevalent in the Russian industry is a unique feature of authoritarian capitalism that has a serious impact on the production of content.

One of the most interesting insights gained from this project is that in Russia, the relationships to the state matter a great deal with regards to what types of programming get made. The relationship in some cases was opposite of my initial expectations. What I believed at the outset of this project was that the further a station was from being owned by the state, the more likely it was to produce programming that the governing party might find troubling. As I noted, however, STS the most privately held company in the country was by far the most cautious about what it could put on the air. Rossiya One behaved as expected since it is completely state owned, but both TNT and Channel One's behaviors were far more complex. Both stations have had conflicts with state officials over their programing. For TNT this was primarily in the early seasons of its reality program *Dom-2*, though their more recent programs depict everyday life in Russia in a fairly unflattering way and require a rating of 16+, meaning the programs are recommended only for those over 16 years old. Channel One, led by Ernst, essentially disparaged on the of the key institutions of Russian society and while lawmakers denounced it, the station and its management suffered no consequences. Even with programs like *School* and *The Method* taking representative liberties with state institutions, Channel One remains the most important television network in Russia, and Konstantin Ernst remains the head of the station. This state of affairs led me to the conclusion that in an authoritarian capitalist system the relationship between producers and managers like Ernst and powerful figures in the state hierarchy produce the conditions for state-aligned companies to make content that openly criticizes the state. To summarize, in some cases a station's relation to the state means that it can be more, not less, critical of it on screen.

Contributions

This project has advanced the study of Russian media and global media industries in several important ways. First, it marks a significant shift away from solely textually based accounts of Russian Television, such as those previously produced by Prokhorova, MacFadyen, Hutchings and Rulyova and Beumers. While these were always interesting and offered insight, they always failed to properly segment the series that they looked at by station and as a result failed to understand the significant role that different organizational structures played in the development of Russian television. They also often failed to properly examine the interaction between the Russian and global television industries and, as a result, never fully understood the significance or the importance of programs that were being imported. They also failed to address the ways that interactions with the global television industry were altering the infrastructure of Russian television, a question I looked at in detail when examining Sony's role in the Russian television industry. The mapping out of the industry's most important players and their relations to one another clearly advances the study of Russian television by making it more complex.

My project is also a preliminary model of some of the challenges that come from examining an authoritarian capitalist system. In particular, my work suggests that in such a system expectations need to be recalibrated in numerous ways. Naturally, the state's role needs to be taken into account in a much more substantial way than in studies of Western media systems. Merely looking at regulation does not suffice. There needs to be an examination of both the legal and extra-legal means that the state uses to coerce media industries into serving the purposes that the state requires. Studies in the West tend to have the large studios as their central focus. Similar work in authoritarian capitalism must have the state in the central role with all other actors subordinate. More than in a completely business driven Western context, monetary

concerns need to be considered along with the cronyism and patronage systems that ultimately bind the actors together. In Russia, this is primarily a study of the network of oligarchs that gather around Vladimir Putin and their lieutenants, but in another authoritarian capitalist system, it likely has a different articulation.

However, the attention to the state should not lead to the conclusion, made by some scholars, like Zhu, that the state is the only actor or that it can be treated unproblematically as omnipotent. There seem to be many ways in authoritarian capitalism to produce content that is not entirely to the state's liking without triggering repression. In Russia, the oversight of television fiction is very loose, mostly relying on self-censorship despite the commonly held perception in the West that the Russian state, must be tamping down free expression. Russian producers are, for the most part, unwilling to put their careers in jeopardy, especially for those that have high paying positions either at networks or production companies. The relative luxury afforded by their incomes because of capitalism is an effective limit on their expression. However, there are numerous occasions where, wanting to draw more viewers, the networks probe the limits of what is allowed. Thus, while the state is a continual threat, it is not omnipotent, and there are aspects of what plays out on television that do not serve its interests.

My study also contributes to the literature on hybridity in important ways. Particularly my work on Sony suggests that, to the extent that it has tried to create programs in the Western mold, television in Russia has developed along typically hybrid patterns as outlined by scholars like Kraidy. More importantly, my work speaks to the way that global practices and norms are adopted and hybridized by local industries. What is particularly significant about Sony's role in the Russian market is the way that its concerted efforts ultimately led to the adoption of Western methods of writing and production throughout the industry despite opposition. Essentially,

through the slow and steady building of human capital in the industry, Sony has managed to westernize the production techniques at several channels and production companies. People who have worked on programs localized from Western models have then spread themselves through the industry increasing the prevalence of these techniques. Competition with channels like STS, whose programming is very western in style, has also pushed other networks like Channel One to produce programming that emulates the style of Western programming and the series on STS. Therefore, my work points not only to forms of textual hybridity but also to industrial forms of hybridity.

The Parameters of this Project

The greatest challenges of this project was an accidental one related merely to bad timing. Because of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation in 2014 the political climate in Russia, particularly where it involved Western scholars hoping to study a critical industry cooled significantly. Where industry workers had tentatively been willing to talk to me before the crisis began, they understandably became reluctant to participate following the start of new tensions between the West and Russia. As a result, where I had hoped to carry out significant field work in Russia I was unable to do so in a substantial way. Even the possibility of doing interviews at a distance via Skype or another web-based system did not seem appealing to people working in the industry. Most of them simply judged that talking to a Western scholar was not a good decision at this moment.

As a result, many of the people who were willing to be interviewed for this project were westerners who had worked in Russia for extended periods of time. These accounts were invaluable to this project, but they come from Westerners accustomed to the norm of industries outside Russia. More accounts from Russians working in the industry would have without a

doubt been helpful for understanding how decisions are made on a daily basis. An on the ground account of the Russian television industry is certainly warranted and necessary for scholars once the conflict between the West and Russia cools. While I have done everything possible to assemble an in-depth account of the Russian television industry, much of it is constructed on trade and popular press accounts of the companies and pivotal actors in the industry. My discussions of the heads of the networks and their roles in mediating between the state and the producers is a middle range study of Russian television, albeit one that still looks at it from a higher vantage point than what Havens, Lotz, and Tinic argue should be the norm in media studies. They argue that political economy is like looking at the industry from a jet plane, while their critical media industry studies is compared to a helicopter. The helicopter would, of course, offer a more precise way of looking at a media industry. This study falls somewhere between those two altitudes; it is more detailed than political economy, but lacking access, I was not able to assess the Russian industry as closely as I had originally hoped.

My cultural position also proved to be somewhat problematic. At times being an Anglophone Canadian scholar who learned Russian as an adult means that some of the cultural and situational representations that I encountered on Russian screens proved extremely difficult to understand. While I have been studying Russia and its culture in one form or another since 2001, this project has made it abundantly clear that there are some aspects of Russian culture that may remain perpetually elusive. I remain baffled, for instance, by the popularity of actor Dimitri Nagiev who dominates Russian television screens starring in at least three series that I watched (*Kamenskaya, the Kitchen,* and *Fizruk*) and several that I did not. Querying my Russian friends on his popularity was not enlightening and met mostly with the conclusion that it is something that only Russians truly understand. Despite their enormous popularity, I also struggled to

understand the appeal of many of the series on TNT. As I noted, these series, anchored as they are in the nuances of contemporary Russian life, were very difficult both to understand and to watch. As a western viewer, I gravitated towards programs like *The Kitchen* and *The Method* which are much more accessible because they use television conventions with which I was already familiar. I initially wanted to exclude TNT from my analysis because at a semi-conscious level its series were uncomfortable to watch.

Future Considerations

Without a doubt, further studies of the Russian television industry are needed. While I am confident that this is the most in-depth study conducted to date, there are other aspects of the industry that should be addressed either by myself in future studies or by others. In particular, further interviews need to be conducted with mid-level and high-ranking employees within the industry to fill in the ground level analysis. Particularly given the disappearance of important industry trade publications like *Variety Russia* and the uneven quality of Russian-based publications like *Broadcasting.ru* and *The Hollywood Reporter: Russian Edition* there is substantially less high-quality reporting on matters related to Russian television and other media industries than there were at the beginning of this project. This deficit means that it is even more important for scholars to fill in this gap by producing more in-depth accounts of the industry as it continues to transition into the global era.

The model that I have laid out in this study, which looks broadly at a television industry in an authoritarian capitalist state needs to be applied to other countries that share similar political and economic arrangements. These countries should be studies in ways that are ultimately attentive to the role of the state, but then follows the relationships of power downwards through the hierarchy to determine how these structures affect the types of

programming that are made. Any studies of other media industries would, of course, have to account for the differing industrial histories in those countries. Any study should be attentive, however to the different forms of textual and industrial hybridity that result from prolonged periods of interaction with major global players. As this account out suggests, the knowledge and practices that Western companies instill in their new partners are a powerful means for transforming an industry and making it more competitive globally. These types of transformations are potentially beneficial for the industry since they may very well lead to the production of series that can be formatted to supply Western channels and platforms with proven, high-quality programs to meet their need for increasing amounts of content.

Closing Remarks

The greatest period of transition for the Russian television industry is likely over. The industry today is producing most of its prime-time programming, and while some of the content is still low quality, an increasing amount is of equal or nearly of equal quality with many Western programs. The next major questions that face the Russian industry are whether it will be able to make the transition to a provider of formats for other markets, particularly the rich markets of Western Europe and North America. There are also major questions about how it will adapt to competition from digital platforms like Netflix which became available in Russia in 2016. The Russian television industry today is funding itself primarily through advertising sales. However, the dominant position of the big six networks may be challenged if internet distribution becomes widespread. In fact, several of the major networks, including STS and TNT have already launched online video portals (Videomore and Rutube.ru) to get ahead of the market.

Globally Russia is only likely to become more important. The size of the Russian market means that they can support a domestic industry without significant outside funding or major state subsidies in a way that few other states can. Russians' preference for content produced domestically means that the industry is likely to remain profitable and, given the hunger of global markets for original content, that eventually Russian products in some forms will find their way to the international market. Russian producers for their part, clearly want to be part of the global television market. The sense is palpable that after an absence of two and a half decades that Russians want to contribute to global culture again. Fifteen years of watching, copying, imitating and dreaming have left them ready to do so. All that remains to be seen is whether the global markets are interested in what they have to offer. That might be the subject of a future project. My present project is, however, at an end.

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