



## Pussy Riot. Speaking Punk to Power

Eliot Borenstein, London & New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, xii + 140pp., \$11.69 ebook.

**Sona Singh**

To cite this article: Sona Singh (2022) Pussy Riot. Speaking Punk to Power, Europe-Asia Studies, 74:4, 700-701, DOI: [10.1080/09668136.2022.2066906](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2066906)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2066906>



Published online: 24 May 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 101



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

combines elements of Soviet socialist and post-Soviet neoliberal models; thus, Russia's state-led pharmaceutical industry benefits from market and international dynamics without compromising its claim to promote the national interest in health and pharmaceutical sectors.

The penultimate chapter demonstrates that current Russian pharmapolitics prioritises the development of an innovation environment for the Russian pharmaceutical sector, science and technology. For Zvonareva, this involves the promotion of collaboration with international partners in mutually beneficial areas, despite the challenges presented by the market, academia and state policies. The final chapter concludes by identifying the key characteristics of Russian pharmapolitics and their implications for the challenges in promoting innovation in both Russian and the global pharmaceutical industry. The book suggests that for the development of more innovative and cooperative pharmapolitics, more transparent and equitable pharmapolitical regimes should be developed in both Russia and the rest of the world.

Overall, this book makes a very interesting contribution to the academic literature on Russian politics and society, by analysing Russia's pharmapolitical regimes wherein market, state and global dynamics substantially shape Russia's national visions as well as the trajectories of pharmaceutical industry and technology. Zvonareva takes a balanced approach to Russia's changing pharmapolitical regimes and suggests that these regimes could generate a culture of innovation if they were regulated in a more transparent and equitable way. Russia's recent experience in the development of the coronavirus vaccine Sputnik-V, which could perhaps be addressed in future editions of this book, seems to confirm most of Zvonareva's findings. All in all, *Pharmapolitics in Russia. Making Drugs and Rebuilding the Nation* is a timely and thought-provoking book and is enthusiastically recommended to all scholars and students of Russian politics and society.

OKTAY F. TANRISEVER, Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. *Email*: oktay@metu.edu.tr

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2066907>

OKTAY F. TANRISEVER © 2022

Eliot Borenstein, *Pussy Riot. Speaking Punk to Power*. London & New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, xii + 140pp., \$11.69 ebook.

IN 2012, A GROUP OF FIVE YOUNG WOMEN IN MOSCOW ENTERED THE Cathedral of Christ the Saviour Church and executed an impromptu, unsanctioned punk prayer, which was later released on YouTube. The group, which called themselves Pussy Riot, were expressing their dissent against the rising authoritarian tendencies of the government. They were also protesting the close relationship that had developed between the state and the Orthodox Church in the Russian Federation. The group garnered immense attention across the country after three of its members were arrested on charges of 'premeditated hooliganism motivated by religious hatred' and were sentenced to two years in prison. After this incident, there were protests in Russia against their arrest. Overseas, Pussy Riot became quite a popular group, known for their bright coloured balaclavas, shocking activities and their anti-government politics. The performance by Pussy Riot was concurrent with widespread protests in Russia against President Putin's re-election bid. In fact, three weeks after the protest in the cathedral, Putin won the presidential election.

*Pussy Riot. Speaking Punk to Power* is part of a series of short publications put out by Bloomsbury that delineate various important movements and events in Russian history. Over 11 chapters Eliot Borenstein examines the movement's origins in the guerrilla art collective group *Voina*; the symbolism of the group staging its protest in the cathedral; and how Pussy Riot became an

international sensation overnight set against the mixed response it received at home. Exploring how the group evolved, Borenstein links it to the postmodernist artistic movements that surfaced throughout the last 25 years of Soviet power, whose members expressed disapproval of the country's political system through their work.


In the age of digital media where the internet can make anyone a viral sensation, Borenstein highlights how the media can create a narrative to suit the interests of the ruling regime, a phenomenon we see being replicated in countries with strong leaders. Borenstein discusses various instances where the Russian media created a false narrative around Pussy Riot, misrepresenting their actions rather than showing them as they were: a feminist collective making use of performance art to protest the closeness between the church and state and a regime that was increasingly becoming authoritarian.

Borenstein traces the long history of the Russian feminist movement. He also points out a problem in Russian political culture during the first two decades of the millennium: people became wary of idealism, and it was difficult for Russians to believe that people could be motivated by ideals of political activism without taking personal benefits into account. The book examines the path taken by Pussy Riot members, their lives before they joined the collective, during the period when they staged protests and after they came out of jail, which is a separate story in itself. Borenstein traces the careers of these women after their release from prison, and how their politics has evolved over the years—from shock tactics to continued political activism—starting a movement championing the rights of prisoners, establishing a media portal, releasing satirical music videos and doing cameos on American sitcoms. Through these examples, he highlights the group's continued efforts to reinvent themselves at a time when the state continued its crackdown on a new generation of dissidents.

The author tries to contextualise their behaviour in light of the fact that, after their infamous performance in the cathedral, which was posted online, the Pussy Riot collective became celebrities overnight and used their new fame to continue their opposition to authoritarianism and church–state relations and to promote feminist politics.

The book delineates the evolution of Russian politics over the years, the journey of the creation of the USSR to its dissolution in 1991. Through tracing the trajectory of the Pussy Riot collective, Borenstein analyses the changing political atmosphere in Russia and how it has become increasingly authoritarian under Putin. Borenstein takes a long historical view in explaining the problems facing Russian society and politics today, in an age when there is increasingly less and less space for dissent.

The book is a short account of Russian socio-political reality, using the Pussy Riot protests as a backdrop. This is recommended reading for anyone interested in history, feminism, politics and art movements. I wish the author had written more about what it means to be a celebrity in the age of the internet, social media and viral videos, but that could perhaps be the subject of a separate book in itself.

SONA SINGH, PhD Candidate, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.  
Email: singhsona.jnu@gmail.com  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2784-9413>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2066906>

SONA SINGH © 2022

Tomasz Kamiński (ed.), *The Role of Regions in EU–China Relations*. Łódź: Łódź University Press, 2021, 225pp., open access ebook.

THE SUBNATIONAL DIMENSION OF SINO–EUROPEAN RELATIONS HAS BEEN mostly ignored by scholars, compared to the increasing number of studies, from various angles, on European Union (EU)–