

Partial Russian Justice in Chechnya: The Lapin Case, Anna Politkovskaya, and Transnational Activism

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***Abstract:** Sustained by a transnational network of activists, the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya was able to achieve a form of “partial justice” for victims of human rights violations in Chechnya. One such victim was Zelimkhan Murdalov, a 26-year-old Chechen civilian who was arbitrarily arrested, incarcerated, tortured, and murdered by the Russian police officer Sergei Lapin and his colleagues. Murdalov’s fate became the most famous of thousands of “disappearances” during the second Russo–Chechen conflict. The Lapin case resulted in the first conviction of a Russian police officer for the torture and disappearance of a Chechen civilian. This article shows how this case was both provoked and driven by the publicity, investigations, and international pressure brought to bear by Politkovskaya’s network. The article focuses on the period from the disappearance of Murdalov in January 2001, to the conviction of Sergei Lapin in March 2005. Based on original research and numerous interviews conducted in Russia and Europe with Anna Politkovskaya’s key contacts, it casts fresh light on the campaign and Politkovskaya’s role more generally within a transnational human rights network.*

Introduction

The second Chechen war, which coincided with the creeping authoritarianism of the Putin regime, dictated the trajectory of Anna Politkovskaya’s internationally renowned career as a human rights journalist. As *Novaya Gazeta*’s correspondent from 1999 until her murder in October 2006, Politkovskaya exposed atrocities in the North Caucasus. Combining reporting with advocacy, she