

MASHA GESSEN

b. January 13, 1967

RUSSIAN-AMERICAN JOURNALIST

“To create, and to confront, one has to be an outcast.”

An outspoken critic of Vladimir Putin, Masha Gessen has written extensively on LGBTQ rights.

Masha Gessen is a Russian-American journalist, an activist and a vocal critic of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. Gessen identifies as nonbinary and trans. Known as “Russia’s leading LGBT rights activist,” Gessen was the only openly gay public figure in Russia for many years and frequently endured harassment.

Gessen was born in Moscow to Jewish parents. In 1981 the family immigrated to the United States to escape religious persecution.

A dual citizen of Russia and the United States, Gessen returned to Russia as an adult in 1991 to work as a journalist, writing in Russian and English. Gessen served as Moscow bureau chief for the U.S. News & World Report and as editor in chief of the oldest Russian language publication, Vokrug Sveta, a popular-science magazine.

Gessen served for five years on the board of Triangle, the LGBT rights organization based in Moscow. While in Russia, Gessen published several critically acclaimed books, including “Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia After Communism” (1997) and “Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin” (2012).

Gessen often reported on issues of political freedom and LGBTQ rights. In a 2008 profile of Putin for Vanity Fair, Gessen noted the country’s slide toward autocracy. Gessen contributed regular commentaries about Russia to The New York Times blog on subjects such as the “gay propaganda” law and the persecution of journalists.

In 2012 Vokrug Sveta fired Gessen after Gessen refused to cover an event featuring Putin hang gliding with Siberian cranes. Gessen viewed Putin’s stunt as an exploitation of environmental concerns for political gain.

Gessen, who has three children, moved back to the United States in 2013 when Russian authorities were discussing removing children from gay parents. Gessen continued to write in the U.S. for leading publications, including The New Yorker, The New York Times and The Washington Post. Based on experience with the Kremlin, Gessen wrote articles and gave interviews after Donald Trump was elected on how to recognize and resist his administration’s attempts to silence the press and the public.

The author of 12 books, Gessen won the 2017 National Book Award for “The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia.” The Wall Street Journal extolled its “fearless indictment of the most powerful man in Russia.” Gessen became a staff writer for the New Yorker that same year.

Gessen has received numerous honors, including Andrew Carnegie and Guggenheim Fellowships, and is a Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College.

Gessen is married to Darya Oreshkina. The couple lives with their children in New York.

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