

SHIFTING MASCULINE TERRAINS: RUSSIAN MEN IN RUSSIA AND THE UK

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the conception and performance of masculinities amongst two groups of Russian men, half of whom live in Russia and the other half in the United Kingdom. A total of forty in-depth biographical interviews were carried out, twenty in each country, with men of different ages and highly different social backgrounds. On the basis of these interviews, the thesis portrays contemporary Russian masculinities as a complex, socially and historically constructed phenomenon, situated within large-scale social and political processes. It explores the most prominent reference points and social hierarchies employed by the respondents in order to negotiate their individual gender projects, and shows how these are culture-specific, context-specific, and rooted both in individual life history and in the social, economical and political realities of different historical periods.

While the respondents play an active role in defining and constructing their own masculinities, they do so within the macro-parameters laid down by the state, in accordance with broader socio-cultural and political factors. Shifts in the macro-parameters (such as the collapse of the Soviet Union or migration to another country) change the environment in which an individual lives and give rise to new resources for negotiating masculinity. Like the reference points and social hierarchies referred to above, these new resources are rooted in specific historical, cultural, political and personal events. Each resource belongs to a particular social topography that orients people towards the places, practices and discourses which they need to realise their masculinity. The main empirical findings in the thesis are ordered in accordance with the contexts, reference points and hierarchies for making masculinity which were referred to by the research participants themselves. The dissertation is structured around four contexts which emerged from the data: (i) the Soviet past; (ii) the first post-Soviet decade (the 1990s); (iii) the second post-Soviet decade (the 2000s); (iv) the immigration period.

I explore different masculinity construction strategies and the reference points on which they rely as the site of a socio-cultural power struggle that offers a unique prism through which to understand how Russian masculinities and gender relations are validated and contested, and how they change.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

The Library of Congress transliteration system is used in this thesis whenever unfamiliar Russian words are introduced. I have partially adopted a simplified form of the BGN/PCGN Romanisation system of Russian. This simplified version allows omitting apostrophes for ‘ъ ’ and ‘ь ’ (for example, Ol’ga becomes Olga). Unless otherwise stated, the translations of direct quotations from the interviews are mine.

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Introduction

Why Russia and Russian Masculinities?

Russia at the present time is a country that is seriously concerned with rebuilding a strong state and restoring national pride. The loss of superpower status and the lack of internationally relevant achievements after the dissolution of the Soviet Union have been experienced by many Russians as humiliation. Since Vladimir Putin came to power, the image of Russia rising from its knees and reemerging as an important player on the world stage has captured people's minds. In her most recent book on gender politics in Russia, Valerie Sperling shows that fostering Vladimir Putin's hyper-masculine image has been one of the central legitimization strategies of the current political regime. The emphasis on Putin's masculine toughness is aimed at convincing the population that they are safe under his rule and that protests or the election of someone other than Putin would result in crisis and instability. The aim has been to make people believe that with Putin in power, Russia will no longer be kicked around and treated with a lack of respect on the international scene. It has been a winning strategy. The emphasis on Putin's patriotic machismo gained him popularity, and along with the masculinisation of the president came the remasculinization of the state (Sperling, 2015). But what is masculinity? What can masculinity tell us about contemporary Russia or the course of Russian history? Is there such a thing as Russian masculinity? Does a single, widely recognised form of Russian masculinity exist? If so, how is it different from other national masculinities? Where did Vladimir Putin and Russians in general get their ideas about what it means to be a man?

Russia is in many ways a unique context in which to study masculinities. The powerful legacy of the seventy years of Soviet rule, with the turbulent political, economic and social transformations which mark the beginning and the end of this rule, as well as the Soviet gender equality experiment which failed to fundamentally transform gender roles or overcome gender inequalities, makes Russia a particularly fruitful context for theorising gender relations and studying the transformations of masculinities. The pre-revolutionary gender order in Russia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries has a number of common features with other European countries. Although Russian history, just like the histories of many other European states, has examples of aristocratic women who rose to very powerful positions (e.g. Catherine the Great) and entered the spheres of science, literature and poetry (e.g. Sofia Kovalevskaya), as well as feminist organisations calling for women's equal rights, education, inheritance and social welfare

(Noonan and Nechemias, 2001: 38-40), the overall role of women in political and economic life in pre-revolutionary Russia was extremely restricted. From 1917, however, the year when two revolutions swept through Russia, put an end to centuries of imperial rule and set in motion political and social changes that would lead to the formation of the Soviet Union, the development of the gender order in newly Soviet Russia drifted off the European track.

From the very beginning of Soviet rule, the Bolsheviks embarked on forging a new gender order. This ambitious aim was to be achieved in the first place by liberating women from the patriarchal family and challenging traditional gender roles. This project started as an abrupt and straightforward acknowledgement of gender equality by the Bolsheviks, which subsequently became one of the key organising principles of the Soviet system. For instance, one of the most important laws of the early Soviet years, the 1918 Code of Laws concerning the Civil Registration of Deaths, Births and Marriages, was a historically unprecedented progressive move towards women's liberation. This code, among other things, abolished the inferior position of women under the law, gave legal status only to civil marriage (religious marriages were declared invalid), permitted divorce, gave all children equal rights and allowed women to retain full control over their property and earnings after marriage.

Arguably, as Sarah Ashwin (2000: 5) has explained, 'the Bolshevik state was never directed at the liberation of women from men, it was directed at breaking the subordination of women to the patriarchal family in order to 'free' both men and women to serve the communist cause'. Ashwin's interpretation of the Bolsheviks' gender policies, which holds that a rather radical emancipation of women was a deliberate intention to destroy the social institutions of the old regime in order to legitimise the new political rule, definitely has some legitimacy. However, this interpretation can only serve as an initial explanation. A more nuanced approach is needed for a deeper analysis of the topic. The weakness of Ashwin's argument is in that her analysis is too dependent on hindsight. It is crucial to analytically distinguish between the Bolsheviks' intentions/ideology and outcome/lived reality. The Bolshevik theories of gender failed to understand the power of men over women and centred the agency of oppression in the property-transmitting family. However, it is questionable whether women's emancipation was intended to enslave them to a more or equally oppressive ideology, as Ashwin implicitly suggests.

Interestingly, Western theorists of masculinity note that although men have historically been in power, changes in masculinity most often follow as a reaction to

changes in femininities (Kimmel 1987:123). For example, Pascoe and Bridges write: ‘Challenges to masculinist ideologies often come from structurally disadvantaged groups.’¹ When women organized to fight for the right to vote, for instance, they were challenging more than a set of voting rights and restrictions; they were challenging gendered ideologies of citizenship that bolstered systems of men’s collective power and privilege. But, challenges to masculinism can also come from social, structural, and historical locations’ (2016: 40-41).

In contrast to the twentieth century histories of Western societies influenced by feminist political movements, in Russia the radical challenges to national femininities and masculinities mainly came from above. Emancipation of women in the twentieth century radically transformed the lives of women and men both in Western societies and in Soviet Russia and had some similar effects in both contexts. However, we should analytically distinguish between emancipation in the West that resulted from a grass-roots movement and a wider struggle for individual rights and freedoms, and emancipation in the Soviet Union whose ultimate aim was to destroy the ideology of the previous political regime and strengthen the control of the young Soviet state. Neither feminists, nor women in general were authors of the Soviet emancipation project and agenda. Thus whereas the Western literature on gender relations is constructed around very particular patterns of gender identity in Western capitalist societies, the Russian context is completely different. The huge experiment of forging a new Soviet man and a new Soviet woman happened long before liberation movements in many Western countries.

Russian masculinities as well as femininities were revolutionized from above. The model of Soviet man was formed by the Communist party and normalised a certain meaning of masculinity for the entire society by defining its standards and appropriate manifestations. The idea was to forge a man who would evaluate himself not via his family role but through the eyes of the Soviet collective, a person who would put the good of the collective and the Communist Party above everything else, even above his own family. Infinite devotion to the state was portrayed as the main virtue of a man. His life path was the path of a selfless builder of Communism and a soldier liberating the people of his country from oppressive tsarist, capitalist and then fascist regimes. As Maya Eichler (2012:25) writes, ‘The state’s valorization of the military and of militarized masculinity as a key plank of the gender order was one of the ways in which male power was underpinned

¹ Following Brittan (1989), by ‘masculinist ideology’ Pascoe and Bridges (1989: 3) mean ‘the ideology that justifies and naturalizes male domination’.

in Soviet society'. Despite the serious gaps between official ideology and actual people's lives, and the inconsistencies of the socialist project in the Soviet Union, it is undeniable (and my data once again clearly confirm this) that the Soviet political and ideological system left a heavy imprint on the development and evolution of gender relations in Russia.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 called the Soviet ideologies, including gender ideology, into question. Patriarchy was in need of new legitimacy strategies and men faced the task of renegotiating their positions, their power and their masculine identities in a post-Soviet society. A more detailed discussion on how transition from the centrally planned economy to the free market influenced Russian masculinities is undertaken in Chapter Four of this thesis. The changing macro-parameters of the 2000s and early 2010s created new conditions for negotiating masculinities among Russian men. As Chapter Five of this thesis explores, the major development of this time was a powerful ideological call for, and practical emphasis on, the rebuilding of a strong state and the restoration of national pride. These aims were officially proclaimed to be matters of state concern and an area in which active measures have been taken since Vladimir Putin came to power. Active political measures have also included a number of gender and sexualities issues. During this period gender politics in Russia took a sharp conservative turn and became increasingly visible and widely discussed not only within the country but also at the international level. Given the specificity of the Russian context and its history of gender relations, the theoretical assumptions, methods and general approaches developed within Western scholarship on gender should be applied with caution in relation to Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. In fact, Russian history and the Russian context constitute fruitful grounds for challenging Western theoretical perspectives.

Mapping the Field

Despite the relatively rapid development of men and masculinities studies in the last three decades, this field of research has been developing unevenly in geographical terms, leaving certain cultural contexts under-researched and under-theorised (Kimmel et al., 2005). Most of the existing research has focused on various American, European, Australian and Asian contexts. One of the largest regions in the world that is currently understudied in this field is the bloc of post-Soviet countries. The proposed research on Russian masculinities aims to help fill the gap in the geography of men and masculinities studies. In addition to filling this gap, my rationale for the current research project as I outline in the previous section is

that Russia is in many ways a unique context in which to study masculinities and gender relations.

It is important to point out that in the Western academic context, men and masculinities studies refer to a well-developed body of interdisciplinary empirical and theoretical research, which is closely connected but at the same time relatively separate from gender and sexualities studies and feminist and queer theories. In the Russian context, however, men and masculinities studies do not form a separate area of research neither in terms of quantity (critical mass) nor in terms of any emerging and unifying theoretical framework. For these reasons, I consider existing research on Russian masculinities to be a part of gender and sexuality studies of the region. Also, in contrast to Western men and masculinities studies which emerged in response to the growing feminist political movement and women's studies, in the post-Soviet Russian context masculinities studies and gender studies began as a purely academic enterprise and an attempt by Russian sociologists to 'catch up' with the Western academic agenda of the end of the twentieth century (Popkova and Tartakovskaya, 2003: 42).

As Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2000) suggest, following liberation from Soviet ideological constraints, Russian theoretical discourse in the early post-Soviet period can be characterised as open; it was in the state of reception, adoption, absorption, and digestion of numerous (and mostly) Western social theories emerging from different disciplines and different periods. Among them are classical approaches and the postmodern theories that appeared as their critique. Such theoretical 'omnivory' could be seen as compensation for the discursive deficit experienced in the Soviet era, when many theoretical traditions, which created the ground for the Western critical social theory, were marginalized (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2000: 19-20.)

Although in the following decades (the 2000s and 2010s) the social sciences and humanities in the Russian context have made considerable progress, theoretical messiness and a lack of adequate methodological training in post-Soviet Russian universities persist. The contribution of gender and sexualities researchers studying the region while being situated within Western academia partially remedies the problem; however, these works are often inaccessible for post-Soviet audiences, either because they are written in English or because they do not reach the local book stores and libraries. Some notable exceptions here are the works published in Russian by Anna Rotkirch '*Muzhskoi vopros. Liubov i seks trekh pokolenii v avtobiografiakh peterburzhtsev*' (2011) and the collection of essays edited by Serguei Oushakine, '*Pole Pola*' (2007). Both authors provide a methodologically

and theoretically rigorous analysis of contemporary Russian masculinities and point out the challenges of cultural and theoretical translation that gender and sexuality researchers face while studying the region.

Existing academic research on Russian masculinities by both Russian and Western scholars is invariably based on a direct transfer or partial adaptation of Western gender and feminist theories of different times and traditions to a uniquely complex history and social organisation of the Russian context.² Thematically it covers a rather broad variety of issues – boyhood (Kon, 2009a), fatherhood (Alich, 2009; Chernova, 2011; Kay, 2004; 2007; Kukhterin, 2000), homophobia (Healey, 2001; 2002; Omel'chenko, 2002), male bodies and bodily practices (Kon, 2002; 2003; 2009b; Omel'chenko 2008; 2010; 2014), masculinity and alcohol (Hinote and Webber, 2012; Keenan et al., 2015a; 2015b; Zdravoysova and Chikadze, 2000), masculinity and domestic violence (Johnson, 2009; Khodyreva, 2002), masculinity and militarism (Eichler, 2012; Maklak, 2015), masculinity and sexuality (Kon, 2009a; 2009b), men's health and disability (Pietilä and Rytönen, 2008; Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2002) and more.

In the wake of Raewyn Connell's groundbreaking conceptualisation of multiple masculinities (Connell 1995; 2000) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; 1995; 2000; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), researchers studying masculinities in Russia have made widespread use of these concepts.³ There is a volume of research that explicitly or implicitly draws upon Connell's model and analyses different configurations of Russian masculinities. Gromov (2013), Gromov and Stevenson (2008), Stephenson (2009; 2011; 2012; 2015), Salagaev and Shashkin (2002; 2004; 2005) carried out examinations of 'street' masculinities and masculinities of delinquent gang members. Canadian researcher Maya Eichler's focus of investigation was militarised Russian masculinity (2012). Ryabova and Ryabov (2011), Riabov and Riabova (2014), and Sperling (2015) explored political masculinities. Hilary Pilkington (1996) and Irina Kosterina wrote about youth and masculinities (2008; 2010; 2011). Meshcherkina (1999) and Tartakovskaya (2002) explored 'new' Russian masculinity and 'failed' Russian masculinity. Pilkington (2014) and Pilkington, Omelchenko, Garifzianova (2010) wrote about punk and skinheads' masculinities.

² Those works that are written in Russian language often face the absence of adequate conceptual language and largely rely on transliteration of the key analytical terms from English. See Yusupova (2014) for a discussion of the problem of translation and specifically transliteration in the context of gender research and feminist activism in post-Soviet Russia.

³ See discussion of Connell's theory of gender relations and conceptualisation of masculinity in Chapter One.

A certain amount of studies have been published on histories and transformations of masculinities in Russia, e.g. Attwood (1990), Ashwin (2000), Ashwin and Lytkina (2004), Clements, Friedman and Healey (2002), Kay (2006), Oushakine (2002), Randall (2012) and more. These scholars offer an insight into some historical, cultural and ideological transformations that Russian men and Russian masculinities have gone through. For example, an edited collection by Clements et al (2002) looks at transformations in Russian masculinities since the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725) up to the modern age. These studies provide a valuable but fragmentary background of the transformation of Russian masculinities in history and culture. One of the most insightful, elaborated and methodologically grounded works is a collection of articles, *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia*, edited by Ashwin (2000). This book explores the constitution of gender identity in the Soviet system, examines the implications of the collapse of communism for the gender roles of both men and women and notably focuses on men and masculinity within these processes.

What is missing from the literature on Russian masculinities, however, is a systematisation of the insights deriving from this body of research and, more importantly, a conceptualisation of Russian masculinity in a dynamic historical perspective.⁴ Since different authors focus on different aspects of masculinities in Russia there is no unifying theoretical framework, no systematic comprehension of the field, no history of Russian masculinities. The current research project aims to partially remedy this situation and offer a serviceable framework for contextualising research on Russian men and masculinities within the broader historical, sociological and political research on Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. It takes a serious intellectual risk in attempting to develop an approach for documenting a history of Russian masculinities closely tied to the history of socio-political transformations in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. While I am not the first scholar to step onto this territory, my intention is to sketch a map of this land, offer a new framework for understanding Russian masculinities and outline the directions for future research.

By looking at the interplay between individual masculinity construction strategies and the change in social organisation, this study contributes to Russian studies, masculinities studies and transnational migration research. I view different masculinity construction strategies and the reference points they rely on as a site of a socio-cultural power struggle that offers a unique prism through which to understand how Russian

⁴ This is not a comprehensive literature review. For example, I have not included works on Russian masculinities in literature and cinema studies.

masculinities and gender relations are being validated and contested, and how they change. If we understand masculinity as a fluid political and historical construct, then the radical political and economic transformations that Russia has undergone during the past three decades have made Russian masculinities a particularly fruitful field for analysis. This field becomes even more fruitful if we look at how masculinities among Russian men are shaped by moving out of Russia and to a country like the UK, with one of the highest levels of gender equality in the world. I argue that if we broaden the angle of vision and view Russian masculinities not only as an object of research investigation but also as a window through which to look at socio-historical processes, such an approach might have powerful potential for providing essential insights into the gender order, political regime and the working of institutional structures in Russia and the Russian-speaking community in the UK.

Research Outline

This thesis examines contemporary Russian masculinities as a complex, socially and historically constructed phenomenon that is situated within large-scale social and political processes. This research project started with the intention of exploring how masculinity is defined, experienced and negotiated by Russian men living in Russia and Russian men who at some point of their lives moved out of Russia, to a Western country with a different past and present construction of gender relations (one of the countries where contemporary gender theory was forged). I collected the life stories of forty men of different ages, highly different social backgrounds and residing in two different countries. Twenty interviews were conducted in Russia and another twenty took place in the UK. My aim was to recruit participants who were as different as possible in order to see if there were any common culturally prescribed grounds in the way that Russian men strive to signify a credible masculine self. I assumed that while all men are different, from the point at which they attempt to signify and ‘do’ a credible masculine self, their behaviour would be patterned (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002; Connell, 1995).

Along with questions relating to individual life stories, I directly asked each of my informants if they considered themselves to be a man, following this inquiry with a set of questions about their ideas of masculinity. For instance, I asked the respondents to explain in their own words how they understood the expression ‘to be a man’; who taught them to be a man; if they had encountered any difficulties in becoming or being a man; and what the main challenges of being a man in today’s world are. I was aiming to find out how

these men constructed and experienced their gender identities, how they saw their place in the world as men, how they created and asserted their masculine identities during the interview, if they resisted, challenged, adjusted, re-evaluated or retained their fathers and grandfathers' ideals of masculinity, and how immigration and the new social context shaped these processes.

Subsequent thematic and narrative analysis of the data has revealed the most prominent reference points and social hierarchies that the respondents employed in order to negotiate their individual masculinities. My analytical strategy encompassed the following steps. Firstly, I looked closely at these reference points and gendered hierarchies. Secondly, I contextualised each of them within the historical, sociological and political research on Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Thirdly, I reconstructed the social conditions that brought each of these reference points and hierarchies to life. This exercise brought me to the conclusion that while the respondents play an active role in defining and constructing their own masculinities, they do so within the macro-parameters laid down by the state along with broader socio-cultural and political factors. Shifts in the macro-parameters (such as the collapse of the Soviet Union or migration to another country) change the individual's environment and bring to life new resources for negotiating masculinity. Each resource for making masculinity is rooted in specific historical, cultural, political and personal events that took place during the individual's life. Each resource belongs to a particular social topography that orients people towards certain places, practices and discourses that they need to use and occupy in order to realise their masculinities.

The thesis shows that the masculinity-related reference points and hierarchies within my data are culture-specific, context-specific and historicized (rooted in individual life history as well as social, economic and political realities of different historical periods). Comparison of the gendered self-representations of men who live in Russia and Russian immigrants in the UK revealed that movement out of Russia to a more gender-equal country inevitably gives rise to gender trouble (Butler, 1990) and the re-examination of personal masculinity projects. While the results of this emerging gendered self-awareness can be radically different, the immigrants' narratives show that the foundation of their reflexivity, the place from which their judgments and masculine performances derive, is the lived reality and cultural tropes of Soviet and post-Soviet life. The findings of the thesis are therefore organised around four main socio-historical contexts: (i) the Soviet

past; (ii) the first post-Soviet decade (the 1990s); (iii) the second post-Soviet decade (the 2000s); (iv) the immigration period.

Chapter Three looks at the performances of masculinity among my respondents that directly refer to Soviet times and Soviet state ideology. I demonstrate the crucial importance of the Soviet past and Soviet culture for understanding the social topographies of contemporary Russian masculinities by looking at several key themes around the individual performances of ‘being a man’ that emerged from the interviews: notions of collectivity, a binary opposition of ‘integrity’ and ‘venality’ (*poryadochnost/prodazhnost*), the Soviet version of the ‘main breadwinner’ discourse, the gendered ‘do-it-yourself’ culture that emerged in the late Soviet period, and Soviet militarism. The third chapter’s main argument is that the official ideology and legislation handed down by the Communist Party had a significant, although not always straightforward, effect on individual people’s understanding and representations of masculinity. The chapter reflects on the masculine hierarchies that emerged during the late Soviet period and continue to survive today.

Chapter Four analyses the most prominent resources for making masculinity that came into being in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and feature strongly in the interviews. I discuss three important developments that took place during this period, namely the emergence of the ‘new’ bourgeois ideal of gender relations; the masculinization of economic success and the rise of private entrepreneurship; and the expansion of criminal and ‘street lads’ cultures. The chapter reflects on the class formation processes, reconfiguration of masculine privilege and the new masculine hierarchies that emerged along with the radical socio-economic changes of the 1990s.

Chapter Five reviews how the legacies of the Soviet years and the ‘wild’ 1990s, along with the changing macro-parameters of the 2000s, created new conditions for negotiating masculinities among Russian men. During this period, the rebuilding of the strong state and the restoration of national pride became a matter of state concern and an area in which active measures have been taken since Vladimir Putin came to power. The political leadership’s attempts to re-establish the link between masculinity and patriotism have included tight control over the media, a number of nation-wide state programs for the patriotic education of the population and a renewed ideological call for a stronger military and centralised Russian state. The chapter demonstrates how these processes affected masculinity construction strategies among the respondents. I also look at the gendered self-representations of younger men who came of age and were educated during the post-Soviet years, men who are ‘looking West’ and have invested in the construction of fair-minded,

progressive and gender sensitive masculinities. In doing so they invoke the notions of gender equality on the one hand, and race, religion and nationality on the other. A close reading of their biographical narratives shows that these seemingly progressive self-representations simultaneously reinforce existing gender and racial hierarchies and work to conceal systems of power and inequality in historically new ways.

The final empirical chapter, Chapter Six, looks at the self-representations of Russian men living in the UK, discusses the reference points for making masculinity that specifically refer to the individual experiences of migration and contemplates what role migration to a country with a different construction of gender roles may play for the development of Russian migrant men's gender identities. All but the last empirical chapter look at the data as a whole. Hence the twenty interviews collected in the UK are present in every chapter, not just the one on immigrant masculinities. However, for obvious reasons the chapter on immigrant masculinities refers only to the twenty respondents interviewed in the UK. Here I look at seven themes that emerged strongly from the interview data: emerging reflexivity and rethinking of gender and national identity, gender equality backlash and hierarchies building, stereotypes about Russian/Slavic and British/Western women, a changing perception of Russia and the use of individualism/family values binary, the growing role of the Orthodox Christian identity for the Russian immigrants' gender projects, the changing role of homophobia in the construction of Russian masculinities and the immigration as a homecoming narrative among the gay men. In contrast to the other chapters, which end with a discussion of the masculine hierarchies specific to a certain historical period, the chapter on immigrant men closes with a discussion of masculinity as a new form of reflexivity, which emerges in the move out of Russia.

It is important to mention that sometimes the use of the same reference point may refer to different historical and spacialized contexts and is therefore discussed in more than one chapter. For instance, despite many continuities between the Soviet and post-Soviet army, the respondents regard them as two completely different social institutions: the Soviet army is seen as a social lever and a forge for masculinity, and the post-Soviet army as a dangerous place, a waste of time and a regrettable inevitability for the poor. Given that existing research on the Russian military to a considerable degree supports this view (e.g., Eichler, 2012; Maklak, 2015), I discuss the role of the army as a resource for masculinity construction in Chapter Three and Chapter Five. Also, although women or the 'idea' of women is the most prominent negative reference point for doing masculinity across the

data, Chapter Six specifically focuses on the expressed stereotypes about Russian and British women in the narratives of Russian immigrants. This focus provides a window into both their immigrant anxieties and masculine conceits. I demonstrate that these stereotypes serve gender and cultural needs as Russian immigrants grapple with the reality of life in a society, which has a long-term history of feminist political movements and state-sponsored gender equality programmes.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Foundations

What is ‘masculinity’? Although we seem to have a difficult time defining masculinity, as a society we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust. (Halberstam, 1998:1)

As Jack Halberstam rightly notes, defining masculinity is never an easy task for researchers and analysts. Lay people, however, seem to have far less struggle with the definition. In the mass consciousness, masculinity comes across as a self-evident concept. Most people adopt an ‘I know it when I see it’ approach when they think about masculinity. When a researcher approaches masculinity empirically, she almost inevitably faces one specific paradox. On the one hand, in the Western mass culture, of which Russia in many ways is a part, masculinity is often understood as something men possess simply by virtue of being born in a male body. In other words, masculinity is perceived as the natural, inherent property of men. On the other hand, the same mass culture contains a great number of cultural messages that describe masculinity as something individual men should work hard to achieve. While there is a logical contradiction between these two beliefs, most people do not recognise it. ‘[W]hen discussing masculinity, we have learned to embrace contradictions embedded in understandings of masculinity. And we can casually ignore these contradictions most of the time because most of us proceed from the notion that everyone knows exactly what we mean when we address the topic’ (Pascoe & Bridges, 2016:3).

To borrow the words of Lev Shestov, a Russian existential philosopher of the last century, this chapter is devoted to the task of ‘overcoming the self-evident’ (1993 [1929]) and developing a theoretical framework for understanding and analysing Russian masculinity, which combines elements from men and masculinity scholarship, feminist theorising of gender inequality, poststructuralist and queer theories, historical research on gender as well as historical, sociological and political science investigations of the transition from socialism to capitalism in Russia.

Masculinity as a Social Construction

If we start thinking about masculinity on the most basic level, as something that makes one a man, then the term could be related to identity, practices, social relations, social

structures, body, style, performance and more. Over the last few decades, social, psychoanalytic, feminist and queer theorists have approached the concept of masculinity from a variety of different perspectives. Space does not permit me to do justice to the history of men and masculinities studies and map the interdisciplinary terrain where these studies have been developing.⁵ However, it is worth pointing out the major line of consensus among contemporary academic studies that specifically focus on masculinity or use masculinity as an analytical tool.⁶

The central premise of contemporary scholarship on masculinity is that masculinity is a socially constructed phenomenon. Anthropological and ethnographic research effectively proves that the definitions of masculinity vary across history and cultures (Mead, 1963[1935]), while sociological research shows that individual people have and actively exercise the ability to contest and/or enforce the prevalent cultural definitions and practices of masculinity. In contrast to biological determinism, which considers human behaviour to be biologically predetermined, the social constructionist perspective argues that masculinity is not a transhistorical and universal phenomenon. This shift from biology-driven understanding of gender to a social constructionist perspective had very far-reaching consequences; demonstrating that gender is not natural, and provided the basis for arguing ‘that inequalities between men and women are not natural either’ (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016: 38).

The first attempt at theorising masculinity as a socially constructed phenomenon was sex role theory developed by American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1954). Parsons suggested that in order to be a man or a woman an individual should enact a ‘general set of expectations which are attached to one’s sex – “the sex role”’ (Connell, 1995:22). This theory states that any cultural context has two sex roles, a male one and a female one. The male sex role is described as ‘instrumental’ and the female sex role as ‘expressive’ (Parsons and Bales, 1953). They are understood as equal and reciprocally dependent on each other. Within this theory, certain behaviours are understood as responses to different sets of social expectations, not as predetermined by nature. Although the idea that masculinity is an internalised male sex role was an important shift from biological

⁵ A brief overview of an evolution of approaches to masculinity can be found in Pascoe (2007), a more detailed discussion of different traditions in the studies of men and masculinities in Kimmel et.al. (2005) and Connell (1995).

⁶ To date all academic studies of men and masculinities can be broadly considered as feminist-influenced. Anti-feminist and apolitical gender studies as well as research based on sex role theory, while still existing within, for example, men’s rights movements or positive psychology, is driven out to the side lines of academic research. The central premises of these types of research do not stand up to scrutiny and are not taken seriously by the academic community of the twenty-first century.

determinism, the sex role theory was subsequently critiqued and rejected. Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne (1985) and Raewyn Connell (1985) spelled out the shortcomings of this theory and deemed it to be tautological, teleological, ahistorical and ignoring diversity and inequality (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016:9). The main problem with sex role theory was its inability to explain change in gender relations over time and address the issues of power and inequality.

The logic of complementary male and female roles in family and society, however, has permeated popular discourse and is still widely present in much of the discussion on gender. Mass media outlets implicitly or explicitly rely on it; politicians use it to claim political legitimacy; (as a result) this logic is also widely present within classrooms in many parts of the world. Virtually all the gender studies courses and textbooks used in Western universities start from addressing and refuting the sex role theory.⁷ Broadly speaking, addressing the inadequacy of sex role theory, which renders gender inequality inevitable, still remains a central issue of gender scholarship today. As Pascoe and Bridges (2016) argue, it was this frustration with sex role theory and its underlying biological basis that gave rise to contemporary scholarship on men and masculinities. All the more recent developments in theorising masculinity explicitly or implicitly have built their argumentation on the critique of sex role theory.

Theorising Gender and Masculinity

Contemporary masculinity scholarship is dominated by a single theoretical framework developed by Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (1985; 1987; 1995; 2000; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell's theorisation of masculinity is only a part of her groundbreaking theory of gender and gender relations. Since the current research project to a large extent is built on Connell's discussion of gender and masculinity and her concepts provide the foundation for my empirical data analysis, in what follows I briefly review the main elements of her theory.⁸

⁷ It is important to acknowledge that the popular focus on the difference between male and female roles should also be attributed to the historical influence of post-Enlightenment theories of sexual complementarity, the psychological theories of identity formation and 'the inclination of academic journals and mainstream publishers to focus on research findings of difference, which is seen as more newsworthy than research on similarities' (Petersen, 2016: 340; Lloyd, 1984; Howard and Hollander, 1997: 12-13).

⁸ It is important to mention that Connell's theory of gender relations was developed at the same time as West and Zimmerman wrote their seminal article 'Doing Gender' (1987). Both theories are built on a critique of static analysis of sex role theory and make some similar points regarding its inability to address power and inequality.

Gender

Connell suggested that rather than focusing on sex or gender roles, we should think about gender as ‘a configuration of practice.’ Rather than focusing on what is expected (as role theory does), we should focus on what people actually do. She writes: ‘Gender is social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body’ (Connell, 1995:71). Bodies are important but they do not define a particular gender. To theorise gender as social practice, Connell uses the term ‘reproductive arena’, which refers to practices associated with and culturally attached to reproductive differences. Gender is culturally organised in such a way that the difference in reproductive capacities of male and female bodies is used as a justification for a wide variety of social practices in no way connected to biological reproduction. For example, the fact that (most) female bodies can give birth and lactate is often used to suggest that women are ‘natural caregivers’ and the fact that (most) men do not give birth and lactate is used as an explanation of their lack of ‘natural’ caregiving qualities (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016:12-13). When we think about some masculine or feminine qualities, attitudes or behaviours as natural outcomes of male or female reproductive capacities we enter the reproductive arena. Connell theorises gender relations as ‘the relationships arising in and around the reproductive arena’ (2002:73). According to her, the reproductive arena organises practice at all levels of social organisation from identities, to symbolic rituals, to large-scale institutions (1995:71).

This shift from sex roles to a configuration of practice in thinking about gender is important because it allows us to go from understanding gender as produced by social structures to considering how the social structures themselves are being produced by gender. This perspective therefore enables us to shift attention from gendered individuals to gendered institutions. For example, gender scholars use this theory as a tool for analysing the state and the military as masculine institutions.

Furthermore, Connell suggests that a particular configuration of gender relations in a certain time and space is structured on a societal level in a particular ‘gender order’. Gender relations in smaller settings, such as certain institutions, are described by the term ‘gender regime’. A family or an organisation can have a gender regime different from a prevailing gender order. This is another very important shift in theorisation of gender: from thinking about gender in general, Connell moves to a consideration of gendered practice and gender relations in a particular gender order.

Gendered practice and gender relations in a particular gender order are, in turn,

organised by social structures and social relations. Connell suggests considering four distinct dimensions of gender relations (1987; 1995; 2002; 2009): *power relations* (the patriarchal social structures that organise gender relations on a global scale and directly or symbolically represent men as a dominant group, i.e. ‘the global dominance of men over women’ (1987:183)); *production relations* (gendered divisions of labour and their social and economic consequences); *emotional relations*, or cathexis (the structure of emotional and sexual attachments and desires and how they are integrated throughout social life, from the bedroom to the board room); and *symbolic relations* (gendered symbolism embedded in language, writing, dress, makeup, movement, art, architecture, films, music and more).⁹ These dimensions of gender relations should be understood as working together. Focus on dimensions of gender relations which are separate but work together and reinforce each other within a particular gender order or a specific gender regime enables us to address complicated and often contradictory gendered practices, identities and representations. Connell argues that ‘with a framework like this we can come to a serviceable understanding of current history’ (1987:97).¹⁰

Another integral feature of gender relations within a particular gender order, according to Connell, is that they continually tend toward crisis. To make sense of historical change in gender relations, Connell borrows the term ‘crisis tendencies’ and the logic of conceptualisation of gender relations from Habermas (1975). Following Habermas, who analyses crisis tendencies as embedded within the structures of late capitalist societies, Connell approaches gender relations as inherently contradictory, messy and ever-changing. It is suggested, however, that the crisis tendencies in gender relations may have intensified in recent history and have resulted in ‘a major loss of legitimacy for patriarchy (Connell 1995:2002).’¹¹ By identifying such ‘crisis tendencies’, Pascoe and Bridges (2016:17) suggest, Connell’s theory is able ‘to make sense of moves toward and away from gender inequality and simultaneously speak to the flexibility of systems and structures of power and inequality’.

⁹ The wording of the brief descriptions in brackets is taken from Pascoe and Bridges (2016: 125).

¹⁰ It should be noted that symbolic relations were added to Connell’s theory of gender more recently. Initially the theory included only three dimensions of gender relations: power, production and cathexis. A fourth structure of gender relations, which she calls ‘the structure of symbolism’ is not as developed within this model as the initial ‘three-fold model.’

¹¹ It is important to keep in mind that Connell has developed her theory in Australia and the United States, and thus many examples that she uses refer to the history of democratisation in the Western world. Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, however, is a very specific region, where gender relations were revolutionised from above in the beginning of the twentieth century. Connell herself cautioned the readers that ‘theories don’t grow on trees; theorizing is itself a social practice with politics’ (1987:xi).

Masculinity

The most influential and popular part of Connell's work is her formulation of a multiple masculinities model and the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Connell makes a convincing point that in order to overcome the pitfalls associated with sex role theory (its inability to explain the complexities and nuances in gendered identities and practices) we should talk about *masculinities*, rather than the singular *masculinity*. The multiple masculinities model suggests that in a particular gender order there is a variety of masculinities, and these masculinities are in a hierarchical and contested relation with one another. Individual men enact and embody different configurations of masculinity depending on their overall status within a social hierarchy of power and their immediate positionality in a certain social context or certain social interaction. This means that individual men cannot choose to embody any masculinity they wish. Masculinity as a social practice is structured by four separate dimensions of gender relations: power relations, production relations, emotional relations and symbolic relations.

The multiple masculinities model effectively addresses the fact that not all men benefit from gender inequality in precisely the same way. Some masculinities are more culturally exalted and collect more respect, status, authority and money than the others. Connell introduces the concept 'patriarchal dividend' to explain how it works. Patriarchal dividend is 'the main stake in contemporary gender politics. Its scale makes patriarchy worth defending' (2002:142).

Therefore, in addition to pluralising the term, Connell suggests that masculinities are organised hierarchically and thus that 'certain masculinities are more socially central, or more associated with authority and power, than others' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:846). In any given society, there is a hierarchy of masculine behaviours and at the same time there is a specific form of masculinity that 'structures and legitimates hierarchical gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men' (Messerschmidt, 2012:58). This is known as hegemonic masculinity – 'the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable' (Connell, 1995:76).¹²

Hegemonic masculinity is one of the most used (and often misused) elements of

¹² Connell borrows the conceptualisation of hegemony from Antonio Gramsci (1971) who was interested in class inequality. Gramsci theorised the working of ideology as the main asset of ruling elites for retaining power and legitimising their dominance.

Connell's theory.¹³ Although the concept was subject to extensive critique (e.g., Donaldson, 1993; Demetriou, 2001; Hearn, 2004; Schippers, 2007) and reformulation (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), its core elements have not changed. In Connell's (1995:77) words, hegemonic masculinity is 'the configuration of practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'. Simply put, hegemonic masculinity is a strategy through which the global dominance of men over women is achieved and maintained. However, since men do not constitute a homogeneous group, some masculinities are themselves subordinated by the hegemonically masculine practices.

Connell and Messerschmidt stress that hegemonic masculinity is not fixed and is not necessarily the type of masculinity that is dominant at a particular time and place. This masculinity is not the most culturally celebrated or the most common in particular settings, but the one that legitimates a culturally and historically specific kind of gender inequality and hierarchies between men and between men and women (Messerschmidt, 2012). For this reason hegemonic masculinity may only be understood in its relationship to femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities.¹⁴ The concept of hegemonic masculinity effectively links together the relations within gender and between genders.¹⁵ 'Connell's originality lies in the formulation of a single theoretical principle that states that *the relationships within genders are centered on, and can be explained by, the relationships between genders*' (Demetriou, 2001:343).

The concept 'hegemonic masculinity', despite being widely used in social sciences, has its limitations. For example, it does not sufficiently account for the variety of dominant masculinities; it is primarily focused on the structural level and fails to explain how complicity and resistance can coexist and are organised on an individual level (Whitehead, 2002). These are just examples of limitations, not an exhaustive list of them. For a more

¹³ Some scholars reduce the term 'hegemonic masculinity' to specific traits and behaviours and/or develop typologies of masculinities. Connell continuously stressed that this is an inaccurate understanding and misinterpretation of her theory.

¹⁴ Apart from hegemonic masculinity, Connell conceptualised three other configurations of masculinity-subordinated masculinity, complicit masculinity and marginalized masculinity. I do not specifically elaborate on these concepts, as I do not use them in the context of this research. See Connell (1995) and Pascoe and Bridges (2016) for a detailed discussion of these terms. For the current study, it is important that masculinities are organised hierarchically and that practices and discourses associated with hegemonic masculinity legitimate gender and other types of social inequalities.

¹⁵ Connell does not pay as much attention to relationships among femininities as she does to relationships between masculinities. Although Connell does theorise hegemonic masculinity in relation to 'emphasized femininity', she suggests that 'hegemonic femininity' does not exist. This claim was subsequently challenged by Mimi Schippers (2007), who has developed her own model of relationships between femininities.

detailed discussion see Hearn (2007). My research addresses these limitations by taking the focus away from the structural and analysing masculinities as collective human projects that are individually lived out (Watson, 2000; White, 2002).

Masculinity and Intersectionality

Apart from Connell's influential theory of gender relations, the current research project builds on the broad insights of feminist intersectional approaches to gender inequality, which emphasise the complexity of social reality and consider how different forms of power and inequality work together (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1991). Quite often, in order to understand distinct configurations of masculinities and gendered inequalities, we have to examine intersections between masculinity and other categories of identity like race, class, able-bodiedness, age, sexuality, nation and more. According to this approach, gender might be not the most important category to understand some configurations of masculinity and forms of inequality (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016: 225). For example, as I show in Chapter Five, certain configurations of Russian masculinities can only be understood via the workings of race and class. It is impossible to separate one's gender from one's class, one's sexuality and so forth. There has been an almost universal acknowledgement within the social sciences of the multiple, shifting nature of gender identities and performances.

The intersectional approach, along with Connell's concept of 'patriarchal dividend' (2002: 142), help to explain why Russian men in both research contexts (Russia and the UK) can simultaneously suffer from some systems of power and inequality and are privileged by other systems of power and inequality. We simply cannot understand their experience, their performance of self and their conceptualisation of masculinity without paying attention to their social class and the educational and economic conditions under which their identities and practices were forged. The Russian men I interviewed are not simply people with gender identities; they are also classed, raced and situated in a wide array of different life contexts. Immediate positionality of an individual or a social group within different systems of inequality provides an unequal access to culturally exalted forms of masculinity and the production of multiple hegemonic masculinities. Thus this work, among other things, aims to illustrate the complexity of systems of power and inequality by examining how deeply different forms of inequality rely on and reinforce one another.

Building a Framework for Understanding Russian Masculinities

My research project is based on several key elements of Connell's theory of gender and gender relations.¹⁶ Moreover, apart from borrowing a number of theoretical concepts from Connell, I use her theory as an organising framework for connecting diverse bodies of scholarship that I use within this work. Following Connell, I understand gender as a configuration of practice, which is constantly produced and reproduced in social practice and social interactions. Thus, when I speak of masculinity or femininity, I speak of configurations of gender practice. 'Taking a dynamic view of the organization of practice, we arrive at an understanding masculinity and femininity as *gender projects*' (Connell, 1995:72). I therefore understand Russian masculinities as collective human projects that are individually lived out.

The concept 'hegemonic masculinity' helps me to analyse the content, dynamics and organisation of different masculine hierarchies that emerge from my data and simultaneously keep the analytical focus on both social structures and individual agency. Hegemonically masculine discursive practices within my study are largely performed via the direct or indirect building of hierarchies between men and women and between 'proper' or 'real' men and men who are portrayed as not 'manly' enough (subordinated and/or marginalised masculinities in Connell's terms). Analysing the mechanisms and culture-specific logic of the building of masculine hierarchies, I employ Connell's theory to study gender not only as identity but also as a process and a set of relationships. "Masculinity", to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effect of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture' (Connell, 1995:71).

Connell's concepts of 'gender order' and 'gender regime' are the other central concepts for this research project. Following a number of researchers working in the field of gender and Russian Studies, I use these terms to conceptualise the changes in the overarching patterns in gender arrangements and relations in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia (Ashwin et al., 2000; Ashwin, 2002; Stella, 2016; Štulhofer and Sandfort, 2005). Since masculinity as a gender project is rooted in the social structure and organisation of society,

¹⁶ This theory was used and developed in the works of a number of scholars. I have formed my own understanding of the field of men and masculinities studies via the close reading of the works of Raewyn Connell, Michael Kimmel, Michael Messner, Jeff Hearn, Michael Schwalbe, Jack Halberstam, Nancy Chodorow, Michael Kaufman, Victor Seidler, James Messerschmidt, Joseph Pleck, Harry Broad, Oystein Gullvag Holter, Alan Peterson, Kenneth Clatterbaugh, Tim Edwards, Judith Kegan Gardiner, Anne Ferguson, C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges. Throughout this thesis I explicitly or implicitly draw on the insights of these outstanding feminist thinkers.

this project is entirely contingent on these structures and hence inherently unstable. Hegemonic masculinity, understood as the current answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, is also historically and contextually mobile. ‘To understand the current pattern of masculinities we need to look back over the period in which it came into being. Since masculinity exists only in the context of a whole structure of gender relations, we need to locate it in the formation of the modern gender order as a whole...’ (Connell, 1995:185). This historicised understanding of masculinity is the key element of my own theoretical framework.

Masculinity as a Historical Category

“‘Masculinity’ has meant different things at different times, in different cultures, to different groups, in different contexts’ (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016:123).

One of the most important building blocks I borrow from Connell’s theory and other historical scholarship on gender is the understanding of masculinity in historical perspective. This point is rather simple – the meaning of masculinity (and femininity) changes over time. Historical transformations bring about changes in the cultural meanings, social status, power arrangements and body images associated with masculinities. Examining historical and cultural variations of masculinity gives new insights into the development of gender theory. However, change is not something that just happens to masculinities or simply impinges upon them. In Connell’s et al words, change is ‘a dialectic arising within gender relations themselves’ (cited in Carrigan et al., 1985: 580) Therefore, it is important to consider how the changes in masculinities are related to structures of power and inequality. To make sense of the transformations of gender order in Russia in the twentieth century, I step aside from the men and masculinities scholarship and use the theoretical insights of American historian Joanne Scott.

In her groundbreaking work *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan Scott wrote that gender relations are reconstructed every time there is a struggle for the redistribution of power in a given society. Although this struggle always includes gender, its purpose is not gender relations themselves, but the acquisition of social power, of which these relations are a part (Scott, 1999). The redistribution of power and political transformations in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia are important for understanding Russian masculinities while the shifting meaning of Russian masculinities and the commonly used masculine

hierarchies have important implications for understanding Russian history and the evolution of political regime. ‘Some masculinities are [or become] subordinated not because they lack some transhistorical quality or because they are naturally inferior to others but because the configuration of practice they embody is inconsistent with the currently accepted strategy for the subordination of women’ (Demetriou, 2001:344). Consequently within my study masculinity serves not only as an object of research investigation but also as a window through which to look at socio-historical processes.

Through adoption or opposition to specific masculinities Russian men in Russia and Russian immigrants in the UK are struggling to make their way on the rapidly shifting social and political terrains. The study of masculinity in flux, in a state of manoeuvring between different contexts (historical – between Soviet and post-Soviet political regimes, and spatial – between Russia and Britain), as well as relationships between politics and everyday life in Russia and the Russophone community in the UK, has not received proper attention.

I understand masculinities that are enacted by my research participants to be powerful historical discourses, which have the ability to transform themselves into people’s direct speech, and at the same time as a strategy, which is wittingly or unwittingly employed by those who desire to be seen as masculine. My data clearly shows that while the respondents play an active role in defining and constructing their gender identities, they do so within the macro-parameters laid down by the state and broader socio-cultural and political factors (Ashwin, 2000:2). Attention to the changing macro-parameters helps me to explain why individual masculinities of the research participants are shaped the way they are and provides insights into how gender relations change and evolve and how gender hegemony reproduces itself.

In line with scholarship concerned with historicising masculinities, I argue that attention to the evolution of broader socio-political factors is crucial for understanding the Russian context and Russian masculinities. That said, it is not always easy to draw a clear separating line between different historicised and spatialised contexts (e.g. between Soviet and post-Soviet Russia or between Russia and a Russian-speaking community in the UK). This is simply because, when we talk about individual gender projects and identities, this line may not exist. What exists is a fluid, elusive and contradictory field of gender relations in contemporary Russia and an even more contradictory and complicated extension of this field represented by the Russian-speaking community in the UK. Thus, for example, the Soviet gender project was not left behind in the Soviet era; it continues to live today not

only in the post-Soviet spaces but also abroad. It travels along with the people who were born and came of age in the Soviet era. Similarly, while migration certainly gives rise to gender reflexivity and sensitivity, the outcomes of this reflexivity vary: individual people in this study are positioned somewhere along a continuum, from criticising Russia and embracing the new notions of gender to aggressively fostering their ‘Russianness’, which is perceived as the antithesis to ‘Britishness.’ While such intricacy in the data almost always has a disheartening effect on a researcher, what helped me to get out of the empirical woods was attention to the already-mentioned broader socio-historical factors (macro-parameters).

My data shows that the gender identity construction process and performances of masculinity among my research participants relies on manoeuvring between several competing gender regimes which function within historical gender orders (late Soviet, early post-Soviet and late post-Soviet). For example, certain kinds of Russian masculinities are embedded in the gender regime of an institution such as the army. Because Soviet and post-Soviet Russian armies played rather different roles in Soviet and post-Soviet societies, militarised Russian masculinities of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods partially construct themselves in opposition to one another. The former are engaged in the performance of a selfless defender of the motherland and despise commercialisation of the contemporary army, while the latter deem a persisting faithfulness to the Soviet type of militarism and a pride for personal sacrifice to be a sign of being brainwashed by state propaganda and a lack of critical thinking ability. Immigration to the UK in its turn places Russian men into another set of historicised and specialised gender regimes (e.g. an all-English IT company, a school in Scotland or an Orthodox Russian speaking church community in Manchester), which further complicates individuals’ gender projects.

Therefore, historicising masculinities is a tricky business. If we look at how individual men engage in masculinity construction process within a life story interview, we can see masculinity construction as a highly agentic and creative process, which is neither necessarily supportive of nor necessarily opposed to the values and ethics of any particular epoch. For instance, some men idealise Soviet masculinity and reject the post-Soviet masculine ideal of the ‘successful businessman’ (in their interpretation, someone who ‘unrightfully’ took advantage of ‘unlawful’ processes of privatization in the 1990s) or, conversely, deem people who saw any advantages in the Soviet times to be ‘infected by Sovietism’ and generally inadequate individuals. Other respondents may idealise criminals from the 1990s and their rigid code of conduct as true exemplars of real manliness, while

condemning 'Western' men for being too soft and indecisive; or, on the contrary, they may admire 'European' men's sense of delicacy, gentlemanship and high level of education, while deeming the local criminal lords of the 1990s and bandits from TV serials as an extreme manifestation of Russian backwardness. Some men are invested in the construction of pro-democratic, creative class masculinity, claim that Putin is a dictator, and are bothered by the fact that a man can tolerate the unjust and corrupt regime that Putin has gradually created; others completely endorse Putin's political course and consider him to be a real man and a role model. The configuration of such views and the personal masculinity projects that they give rise to differ considerably from one respondent to another and, following Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, I understand the process of masculinity construction among my respondents to be a juggling act. Juggling between different gender regimes and ideals of masculinity, and appropriating different resources for doing so, the research participants seek to assert their individuality and gain social legitimation for their individual masculinity (2003: 114).

I argue that the process of juggling different masculinity models is particularly interesting and important to observe in societies that are going through radical transformations and among migrant men. Broadly speaking, both immigrant and non-immigrant men in my study may be seen as being in a culturally borderline position. Considering that the meaning and hierarchies of masculinity in Russia have undergone a significant transformation in recent years, the experience of presenting oneself as a Russian man is to a greater extent fragmented and full of anxiety, as one must cope with the uncertainty of the context in which one lives, one's lack of control and the implicit threat to one's identity and status (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2003: 133). Navigating between historicised and spatialised gender orders and gender regimes, men are struggling to negotiate their way in a society with a constantly shifting political terrain or in a country with a different set of cultural meanings and prescriptions attached to biological sex.

Due to the relatively large sample and a rather unique combination of the means each informant uses for accomplishing his individual gender project, I do not present empirical findings in the form of case studies or focus on the juggling acts per se.¹⁷ My intention is to focus on the reference points or resources this discursive juggling includes, explore how individual men use the same reference points for masculinity construction, and reflect upon the roots of every reference point and why it became a pole against which my respondents defined themselves. I assume that no reference point identified by my data

¹⁷ That said, I am continually reflecting on the juggling process throughout the empirical chapters.

was inevitable; certain conditions have brought it to life. That accords with the fact that no reference point is used in a consistent fashion exclusively in a positive or negative light.

This study addresses the underpinnings of this complexity and the evolution of the most important resources for making masculinity among the research participants. In other words, while looking at the individual gender projects of forty Russian men as they wander between different (although not always mutually exclusive) gender regimes, I do not primarily focus on the multifaceted nature of their individual masculinities, but aim to extract the cultural meanings that are produced and brought out in their masculinity construction strategies. Building on the work of Joan Scott, who says that in order to understand how gender works and how change occurs we need to deal with the individual subject, the social organisation and the nature of their interrelationships (Scott, 1986:1067), I view different masculinity construction strategies and the reference points that they rely on as a site of socio-cultural power struggle that offers a unique prism through which to understand how Russian masculinities and gender relations are being validated and contested, and how they change.

Reference Points and Resources for Making Masculinity

Earlier in this chapter I referred to the concepts of ‘reference point’ and ‘resource for making masculinity’.¹⁸ These are two other central pillars of my theoretical framework and, more importantly, my primary analytical tools. It is worth noting that I sometimes use these terms separately from each other and at other times interchangeably. This is mainly connected with the ways the research participants narrate their life stories and engage in performances of masculinities.

I use the concept ‘reference point’ in a straightforward fashion as something the respondents refer to when they explain what it means to be a man or a woman or when they talk about themselves or others in gendered terms. The focus on gender and sexuality reference points was the main principle of the thematic coding I undertook in NVivo, software for qualitative data organisation and analysis. At the first stages of working with the data, I approached the interview materials as descriptive accounts and aimed to find

¹⁸ I am indebted to Michael Kimmel for the concept of ‘reference point’ (Personal communication 31.03.2015). It was his idea to compare reference points for masculinity construction among the interviewees belonging to the Soviet and post-Soviet generations. Kimmel assumed that the same reference point might be used differently (in positive or negative light) by the representatives of different generations. Undertaking this exercise was the key point in my process of getting out of the empirical woods of this project and getting past the research stage where I felt overwhelmed by the data. The process of coding reference points and subsequent contextualisation of these reference points within late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian history enabled me to see the clearly historicised and spatialised masculinity construction strategies and hierarchies.

patterns and themes within the interview data. Accordingly, I coded the data thematically and then analysed common themes and patterns that I had identified. At a later research stage, when my attention moved to the analysis of masculinity construction strategies and performances of masculinity, the concept of ‘resource for making masculinity’ came to the forefront.¹⁹

Quite often both terms can be applied to the analysis of the interview accounts. For example, when a respondent broadly reflects on military or fatherhood, these reflections are reference points only. I sometimes use quotes of this type to illustrate the points I make, give a sense of the data or exemplify a certain kind of historical discourse. However, when a respondent explains why a man should be a soldier or a father, when he emphasises his own gender identity as the identity of a soldier or a father and when he uses soldiers or fathers as role models of masculinity, the military and fatherhood become *resources* for making masculinity. To put it more precisely, the military and fatherhood become both reference points and building blocks or resources for an individual construction of masculinity. In other words, individual men forge their masculinities out of different sets of resources available to them. For example older men can emphasise their experience and social status, while younger men may stress physical strength and bravery.²⁰

The focus on reference points allows me to avoid any kind of typologisation of Russian men and Russian masculinities. I do not directly allocate individuals and their individual gender projects to certain historical periods or geographical contexts. The outlined theoretical framework and the scope of my data do not allow me to do so. However, I argue that a unique combination of macro parameters within certain historical periods and geographical contexts created conditions under which certain ways of being a man were or remain more relevant and prestigious than the others.

Reference points that I examine throughout the empirical chapters can relate to social practices (e.g. breadwinning), individual qualities (e.g. decency), masculine archetypes (e.g. a self-made businessman), masculine countertypes (e.g. a traitor), masculine role models (e.g. Vladimir Putin), and more.²¹ Certain reference points within

¹⁹ My understanding and analysis of masculinity is based on Butler’s conceptualisation of gender as performatively constituted. Butler argues that ‘gender is not a noun,’ ‘it is always a doing’ (1990: 24-25). This element of my theoretical framework is spelt out in detail in the next section of this chapter.

²⁰ As I have previously elaborated, according to Connell, masculinity as a social practice is structured by four separate dimensions of gender relations: power relations, production relations, emotional relations and symbolic relations. This means that individual men cannot choose any masculinity they wish. What they can do is to make a creative use of the masculinity related resources available to them.

²¹ Pascoe and Bridges state that historical research on masculinities can also focus on what they call ‘masculine entrepreneurs;’ ‘individuals who – either by accident or by design – became incredibly well

my data have a very complex nature and simultaneously refer to several things I have just mentioned. For example, the so-called ‘golden hands’ discourse, which directly equates Russian masculinity with certain areas of technical expertise, simultaneously refers to social practices, individual qualities and masculine archetypes and entails a number of culturally established role models. Attention to countertypes of masculinity in turn helps to understand practices and identities against which hegemonic masculinities define themselves and thus sheds light on some normative ideals surrounding masculinities during a certain historical period. For example, during the 1990s in Russia a man was expected to be knowledgeable in criminal norms and values. Fluency in criminal norms is sometimes used as a resource for masculinity construction and hierarchy building within my data.

It is crucial to point out that I balanced the analysis of reference points for masculinity construction by corroborating my findings with more conventional historical, sociological and political research on Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Quite often I situate my analysis within scholarship which is not directly concerned with studies of gender and sexualities. Through working with the scholarship on Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, I contextualise the analysis of reference points and resources for masculinity construction within my data and trace the progression of more competitive ideas associated with masculinity. In Chapters Three, Four and Five, I show how some reference points for making Russian masculinities emerge and others decline in accordance with the changing socio-political conditions. The last empirical chapter on the immigrants in the UK, however, does not focus on the history of Britain in the same way that the previous chapters focus on the history of Russia. This part of my work is primarily concerned with Russian men’s migration experience and discusses the reference points which directly originate from their movement out of Russia and their lived experience in a country with a different construction of gender roles. A detailed discussion of the history of gender relations in the UK is a topic for a separate research project and lies outside the scope of my current work.

known for and associated with transformations in masculinity.’ In contrast to the culturally established archetypes or role models of masculinity, masculine entrepreneurs are those who forge new models and thus ‘provide important information about transformations and periods of history in which the meanings of masculinity were in flux’ (2016: 43-44). In Chapter Five, I explain why Vladimir Putin is a masculine entrepreneur, and why his ascendance to power marks an important transition period in the Russian history of gender relations.

Poststructuralism and Queer Theory

Following Connell, I study masculinity as a configuration of practice; however, my research (built on biographical interviews and personal narratives) is primarily concerned with the dimension of gender relations that Connell refers to as ‘symbolic relations.’²² I study how narratives and discursive performances of Russian masculinities support certain configurations of practice as masculine and how they (re)produce gendered relations of power and inequality. As I have previously mentioned, conceptualisation of symbolic relations within Connell’s theory is less developed than other elements of her theory of gender relations. Therefore, I turn to the poststructuralist theories of gender and specifically to queer theory. Poststructuralism and queer theory emerged outside of social science and at times are at odds with social science methodologies and research logic.²³ Nevertheless, sociologists of gender and sexuality, such as Rupp and Taylor (2003), Seidman (2002), Bettie (2003) and Schippers (2000), to name just a few, have effectively utilised aspects of queer theory in their empirical work. My intention is to build on the methodologies of these scholars and, using queer theory, demonstrate that masculinity can be profitably understood as a discourse and performance which operates by drawing symbolic boundaries between the self and the others.

Poststructuralism originates in the humanities (primarily in literature, film studies and cultural history) and has been mainly concerned with the ways language shapes the meanings people attribute to things and processes as well as their own lived experience and outside reality. Poststructuralism studies the functioning of language, investigates how meaning is created and interrogates the relationship between knowledge, power, truth and subjectivity. ‘Inherent in this approach is the understanding that things, categories, identities, and phenomena as well as reality itself are a lot less stable than we are accustomed to treat them. These various “things” that we study, poststructuralists suggest, are not “actually” out there in any stable or enduring way, but are actively created through the way we talk and write about them. This is not to deny the reality or *realness* of the things we study – it simply questions the origins, longevity, and durability of this reality’ (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016:326).

Poststructuralist theorising about sexuality has primarily taken the form of queer theory. Queer theory, which emerged in the late 1980s, builds on poststructuralist critique

²² Connell attributes meaning, language, ideologies, truth claims and more to the symbolic dimension of gender relations.

²³ I outline the main points of critique and tensions between social sciences and queer theory later on in this chapter.

of identity's coherence, on Michael Foucault's theorisation of history and sexuality²⁴ and on interactionist approach to gender, which demonstrates that gender is accomplished through day-to-day interactions (West and Zimmerman, 1987).²⁵ Queer theory's focus is on the study of sexuality. However, in contrast to gay and lesbian studies, which existed on the margins of sociology before the 1990s, queer theory does not treat sexuality as a separate dimension of identity (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual) but instead draws attention to the ways sexuality structures all aspects of social life and social institutions and effectively proves that social theorising itself is structured by implicit assumptions about sexuality.

Stein and Plummer write, 'Much as feminists began treating gender as a primary lens for understanding problems that did not initially look gender-specific, for queer theorists the personal life is sexualized – and heterosexualized – and so are politics and economics, and just about everything else under the sun' (1994:182). Stein and Plummer outline four hallmarks of queer theory. First, it 'sees sexual power embodied in different levels of social life, expressed discursively and enforced through boundaries and binary divides' – primarily through such binary oppositions as man/woman, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, gay/straight, black/white, majority/minority and more.²⁶ Secondly, it problematizes sexual and gender categories and identities, claiming that identities are always uncertain and volatile. Third, it rejects civil rights strategies (e.g. protesting and parading) 'in favour of a politics of carnival, transgression, and parody which leads to deconstruction, decentering, revisionist readings, and an antiassimilationist politics.' Finally queer theory interrogates areas normally not seen as the terrains of sexuality (e.g., politics and economics) (1994:182).²⁷

What queer theory did for masculinities studies was to detach them from male bodies. Eve Sedgwick writes, 'it is important to drive a wedge in, early and often and if

²⁴ The key component of queer theory is Foucault's concept of discourse, which links power and knowledge (1978).

²⁵ West and Zimmerman define gender as 'the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category' (1987:127). In other words, individual people are expected to act either like women or like men. If some people are not 'doing gender' correctly, others hold them accountable for this.

²⁶ Sedgwick (1990) explains that these binary oppositions are categorical pairs that define each other. This interdependence, however, is not neutral but is imbued with power relations and works to linguistically (re)construct social inequalities.

²⁷ Queer theorists build on the powerful intellectual legacy of a French historian and philosopher, Michael Foucault. Foucault has explained how 'regimes of truth,' including 'the truths' about sexuality, are constituted through institutional discourses (1978). 'As the result of the Victorian era's "discursive explosion," Foucault argues, sexuality became a mainstay of identity, heterosexual monogamy came to function as a norm, and sexual deviants began to see themselves as distinct persons, possessing particular "natures."' (Stein and Plummer, 1994:183).

possible conclusively, between the two topics, masculinity and men, whose relation to one another it is so difficult not to presume' (Sedgwick, 1995:12). As Ann Fausto-Sterling effectively shows, male and female categories are problematic and not necessarily discrete (1995). Therefore, queer theory pushes the boundaries of social constructivism and conception of masculinity as a social construct even further. According to this approach, masculinity as bodily, discursive and symbolic practices can be mobilised by female bodies (Halberstam, 1998; Paechter, 2006; Pascoe, 2007).²⁸

No queer theorist is more famous for making and galvanising all the points made in the previous paragraphs of this section than American philosopher Judith Butler. Due to lack of space, however, I cannot elaborate on Butler's famous rethinking of the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality.²⁹ For the purpose of this study, I only briefly focus on her theorising of performativity of gender and sexuality in the formation of identities.

Gender and Performativity

Mainstream sociology (including the work of Raewyn Connell) today understand gender identities as constituted by social structures and individual agency. That is, individuals situated within the broad institutional structures are restricted by these structures, by prevalent social scripts, by social labelling and by the material resources available to them (Giddens, 1984). However, at the same time they can exercise agency and creatively navigate these structures, individually or collectively undermine them, and transform the meanings associated with certain identities. For example, the feminist movement constitutes a collective effort to challenge the meaning of the category 'woman' and transform the social structures in a way that would benefit women collectively. This structure/agency paradigm views an individual as partially autonomous of social structures. '[E]ven though the self is a social creation according to this paradigm, there is a core self that has the capacity to reflect on and interact with the social environment in ways that can either reproduce or change that environment' (Valocchi, 2005: 755).

In line with its deconstructive approach to binary oppositions, queer theory dismantles the structure/agency dualism (Stein, 1989). '[A]gency itself is a social creation, and the resistance registered by social actors...occurs within the manifold forces that both

²⁸ Although I do acknowledge the existence of female masculinities (Halberstam, 1998) and recognise that girls and women do masculinity too (Pascoe 2007), the current research project is not designed to address this set of issues. That said, in line with the queer theory agenda I do interrogate the boundaries between discursive constructions of masculinities and femininities and call these boundaries into question.

²⁹ Butler's distinct contribution lies in the argument that institutionalised heterosexuality created gender (Butler, 1997:135).

call the social actor into existence and shape the resistance of that social actor against the same forces' (Valocchi, 2005: 756). This point is best captured by Judith Butler's work on the performativity of gender and sexuality. According to Butler, identities do not arise via the expression of gender and sexuality but rather are constituted as the effect of the repeated citation of cultural signs and conventions associated with gender and sexuality (which makes identities multiple, fractured and assembled from an infinite number of potential combinations and intersections, e.g. age, nationality, race). The human subject constitutes and is being constituted through the systems of meanings, norms and cultural taxonomies. Since these systems are not historically and contextually stable, identities, which arise by citing them, are inherently unstable as well. In other words, queer theory questions the stability of self. Peterson writes, 'The critique of identity does not necessarily mean that one should disavow identity, but rather that one needs to be constantly aware of the fictitious character of identity and of the dangers of imposing identity' (2016: 342). This theory shifts the attention from the social structures to the normative and discursive structures, from power as an external force operating through social institutions to the power of norms and discourses.

In her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), drawing on the queer practices of drag, cross-dressing, and butch-femme, Butler develops a conception of gender as performatively constituted. Butler argues that 'gender is not a noun,' 'it is always a doing' (1990: 24-25). People produce gender through their everyday actions. When people repeatedly act 'feminine' or 'masculine' they actually create these identity categories themselves (categories from which 'masculine' and 'feminine' practices are usually assumed to emerge). Butler states that gender is created through repeated reference to or invocation of gendered norms. If a person is not repeatedly citing gendered cultural norms, he or she then risks not being recognised as a culturally intelligible subject. At the same time, gender is done by repeated repudiation of 'constitutive outside' (Butler, 1993:3), which includes everything that is excluded from a socially recognisable gender category. Thus, doing gender, in part, consists of the continual iteration and repudiation of 'the Other,' a process that Butler calls 'abjection.' According to Butler, abjection plays a crucial role in creating a gendered subject. By constantly naming and repudiating some individuals, groups or aspects of identity, appearance, behaviour, etc. as not 'normal' or not culturally 'intelligible,' people affirm their own identities and constitute binary distinctions, which stabilise and consolidate a coherent subject (1990:171). So, according to Butler, gender is the discursive construction and interactional

accomplishment.

Butler attends to how gender (and sexuality) is discursively produced. '[W]e are all controlled by a discourse about identities that disciplines us to inhabit, craft, and embrace recognizable identities. We do so by constantly monitoring ourselves, our behaviors, and all manner of identity practices. The more closely we are able to approximate "normal" identities, the more social rewards we receive' (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016: 329).

Butler writes:

Gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express... To claim that there is no performer prior to the performed, that the performance is performative, that the performance constitutes the appearance of a "subject" as its effect is difficult to accept. This difficulty is the result of a predisposition to think of sexuality and gender as "expressing" in some indirect or direct way a psychic reality that precedes it (Butler, 1993b: 314-15).

As previously mentioned, there are some ongoing tensions between social studies of gender and sexualities, and queer theory. First, although queer theory effectively critiques the social sciences paradigm of structure/agency, decouples gender and sexual identity from sexual preferences and points to implicit biological reductionism within a great deal of social theorising and masculinities scholarship,³⁰ its weakness lies in its almost exclusive focus on literary and cultural texts (Gamson, 1994). The main point of criticism is that queer theory ignores the materiality of life and social inequalities (Seidman, 1997). In contrast, social sciences have been primarily concerned with inequality and institutional analysis. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that, although there is a symbolic component to masculinity, masculinity should not be reduced to a cultural norm. They write:

Discursive perspectives emphasize the symbolic dimension, whereas the concept of hegemonic masculinity was formulated within a multidimensional understanding of gender. Although any specification of hegemonic masculinity typically involves the formulation of cultural ideals, it should not be regarded only as a cultural norm. Gender relations also are constituted through non-discursive practices, including wage labor, violence, sexuality, domestic labor, and childcare, as well as through

³⁰ That is, scholarship which conflates masculinity with what men do. When researchers explicitly or implicitly reduce masculinity to the male body, they reify biological categories of male and female and the assumed biological basis of gender.

unreflective routinized actions (2005: 842).

Another major limitation of queer theory is its unapologetically dense theoretical jargon, which limits its readers to high-flying academics in humanities and social sciences. Many social theorists, in contrast, have been increasingly invested in so-called public sociology and popularisation of theoretical insights and empirical findings. Finally, as Stein and Plummer argue, ‘Although sexuality is constructed through various discourses, individuals are not simply passive recipients of the cultural construction. They use them creatively, accepting parts of them, rejecting others, to actively construct their lives. Queer theorists have attuned us to the importance of looking at texts, but as sociologists we need to look at how identities are constituted in the cultural practices of everyday life, though mediated by text’ (1994:184-185). Sociologists can incorporate insights of queer theory and provide a more grounded and more accessible approach.

The current research project is informed to a considerable extent by Butler’s notion of performativity (1990; 1993) but at the same time is not reduced to it. I view individual masculinity projects enacted during the life story interview as the effect of repeated performance of certain cultural signs and conventions associated with masculinity in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Attention to the discursive production of masculinity is the key feature of my research project. However, I attribute transformations in masculinity construction strategies, and the reference points these strategies rely on, to aspects of the organisation and structure of the societies in which they emerge and do not deny human agency and the possibility for the self to fashion itself. The current research project deploys insights from queer theory to get a more refined sense of how gender and sexuality structure the fabric of social life and aims to help us to understand masculinity not only as a configuration of practice but also as discursive culture.

Concluding Remarks

Although the research participants (and most people I know in my personal life) perceive masculinity as a stable and objective thing, contemporary social theory influenced by poststructuralist insights shows that masculinity can only be understood in plural, as masculinities, and as something which is anything but stable and natural. It is also widely acknowledged now across the academic disciplines that masculinity is not a monolithic and fixed entity, but the confluence of multiple processes and relationships. ‘Although dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity work constantly to maintain an appearance of

permanence, stability, and naturalness, the numerous masculinities in every society are contingent, fluid, socially and historically constructed, changeable and constantly changing, variously institutionalized, and recreated through media representations and individual and collective performances' (Gardiner, 2002:11).

Within the context of this research project based on life story interviews, I approach masculinity as a performance and, using Messerschmidt's words, as a 'situated accomplishment' (1993:79), meaning that, in order to enact masculinity, to present themselves as masculine, and to feel masculine, interviewees (situated within different structural positions) make use of the different resources over which they have some control.³¹ Blending the theoretical insights from sociological research on men and masculinities and feminist and queer theories, I conceptualise masculinity as a configuration of practice, which is organised in relation to the structure of gender relations, and as produced, contested and transformed through discursive processes. Because of the intense identity work that occurs during the life story interview, this is a particularly fruitful site for illuminating and developing these theoretical issues.³²

People are socialised into a collective understanding of what masculinity and femininity mean, yet at the same time can actively challenge and transform conventional gender representations. In other words, this work understands masculinity not as a property of an individual, but as historically and culturally specific practices and discourses that exist independently of individual people while nonetheless being enacted by them (Connell, 1995). Butler's concept of the constitution of gender through 'repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (1990:43-44) helps me to explain how seemingly individualised manifestations of masculinity within the interview interactions with Russian men are actually ritualised cultural patterns constituting masculinity. Looking at masculinities of forty respondents without paying attention to larger structural patterns would have resulted in overly individualised and psychologised analysis. Also, this type of analysis would have distorted larger issues of inequality. To avoid these sorts of distortions, I contextualise my findings within institutional gender processes. Attention to

³¹ As I have already mentioned earlier in this chapter, individual men within my study engage in creative juggling between different practices and discourses of masculinity in order to present themselves in the best possible light and get legitimation for their individual masculinity projects.

³² Connell and Messerschmidt state that life-history research is also a fruitful site for the studies of hegemonic masculinity: 'The concept of hegemonic masculinity embeds a historically dynamic view of gender in which it is impossible to erase the subject. This is why life-history studies have become a characteristic genre of work on hegemonic masculinity' (2005: 843).

masculine hierarchies, in turn, helps me to illuminate how gender relationships are organised hierarchically. Thus, I show that plurality of masculinities is not neutral. Masculinities are not just different but are shaped by power and different forms of inequalities.

To understand the masculinities enacted in the interviews and masculine hierarchies emerging from the data, we have to historically situate the narrative accounts. I argue that reference points for masculinity construction are symbolic of larger historical process through which masculinities are produced, contested, reworked and negotiated (since normative masculinity is embattled terrain). Through my analysis of resources or reference points for making masculinities among the research participants of different ages and highly different social backgrounds, I want to show that Russian masculinities have undergone significant transformations within a relatively limited period of Russian history and change, along with, in some cases, the movement out of Russia. By contextualising the reference points for masculinity construction that emerge from the data within the changing macro parameters in Russia, I want to arrive at a better understanding of where and how new masculinities emerge, what they mean and how power and social inequalities are challenged and reproduced.

Chapter 2. Methodology

Introduction to the Research Idea

The idea for this research project initially came from my own experience of moving out of Russia and living abroad. In 2011, as a Fulbright scholar I moved from my home city Samara (Russia) to New York City (USA), coincidentally the home of one of the largest Russian-speaking communities in the world. The reality of life in a country which has a long history of feminist political movements, an independent media (essential to the operation of a public sphere of open debate) and state-sponsored gender equality programmes, deeply affected my understanding of gender identity construction mechanisms and the dynamics of gender relations in my home country. Conversations with other migrants and international students from the post-Soviet spaces suggested that moving to a more socially and legally gender equal environment inevitably produces a profound reflection on various gender and sexuality related issues. I noticed that the women immigrants from post-Soviet countries I spoke to were seemingly far happier with different gender arrangements than men. Over time it also caught my attention that heterosexual women-immigrants were more likely to be in relationships with USA-born men than their male counterparts were with USA-born women.³³ Since I had already had a background in gender studies and could sense a number of intriguing power dynamics within my personal conversations with post-Soviet immigrants in the USA, the research proposal started to gradually take shape. Although Russian-speaking communities in the USA and the UK have a number of important differences, both of these countries are English-speaking, have a history of feminist political movements and currently employ a similar set of anti-discriminatory gender policies. The insights and ideas that came into being during my Fulbright year in New York happened to be equally applicable in the British context.

The approach used in the study is based on a social constructivist paradigm and understands gender as one of the main organising principles of social life. Instead of approaching masculinity (and femininity) as a somehow 'natural' or psychological set of individual traits and characteristics, this study goes beyond the bio-deterministic interpretations of gender and comprehends it as a socially constructed category and a strategy that particular individuals (wittingly or unwittingly) engage in. I started this research project with the following questions in mind: Is there such a thing as Russian

³³ Later on I found published research that was concerned with the same issue. For example, Larissa Remennick (2005) investigates why Russian immigrant women in Israel are more popular than men.

masculinity? Does a single, widely recognised form of Russian masculinity exist? How do Russian men see their place in the world as men? How are masculine identities created and asserted? How do normative values of masculinity enter men's practices and narratives? How do ideologies of masculinity inform and define the lived experience both of Russian men living in Russia and Russian immigrants in the UK, and what are the specific features of these ideologies? Do immigration and a new social, cultural and legal environment change Russian men's ideas about masculinity? Does life in British society (re)shape Russian men's sense of themselves as men? Although the actual research process changed the framing, focus and scope of these questions many times before I finally came up with a dissertation structure and started to draw all the empirical findings and analytical notes together, over the course of this work I still hope to address most of them.

Contemporary men and masculinities studies are diverse and may have radically different covert or overt political agendas. There is a large range of different research methodologies and quite a lot of disagreement between representatives of different disciplines and generations. Nevertheless, at present, feminist-inflected masculinities studies have reached a consensus about some previously contentious questions. One of the principal points of agreement is recognising that masculinity is a historical and cultural phenomenon that works differently in different times and places. It is also widely acknowledged now across the academic disciplines that masculinity is not a monolithic and fixed entity, but the confluence of multiple processes and relationships.

If we look at my first question, 'Is there such thing as Russian masculinity?', from this perspective the answer will be both 'yes' and 'no.' *Yes*, because any given society at any given historical period does have influential dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity, against which people measure themselves. As Connell and Messerschmidt put it, 'hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them' (2005: 846). *No*, firstly, because the very nature of the phenomenon under study does not allow us to use this term in the singular (multiple patterns of masculinity in a given context are themselves in the process of constant change), and secondly, because the specific national 'cultures' are not homogeneous and are themselves being shaped by global and transnational processes, even when they define themselves through resistance (Hearn et al., 2013).

Although Russian masculinities as the object of study appear to be extremely volatile, it does not make the research process a futile exercise. If one acknowledges the

plurality of practices and discourses that are integrated into an individual masculinity project, is willing to consider individual positionality and agency as essential parts of the gender identity construction and understand masculinity as a historical category, strategy and process, such a study might have a powerful potential of providing essential insights into the gender order, political regime and working of institutional structures in a given society. 'If we broaden the angle of vision, we can see masculinity, not as an isolated object, but as an aspect of a larger structure' (Connell, 1995:67).

In order to achieve the study's aims and address such a complex set of questions, the correct method needs to be carefully chosen. In the following section, I introduce the life story interview method and argue that it is the most suitable way to generate data for this research.

Life Story Interview

How can one study masculinity and its rapidly changing patterns within a certain culture or with respect to a particular individual? Over the last few decades, social scientists have developed a range of approaches to answer this question. Researchers studying men and masculinities rely on various theories, focus on a large number of topics and position themselves differently in relation to the object of their research. However, each approach suits a particular research task and has to be carefully thought through. While planning my research and thinking over which method would allow me to address all of my research questions, I considered ethnographic methods, qualitative in-depth interviews and life story interviews. Finally I decided upon life story interviews as the research method. In the following paragraphs I will discuss the chosen method and explain why life story can be specifically beneficial when researching masculinity as a socially constructed category and a strategy.

The life story interview is defined as a research method 'for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life narrated in his or her own words' (Atkinson, 1998:3). Although life stories may come through many different sources (e.g. biographies, letters, journals, diaries), in social sciences they are most commonly gathered through loosely structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. As a method the life story interview stands out for its interdisciplinary applications, the wide range of research goals it can help to achieve and its capacity to serve as a primary means for understanding the patterns of an individual life. As an approach for understanding individual experiences, the life story interview can reveal more about the inner lives of

people than any other approach (Atkinson, 1998:24).

‘[The] life stories show the centrality of subjective perceptions and evaluations in shaping the life choices. They are redolent with descriptions of feelings and experience of relationships with significant others, with interpretations of turning points, with influences which were rejected rather than followed, with dreams of lives that might have been’ (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997:7). Apart from providing rich documentation of personal truths, ideologies, subjectivities and ultimate concerns, the life story interview is a first class method for understanding how particular individuals construct and make sense of their particular worlds and for ‘discovering the confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are played out in [their] everyday experiences’ (Plummer, 2001:40). At the same time, life stories document social structures, social institutions and social change. People narrating personal lives usually provide rich information about the various contexts that shaped these lives. When a narrator or researcher approaches a life story as a whole, the crucial importance of local contexts, local inequalities, structures of opportunities, and other macro-structural variables become clearly visible.

As Ken Plummer demonstrates in his now classic work *Documents of Life*, a life story cannot only be a resource for understanding particular contexts and how individuals experience, interpret and understand the social world, but also ‘a topic we can investigate in its own right’ (2001:36). ‘Because a life story is not the life experience itself but only a representation of it, we might say that telling a life story is a way of organizing experience and fashioning or verifying identity’ (McRae, 1994; Ochberg, 1994 cited in Atkinson, 1998:11-12). When the construction of a life story itself comes under scrutiny, a whole new set of questions comes into play: Why do people tell the stories of their lives? What makes them tell their stories in a particular kind of way? How is the telling of a story the product of their cultural background (Plummer, 2001)?

Taking into account my research aims, the life story interview accompanied by a set of masculinity related questions has been chosen as the research method. For the purpose of this study, the crucial features of the life-story method are that the interviews are in-depth, loosely structured and, most importantly, allow informants to tell their story the way they choose to tell it (hence ‘[are] more likely to generate a fairer and fuller representation of the interviewees’ perspectives’ (Mason, 2002: 66). The method’s central focus on individual meaning and the unique character of each interview has a great capacity to shed light on how gender plays its role in any life’s shape. Detailed accounts of individuals’ experiences from birth to the moment of our encounter allowed me to collect

data on what particular social conditions have shaped certain meanings; how different social contexts, connections, opportunities and barriers were experienced; and how masculinity was used in telling a life story.

Given that the participants' views and belief systems may differ greatly from a researcher's cultural system, even a very carefully designed qualitative interview about masculinity or different participant observation techniques run the risk of getting it wrong. If the individual world has to be intimately entered, it can be argued that the life story is the most suitable method 'for understanding the workings of a life and the culture of which it is a part' (Plummer, 2001:39). The life story format not only makes it possible to get closer to human beings but even to look at the world through their eyes. We can explore the relationship between early socialisation and occupational choices. We can work out where the informants got their ideas about masculinity, which influences were the strongest and which sources were more important than others. By relating particular individuals' ideas about masculinity to their social contexts - which are highly differentiated, for example by class and level of education - we can begin to discern the unwritten rules that govern these contexts (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997).

For those men who did not have much to say about masculinity (those who never thought about it or just tended to minimise their answers), the life story format often afforded an opportunity for me to prolong the interview and get the data I was looking for. Taking into account the exploratory nature of this research, some significant themes that I am interested in could not always be easily foreseen. It was very important to provide the research participants full room to convey their own experience and views and be flexible enough to pursue gender related topics that I had not thought of before they came up.

The outlined set of strengths, however, comes at a price. Although life story is one of the richest methods in social sciences, it is also one of the most time-consuming. Furthermore, the evidence from a life story interview is not necessarily easy to use. Every life story is inherently unique and unfolds according to its specific logic. For a social scientist, it is not enough to explain each point of view separately; very different life stories have to be woven together. 'It takes time and effort to examine the story from different angles and compare it with other evidence' (Connell, 1995:91). In my case, collecting the life stories of 40 Russian men, listening to the records, transcription and coding took more than two years altogether.

Although the life story interview has provided me with more data than I may actually use in my research on Russian masculinities, it formed the basis from which to

better understand my research topic. The fuller evidence this method provides allowed me to see the interviews as a masculinity construction field and address questions such as: How is masculinity used in telling a life story? How do the men taking part in research construct their masculinities during the interviews? What are their particular strategies for doing so? Why and how do they do this, and with what consequences? Focusing on this set of questions eventually enabled me to better understand how my informants see their place in the world as men, work out an analytical strategy and bring together life stories of people who seemingly have almost nothing in common.

Research Sites

This study draws on fieldwork conducted in Russia (Samara and Ulianovsk) and the UK (Bicester, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Coventry, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, Southampton and St Ives). All but one of my interviews in Russia took place in Samara, the administrative centre of Samara Oblast in the Volga Federal District, known as Kuibyshev from 1935 to 1991. It is located approximately 1,100 kilometres southeast of Moscow, with a population, according to the 2010 census, of 1,164,685. This makes it the sixth largest city in Russia. One interview was conducted in Ulianovsk, the administrative centre of Ulianovsk Oblast. The city is located 250 km up the Volga river from Samara, with a population, according to the 2010 census, of 613,786. Although Samara is a bigger and more thriving city, I consider Ulianovsk to be a very similar context for the purpose of my research.

I specifically wanted to avoid collecting data in the capital cities (Moscow and London), since their inhabitants are likely to have higher incomes, to be less traditional in their views and to have more progressive ideas about gender roles. Therefore, while recruiting research participants in the UK, I strived to interview people who both came from provincial cities in Russia and live in the UK outside the capital. The research participants in the UK came to the country from Chelyabinsk Region, Ekaterinburg, Krasnodarskii Krai, Moscow Region, Novosibirsk, Rostov-on-Don, Sakha Republic, St Petersburg, Tallinn, Trans Baikal Region, Tver, Vilnius, Volgograd and Volgograd. Although most of my UK respondents had been citizens of the Russian Federation, three of them technically came from the Baltic States, but were either born in Russia or have Russian parents who left Russia in the 1990s. All three identified as ethnic Russians (russkie) and expressed loyalty both to the Russian Federation and Russian culture.

All the data in Russia was collected during two field trips: the first one took place in December 2012 – January 2013, and the second in June - September 2013. Using a purposive sampling procedure I collected the life stories of 20 individuals living there and identifying as men. The UK data collection took place from October 2013 to October 2014. If a research participant resided outside of Manchester, the city of my UK residence, I travelled to the place where he lived for the interview.

The Interviewees and Recruitment

The analysis is based on a total of 40 life story interviews with Russian men currently living in two different countries.³⁴ All of my interviewees regarded themselves as men, were born in a male body and had a clear masculine identity. The overall sample includes two groups of participants: 20 individuals residing in Samara and Ulianovsk and 20 Russian men currently living in provincial UK cities. My aim was to recruit participants of different ages, classes, educational backgrounds and occupations in order to see if there were any common culturally prescribed grounds in the way that Russian men strived to signify a credible masculine self. The core element of my research theory is an assumption that while, obviously, all men are different and much depends on who is interviewing whom, how, about what, when and where, the moments when men attempt to signify and ‘do’ a credible masculine self (I argue that an interview about masculinity is definitely one of these moments), their behaviour will be patterned (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002; Connell, 1995). After all ‘if the creatures we call “men” did not do gender in roughly similar ways, we would not even know them as men...[the] claim is not that all men behave alike; rather, it is that [there is] a particular cultural prescription for self-representation [of a man]...’ (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002:203).

From the very beginning I decided that I should not be personally acquainted with my respondents before recruiting them. This served to eliminate me from their life stories and to increase their feeling of anonymity. Therefore when recruiting people in Russia, I relied on my family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours’ personal connections, firstly explaining to them what my project was about, and then asking if they could think of anybody who might be willing to participate in my research. Then, if they offered to get in touch with a certain person on my behalf, I inquired about this individual’s socio-demographic characteristics, occupation, and life style. I strived to recruit respondents who

³⁴ I define Russian men as individuals identifying as men, born in Russia or on the Russian territory of the former Soviet Union, independent of their ethnicity, and for whom Russian is a native language.

were as different in terms of socio-demographic characteristics as possible. For instance, if I had already interviewed an 18-year-old university student or a 68-year-old retired colonel, I would not contact other people with similar characteristics.

I used a different recruitment strategy in the UK. Initially I planned to collect all the interviews in Manchester and started my search from Facebook and Meetup.com groups for Russians living in North West England. I also contacted a Manchester Russian school, went to Russian grocery shops, a Russian restaurant and local Orthodox Church. All of these activities resulted in the recruitment of 9 interviewees. After three months, due to time constraints and the fact that I struggled to find the required number of people with diverse socio-demographic characteristics in one place, I decided to expand my search to other cities. Subsequently, 11 interviewees were found in 9 other UK cities via professional networks and Facebook groups.

It should be noted that it was particularly challenging to find Russian men in the UK who were involved in non-intellectual occupations. This could be attributed to my position within UK academia, the fact that '[m]igration from Russia and the USSR to Great Britain has historically been comparatively low' (Byford, 2012:716)³⁵ and the recently introduced UK immigration point system (2008-2010), which closed a pathway for unskilled immigrants from outside the EU. Although I tried hard to recruit people who were as different as possible, six of my informants either work or used to work in universities as researchers and another six are currently university students (graduate and undergraduate).³⁶ I did my best to ensure that all these men were as different as possible in terms of other socio-demographic characteristics and disciplinary affiliations. Their migrant statuses as well as personal, professional and socio-economical motivations for moving to the UK remained very diverse (i.e. they strongly diverged).

Considering that the aim of the research was to focus on contemporary Russian masculinities, I wanted to interview people who have relatively fresh memories about Russia and could hence make fruitful comparisons between two cultural contexts. Consequently I only recruited men who had moved to the UK after 1991, and who were either recent migrants (including those who are not permanently settled in the country but have spent at least one year in the UK) or those who live permanently in Britain but visit Russia regularly. All my UK based respondents could be classified as members of a new

³⁵ Relying on different sources and estimations, Byford cites the figure of 400,000 (2012:716).

³⁶ Another obvious explanation is that the life story interview format itself may frighten many people away. During the recruitment, I found that while many people are in general very reluctant to share their life stories with a complete stranger and spend time sitting for an interview, the university people are much more research friendly.

wave of Russian migration (or as an extension of the fourth wave that started in the 1980s) (Kopnina, 2005; Pechurina, 2015). In contrast to the members of previous migration waves who were either expelled or fled the Soviet Union, these ‘new’ migrants left Russia freely, for a great variety of reasons, either permanently or for a limited period of time. Migration was a ‘natural’ experience for them and England was in some cases not the first foreign country they had lived in. Using different criteria, many of them can be considered a privileged class (highly skilled professionals seeking better economic and career opportunities). Although only 15 of the 20 UK based research participants can visit Russia as often as they want, nearly all of them were very well informed about contemporary life in Russia, maintained many social and sometimes work connections there and were more than happy to share their thoughts and comparisons of Russia and Britain.

The Interviews

All interviews were gathered during 2013 and 2014, conducted in Russian, voice recorded with the informant’s permission, ranged from two to five hours and in most cases spanned more than one meeting or session. The setting was most often a café or restaurant, but it was also sometimes a participant’s office or home.³⁷ All audio records were then fully transcribed. The field notes and interview transcriptions were systematically arranged for further coding and analysis processes. Prior to the first interview all the participants had read preliminary information about the research (Appendix 1), which explained that my aim was to get their individual life stories from birth to the moment of our encounter and discuss their ideas about masculinity, femininity and men’s and women’s lives in the public sphere and private life.

In preparing for the fieldwork, I used Atkinson’s guide to the life story interview, which offers over 200 questions that can be asked to get a life story (1998). This guide includes the following themed blocks: Birth and Family of Origin; Cultural Settings and Traditions; Social Factors; Education; Love and Work; Historical Events and Periods; Retirement; Inner Life and Spiritual Awareness; Major Life Themes; Vision of the Future; and Closure Questions. I have translated a number of questions from each of these themed blocks into Russian and adapted them to my own conversational style, being aware that ‘[t]he life story interview is essentially a template that will be applied differently in different situations, circumstances, or settings’ (Atkinson, 1998:21). Subsequently, during

³⁷ Although I always tried to arrange the interviews in public places, some respondents preferred (or insisted) on meeting at their homes. In those cases, I always informed my friends or parents about the time of the arranged interview and phoned them after it was finished.

the fieldwork, I adapted and changed many of my initial questions, removed questions that did not work, added some successful formulations and incorporated advice on conducting interviews from the previous participants.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, I also had a number of questions about the respondents' ideas about masculinity. For instance, I asked the respondents to explain in their own words how they understood the expression 'to be a man', who taught them to be a man, if they had encountered any difficulties in becoming or being a man, what the main challenges of being a man in today's world are, etc. If the questions I prepared did not evoke a detailed reply or if they posed difficulties for my respondents, I explained to them honestly that my aim was to look at masculinity through their eyes and encouraged them to identify and raise any issues or stories they considered important in order to articulate these ideas.

Although I had an interview guide and continued to work on it throughout the two years of fieldwork, most of the time I departed from it quite soon after beginning of an interview and entered into a conversation, which felt (to the interviewee) like a free-floating discussion with a purpose. It was often the case that parts of the interviews were indistinguishable from a casual conversation where my respondents and I shared our views, thoughts and experiences, reflected on many issues for the first time in our lives, argued and searched for common ground. At times, I used very different questions with different interviewees; however in most cases I still ended up with fairly complete stories of their lives. During the interviews my role switched from being a guide to being a follower. Some people were happy to launch into their life stories without me having to prompt them; others were not sure what to tell me about themselves and preferred being guided through the interview with my questions. I aimed to leave the respondents in full control of their stories whenever possible and encouraged them to express what they considered to be the most exciting experiences within the lives they have lived. For me and for those of my interviewees who later admitted that they had surprised themselves by confiding in me to such an extent, participation in this project was a very emotional and somewhat transformative experience.

The ultimate aim of these interviews, as I saw it, was building a rapport with the interviewees and making a meaningful inquiry in their lives. Therefore, first of all I aimed at gaining an understanding of their characters, identifying the social contexts in which the respondents spent their lives, and recognising the systems of meanings that they use, believe in or try to contest. Also, as the stated purpose of the research indicates, during the

interviews special attention was paid to gender related narratives. The respondents were encouraged to bring up and discuss any aspect of their life stories which they considered relevant to their sense of manhood.

I never directly asked questions about my respondents' sexual orientation, their romantic lives or participation in illegal actions. However, when any of my interviewees raised these topics themselves, and I felt that they either deliberately wanted to discuss them or just felt comfortable talking about these experiences, I followed this up with additional questions to clarify certain meanings and develop gender related narratives. Nevertheless, when touching upon potentially sensitive topics, I always reminded my informants that they were free to refuse to answer any of my questions or stop our conversation at any time without having to give an explanation.

Positionality: Female Researcher Interviewing Males about Masculinity

Who is this sociologist ... who thinks they have the right to 'seduce' these stories out of people? And indeed what role do they play in all this [?] (Plummer 2001:41)

Listen here, girl, I'll tell so much that you'll go mad.
Oleg, 36 years old, Russia

It's all very personal, but it's easy to tell this to you. I like you, well, visually I mean. If it were a man [interviewer], I wouldn't have answered half of the questions. All these stereotypes would have come up.
Alexandr, 36 years old, England

Well, I think you realise that when you conduct interviews with men, in this interview, we want to look like a man. The interview itself constitutes this act.³⁸
Philipp, 37 years old, England

My research is informed by Donna Haraway's (1988) concept 'situated knowledges,' which has had a major impact on methodological debates with the argument that knowledge is embodied and produced from certain positions while intimately tied to power. The nature of the study that I am conducting (just like the nature of any carefully designed qualitative research) implies that as a researcher I have to conceptualise myself as

³⁸ Philipp's remark is perfectly in line with Judith Butler's theorisation of gender, on which I elaborate in the theoretical chapter.

an active and reflective participant of data generation rather than someone seeking to be perceived as a neutral data collector (Mason, 2002:66). Surely by conducting the interviews, analysing data and presenting my research findings, I do not simply bring out the voices of my informants. My personality, positionality and aspiration in promoting gender equality have fashioned the very things that were said during the interviews even though most of the time I did not directly articulate any of my own views. During the interviews I was not only listening but also contributed to the discussion by sharing some examples from my or my social circle's personal lives, asking clarification-seeking questions or challenging my respondents' perspectives. Therefore I do not aspire to and cannot possibly separate the interviews from the social interaction in which they were produced.

After Mason, I argue that the term 'data generation' rather than 'collection' encapsulates 'the much wider range of relationships between researcher, social world, and data which qualitative research spans' (2002:52). That said, I do sometimes say 'data collection' throughout this work to avoid confusion and as a more conventional way of referring to the general process of accumulating research data. However, thinking and speaking of my interviews as a data generation process, I emphasise that I was not just an independent observer who collected data which already existed in a collectable form. Along with the people who told me their life stories, I was an active participant in our interactions, who, as an interviewer, generated data from the chosen data sources and, as an analyst, actively constructed knowledge about the social world. This is not to deny that the interviews have independent content but to recognise that "research knowledge" only makes sense if we can acquire understanding about the active process through which such knowledge becomes produced' (Plummer, 2001:208).

My dual position as an insider and outsider, as well as my position as a female interviewing males, had a direct impact on how I related to the research participants, how they responded to me and how they (and I) '*did gender*' during the interviews (West and Zimmerman, 1987). For example, my being Russian, having lived most of my life in Samara and being well acquainted with the contemporary and historical Russian culture, shaped my insider position for Samara and Ulianovsk based respondents. Likewise, because of our common origin and language, my UK informants most often treated me as 'one of them'. My outsider position was determined by me being a stranger, researcher and a female interviewing men about masculinity. Nevertheless, this outsider status had some advantages. Firstly, I had a feeling that people confided in me more easily because

they did not know me personally and understood that as a researcher my objectives were different from those of any other person asking personal questions. In fact, a number of respondents, reflecting upon our interview, mentioned that our encounter had a ‘casual fellow-traveller’ effect on them and this is why they allowed themselves to be so honest. Secondly, my positionality as a female interviewing men about masculinity became an additional resource in obtaining research data.

The fact that a female researcher conducted interviews directly concerned with gender deserves special attention. The majority of my interviewees at times employed a narrative strategy of introducing me to ‘their’ male world. Assuming that we had a considerable gap (difference) in experience, they were often willing to explain some ‘self evident men’s truths’ that, in their understanding, by definition were unavailable to a woman. This presumed gap in my experience created a feeling amongst my respondents that they needed to elaborate their stories and provide more information (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2003). Casting light on certain ideas or events, many of the respondents called themselves ‘we, men’ and referred to me as ‘you, women,’ which represents one of the main masculinity construction strategies – actively differentiating from women and everything that is marked as feminine (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2008; Brannon and David, 1976). I never contested these attempts as I consider this identity work to be valuable data. Instead, when I saw that this strategy was at work I adopted a non-expert role and acted as a person who really wanted to understand this matter.

Preparing for the fieldwork, I was aware that an interview situation could be ‘both an opportunity to signify masculinity and a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened’ (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002: 205). It was an opportunity for my interviewees to signify masculinity and portray themselves as in control, autonomous, rational, and so on. It was a threat in as much as in my role as interviewer, I defined the agenda of our interaction to a certain degree, usually controlled the flow of talk, probed for information about internal or backstage realities and asked questions which may have placed the elements of manly self-portrayal in doubt (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002: 205). Anticipating some predictable set of problems in interviewing men, most of the time I adopted a nonthreatening, non-assertive role (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975) and used a number of practical strategies to lower the threat to the masculine self. These strategies included allowing symbolic expression of control to the respondent, treating the respondent like an expert in the discussed topic, circling back to a particular topic, shifting the focus from the subject to the environment, and using conversational

norms of reciprocity (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002).

Overall, the design of my study and the chosen methodological strategy both imply that the data generation for this research was impossible without meaningful intervention into the lives of my research participants and the building of personal relationships with them. This condition has invoked certain ramifications. In the following chapters, I provide a number of examples of how my respondents treated me. For instance, some respondents have tested me in many different ways. Some consistently infused our interactions with sexual content; some wanted to be friends; some told me how I need to live my life or openly ridiculed my research and me by saying that I have chosen a ludicrous topic or that women are inferior beings just incapable of intellectual work. It could be argued therefore that some men used me as a resource for their masculinity construction. For the purpose of this research, I consider these behaviours as an important identity work and crucial evidence for shedding light on different gender strategies my respondents use both in personal life and in the public arena.

Ethical Aspects

Apart from being an intellectually and practically difficult enterprise, the life story interview also poses serious ethical challenges and moral dilemmas. Since the current research relies on personal and sensitive information about human subjects, it required me as a researcher to master the ability to make reasoned ethical decisions throughout the whole research process and be continuously involved in the reflective and self-reflexive process. All the significant risks and ethical concerns that my research could potentially involve were carefully thought through prior to the fieldwork period,³⁹ and then considered and subsequently approved by the University of Manchester Committee on the Ethics of Research on Human Beings.

I have exercised my best efforts to strictly follow the principle of respect, recognition and tolerance for persons and their differences (Plummer, 2001: 228). Nevertheless, the very nature of social communication, social research and the use of life story interview as a data generation method inevitably raises a number of controversial ethical issues, some of which could not be anticipated in advance and therefore it is necessary to make practical decisions and moral judgements on the spot.

³⁹ In doing so I followed Ethical Guidelines of the Social Research Association (2003) and Statement of Ethical Practice developed by the British Sociological Association (2002).

Although I provided each respondent with the research description and made sure that the aims, purpose and agenda of my study were completely clear to them, I had to make certain understatements. For example, I could not directly inform the respondents that one of the things that I was looking for was how they perform their masculinity or ‘do gender’ during the interview. For some people this information would have made no sense, while for others it might have biased the outcomes quite substantially.

While all the interviewees have given me either oral or written consent⁴⁰ to audio-record our interview and use their direct quotes in subsequent publications, most of them were unfamiliar with the principles and techniques of sociological analysis (e.g. interpretation process or making comparisons with data generated through interactions with other informants). Although I made sure that every informant understood that he was the owner of the life story that he provided me with and could refuse to answer any question, withdraw given consent and supplied data at any time prior to the publication of the research findings,⁴¹ it is therefore arguable as to whether a given consent was completely *informed*. As Mason puts it: ‘...it is not sufficient simply to assert that you have gained informed consent because people have agreed to be interviewed, or... have signed a consent form, and you therefore can do what you want with the data and analysis’ (2002:82). The fact that fully informed consent may not be possible puts me as a researcher in a highly responsible position and means that I have a greater duty ‘to engage in a reflexive and sensitive moral research practice’ (ibid) and strive to minimise any potential harm.

As stated in all the ethical guidelines I have consulted, guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity to the research participants are traditionally honoured as the most important component of the ethical social research. However, given the full, rich and personal nature of data generated from the life story interview, maintaining anonymity can be quite difficult and needs very careful consideration before, during and after the research (Plummer, 2001; Mason, 2002; Atkinson, 1998). ‘Such data can usually be recognized by the interviewee whether or not you attach the interviewee’s name to them, and also they may be recognized by other people’ (Mason, 2002:80). As it happened, during my fieldwork I met one of my interviewees on a plane. I was reading a book about men and masculinities, which provoked his interest. After an hour-long conversation we exchanged

⁴⁰ Four respondents did not sign an informed consent form because they either worked in the police or had had problems with the law in the past. They saw a researcher with papers to sign and a voice recorder as some kind of formal inspection and were seemingly uncomfortable signing papers. In these cases, I took a verbal confirmation of their consent to sit for an interview.

⁴¹ One person has exercised this right and has withdrawn the supplied materials from my database.

contacts and arranged an interview. When the first session was over, I realised that I knew this person's sister. The respondent was initially very upset and said that he would not have told me many things if he had known that I knew her. Despite his worries, he was willing to meet for a second interview and allowed me to keep all the generated data.

Even when all the necessary steps are taken to guarantee the anonymity of the research participants, the telling of a life story itself can be a traumatising process. While some people found the experience a positive and welcome one, for others it was disturbing. As Plummer writes: '[I]n practice life story research always means you are playing with another person's life: so you had better be careful. Very careful indeed' (2001:224). To alleviate any potential distress, during the interactions I monitored the emotional condition of the interviewees, strived to be aware of their energy levels and protect them as far as possible from the potentially harmful effects of participating. The same principle was applied during the data analysis and decision-making process concerning which information can and cannot be disclosed about every given informant.

Analytical Strategy

One of the underlying assumptions of my research is that identities 'arise from the narrativization of the self' (Hall, 1996:4 cited in Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2003:118-119). Biographical narratives allow us to see how individuals construct their identities and reflexively examine their lives. In the process of telling a life story (e.g. recounting events and experiences, attributing causality to these events and experiences, reflecting upon important decisions, comparing and contrasting different perspectives and points of view), people rely on cultural norms and models, social expectations and conventions, regional and state histories that are familiar to them. In doing so, individuals favour certain cultural models over others and discursively navigate between different norms, models and histories in order to interpret the world and make sense of their place in it (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2003:118-119).

As the topic of the current research suggests, during the interviews I paid special attention to gender related narratives and performances of masculinity. I was aiming to grasp an individual gender project of each respondent, reflected in his life story, and trace the making and unmaking of masculinity during the interview interaction. Doing so, I hoped to find out if my respondents rely on some common strategies for constructing their gender identities or there is such enormous cultural and individual diversity that no useful conclusions can be drawn. The process of data collection and subsequent thematic coding

in NVivo revealed several common strands consistently present across the data. The implications of these strands are far from clear-cut, however. As the nature of qualitative research and the process of approaching biographical narratives presupposes, there are always different ways to read the data, analyse it and order the presentation of research findings. In what follows, I outline some directions I tried to take and explain the logic of structuring empirical findings.

A first look at my interview data gives the impression that the Russian men I interviewed in the UK are much less traditional than those respondents whom I interviewed in Russia. Traditional attitudes are more vividly expressed in the Russian half of the sample, where the so-called traditional discourse that portrays a man as a strong warrior, defender, provider, head of the family, as being always in control of a situation, and a woman as, first of all, a mother, a wife, supporter, a physically and intellectually inferior being in need of protection, is very strong. The superiority of men over women is usually taken for granted and almost never explicitly or implicitly questioned. That being said, a closer reading of the British half of the data reveals that the very same attitudes are still widely present within the narratives of Russian immigrants in the UK but communicated in a more moderate tone and restricted expressions. The difference between two groups of respondents can be best explained using Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on social interaction and the concepts 'front stage' and 'back stage' (1956).⁴²

The majority of respondents based in Russia seem to be proudly and openly sexist and homophobic in their attitudes and masculine self-representation. In the mainstream cultural and legal context of contemporary Russia, these attitudes (and practices) are not being challenged. Quite the opposite is the case; the current political regime encourages the strengthening of traditional gender relations. Therefore Russian men interviewed in Russia are usually being sexist and homophobic front stage and back stage. Russian men interviewed in the UK rarely follow this pattern. They either consistently express egalitarian, anti-homophobic attitudes or front stage non-sexist, non-homophobic self-representation in some parts of the interview, while overall analysis of their narratives and

⁴² Ashley Crossman explains Goffman's model as follows: 'In stage drama, as in everyday interactions, according to Goffman, there are three regions, each with different affects on an individual's performance: front stage, back stage, and off-stage. The front stage is where the actor formally performs and adheres to conventions that have meaning to the audience. The actor knows he or she is being watched and acts accordingly. When in the back stage, the actor may behave differently than when in front of the audience on the front stage. This is where the individual truly gets to be himself or herself and get rid of the roles that he or she play when they are in front of other people. Finally, the off-stage is where individual actors meet the audience members independently of the team performance on the front stage. Specific performances may be given when the audience is segmented as such' (2016).

attitudes reveals multiple contradictions and a strong gender equality backlash (i.e. they are sexist and homophobic back stage). For instance, direct questions concerning gender equality among such respondents usually evoke positive answers and support for women's empowerment; however, their masculine self-representations are based on statements that accept the strict gender binary and seek to preserve the patriarchal structures and disadvantageous double standards for women in both public and private spheres.

Some ideas and attitudes expressed by the respondents may be shocking for people living in the Western contexts where front staging of gender double standards, various theories of why women are intellectually and morally inferior beings in comparison to men or stories about first hand experience of being a perpetrator of domestic violence are either seriously challenged or considered entirely unacceptable. However, while the exact wording of some such statements seem to go beyond all the bounds of decency, the underlying essentialist gender discourse and traditionalist representations of masculinity among my respondents do have many features commonly present in multiple modern cultures (including the contexts where front staging of such representations generates public judgement). As I have mentioned before, part of the explanation lies in the fact that Russian people in general do not encounter any structural constraints of political correctness for expressing such views. At the same time, as the respondents in the UK demonstrate, politically correct speech does not always mean that a person truly shares the voiced opinions and is not just mimicking the prevalent speech practices of the context they live in. Therefore, despite a number of discrepancies between the two groups of respondents,⁴³ my data does not allow me to say that one of them is more traditional than the other. It works very similarly with other socio-demographic characteristics. For example, age is also a very significant factor; however, it does not predetermine what masculinity construction strategy a given respondent is going to adapt. Sometimes young men in their early 20s engage with a deeply traditional gender performance and people in their 60s seem to be the most progressive respondents across all the data.

A closer look at the data reveals that men who are engaged in the process of creation and assertion of seemingly very different masculinities often rely on the same distinct reference points or resources for doing so.⁴⁴ The most obvious and most prominent

⁴³ As a group Russian respondents in the UK are more privileged people in terms of education, social class and forms of social and symbolic capital.

⁴⁴ It goes without saying that immediate positionality of every respondent is another important factor. If, for example, he is an unemployed father of two, whose wife is the main family provider, his masculinity project is quite predictably built around the concept of 'involved and responsible parenthood'; or, if he is in the middle of divorce, then his views on gender relations would be quite bitter. However, even if we take into

reference point my informants use to define their masculinity is *women*. Typically it is not specific, corporeal women but the ‘idea’ of women and femininity. Femininity and the ‘idea’ of women is the main negative pole against which men define themselves (Kimmel, 1996:7). The international masculinity and gender research at the present time almost universally supports this finding. Other reference points emerging from my data and the ways the respondents use them to negotiate their individual masculinities are far less universal and certainly not so internationally relevant. In order to understand these reference points, we have to look at the specificity of the post-Soviet Russian context and the Russian-speaking community in the UK.

Although the Russian men interviewed for this study have various backgrounds, socio-demographic characteristics, unique life trajectories and are all involved in creative juggling between different gender orders and gender regimes, in the process of doing so they often rely on the same reference points and, more importantly, build similar social hierarchies. These reference points and social hierarchies are culture-specific, context-specific and historicised (rooted in individual life history as well as social, economic and political realities of different historical periods). Therefore the logic and structure of presenting the main empirical findings is organised around the key reference points (or resources) the informants use to construct their masculinity and different types of social and gender hierarchies that they build, while the reference points and hierarchies themselves are ordered according to the contexts they refer to.

Analysis of the key reference points firstly looks at those that refer to the Soviet gender order, explore the background that conditioned and brought them to life and focuses on how individual men use these reference points to construct their masculinities and build social hierarchies. Chapter Four reflects upon how the existing gender order in Russia was affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union and analyses the most prominent resources for making masculinity that came into being in the 1990s, namely, the explosion of criminal culture, the emergence and empowerment of entrepreneurship and the new class formation processes. Chapter Five reviews how the legacies of the Soviet years and the ‘wild’ 1990s, along with the changing macro-parameters of the 2000s, created the new conditions for negotiating masculinity and new masculine hierarchies. Finally, Chapter Six looks at the self-representations of Russian men living in the UK, discuss the reference points for constructing masculinity that specifically refer to the respondents’ migration

account all the multiplicity of individual positionalities and gender projects among the respondents, my data shows that the key reference points they use for accomplishing these projects are still the same.

experience and contemplate what role migration to a more gender-equal country may play for the development of individual gender identity.⁴⁵

To conclude, although most of my respondents think of masculinity as innate, residing in the male anatomical organisation and timeless essence, the process of contrasting their ideas about masculinity and about themselves against historicised and specialised gender orders and gender regimes, socio-political developments and cultural contexts indicates that masculinity is neither static nor timeless.⁴⁶ Masculinity as well as femininity has a complex history. My work aims to explore masculinity as a national and historical phenomenon and map the meaning of contemporary Russian manhood, describing variations in culturally validated representations of masculinity and the ways individual people construct their gender identities by relying on or contesting these representations. By looking into the processes and reference points involved in the creation and assertion of individual masculine identities, this study brings together two methodologies of contemporary qualitative research – thematic analysis and narrative analysis - and offers an approach that combines attention to social structures, political transformations and individual agency to navigate these structures and transformations.

⁴⁵ All but the last empirical chapters are looking at the data as a whole, i.e. twenty interviews collected in the UK will be present in every chapter, not just in the one on immigrant masculinities. For the obvious reason, the chapter on immigrant masculinities will focus on twenty respondents interviewed in the UK.

⁴⁶ Gardiner writes, 'Normative characteristics of masculinity require constant cultural work in order to appear the effortless attributes of privilege they simultaneously justify and disguise' (2002:17).

Chapter 3. Navigating the Soviet Past

Communism had a crazy plan - to remake the 'old' man, the old Adam. And it has worked out ... maybe it is the only thing that worked out. In a little more than seventy years, in the laboratory of Marxism-Leninism, a distinctive type of man has been produced - homo sovieticus. Some think that this is a tragic character, others call him "sovok".⁴⁷ I think I know this person, he is very familiar to me, I lived side by side with him for many years. This person is me, my acquaintances, friends, parents ... homo sovieticus is not only Russians, but also Belarusians, Turkmens, Ukrainians, Kazakhs ... We now live in different countries, speak different languages, but we are unmistakable. One recognises us straight away! All of us, people from socialism, are like and unlike other people – we have our own vocabulary, our own ideas about good and evil, about heroes and martyrs.

Svetlana Alexievich, 2016:1

Back then we were living behind the Iron Curtain and had no idea what the Communist system really was. We only learned this in the 1990s.

Georgii, 51 years old, Russia

When I read through the interview extracts from my data that I have coded as 'Soviet', I try to imagine myself as a foreigner reading an English translation of these words. This imaginative thinking exercise almost always gives me a feeling of unease and returns me to the question of the limits of cultural translation. Sometimes it is difficult to explain why I code certain parts of an interview as 'Soviet manifestations of masculinity'. In some cases, references are quite straightforward and would make sense to everyone; at other times I just sense the language people use (Soviet language), feel the cultural codes, read between the lines. I just know what it feels like to talk to a 'Soviet' person, to a homo sovieticus. These people do not need to go all the way to explain their life views to you. You sense Sovietness straight away. Being a native Russian speaker today, no matter how old one is, means having Soviet experience, either first-hand or second-hand.

Today Russia is still a place where for some people the Soviet past is much bigger than the post-Soviet present (and this chapter mostly looks at such people). Even the way contemporary Russia is referred to today - 'post-Soviet' – indicates the importance of the relationship with the Soviet past. Apart from the enormous cultural legacy, large spaces of the material world are still Soviet. For instance, I can think of many places in Samara where you can remove a couple of advertisement banners and stage films about the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s without changing anything. Stripped of bright, aggressive capitalist

⁴⁷ Sovok is a derogatory term for the Soviet Union or Soviet person (as a regime/territorial identity).

posters, these areas would look Soviet again: same buildings, same children's playgrounds, people dressed in a similar way. Furthermore, if you stop to talk to these people, you will hear the same jokes, the same puns from Soviet films. The Soviet past still hangs over the post-Soviet present. However, as in any other context, the relationship between the past and the present is complicated. If you talk to individual people, fond memories of the good old days and a fierce repudiation of the Soviet regime can cohabit within the bounds of one sentence. Soviet identities forged under a unique combination of material, political and ideological factors are today inextricably tied up with the post-Soviet critique of these factors. As my research shows, references to the lived realities of Soviet life remain an integral part and vital resource for negotiating individual masculinities and femininities in Russia in the 2010s. This is why contemporary Russian masculinities do not make sense if one does not understand those of the Soviet era.

'Proper' Soviet Man

This chapter aims to demonstrate the crucial importance of the Soviet past and Soviet culture for understanding the social topographies of contemporary Russian masculinities. In the view of Svetlana Alexievich, a writer and a Nobel Prize Laureate, the Soviet state wanted to remake the 'old' people and forge a new type of individual, who would think forward, who would overcome his or her pitiful individualistic human 'nature' and achieve a new stage of evolution. These individuals were supposed to truly internalise the values of altruism, collectivism, egalitarianism and self-sacrifice in the name of the communist future and subsequently rise above egoism, individualism and the oppressive class divisions of Western civilisation (Tsipursky, 2013; 2015). However, the ambitious Soviet project, which aimed to build a fair society and erase the impassable boundaries between people, allocated the New Soviet Man and New Soviet Woman rather different roles in the building of communism.

The New Soviet Woman was regarded by the state as a 'worker-mother', who worked outside of the home, procreated and took care of the household and the rising generation (Ashwin, 2000; Rotkirch and Temkina, 1997; Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2007). The young Bolshevik state and the Soviet state elites of different periods saw women as crucial to economic production⁴⁸ as well as biological and ideological reproduction. As Stalin put it in 1923:

⁴⁸ As a result of Stalin's industrialisation program carried out in the 1930-s the number of officially employed women grew almost fivefold. In 1970, the number of women as a share of the total paid workforce was 51

Working and peasant women are mothers who raise our youth – the future of our country. They can cripple the soul of youth. The healthy soul of our youth and the advancement of our country depends on whether the mother sympathises with the Soviet order or trails along behind the priest, kulak and bourgeois.

(Quoted in Lapidus, 1978: 76)

Women's labour participation was integral to the Bolsheviks' political project for a very practical reason. Arguably, the Soviet state would not have been able to transform itself from a relatively backward and mostly agricultural country to a world leading industrial superpower without the full labour participation of working age women.⁴⁹ The New Soviet Man, meanwhile, had a more important role to play. He was supposed to become a hero - more specifically, a soldier-hero - defending the motherland from external and internal enemies, and an industrialisation-hero - a 'Stakhanovite,' an over-achieving hard worker engaged in the struggle to industrialise the country.⁵⁰ His main values were supposed to be the security and prosperity of the Soviet state. His mission was public service. His life path was the honourable path of a liberator-soldier and a builder of the strong Soviet nation, and all his toil was generously repaid with deep respect and a prominent social standing.

In addition to dogmatic descriptions of the new male and female roles, there was a dogmatic description of the relationship between man and woman under the Soviet regime. The essence of this description was that the Soviet Union was a country that had achieved full gender equality. This is partly true, but only partly. From the very description of the New Soviet Woman and the New Soviet Man, we can see that the radical social transformation intended by the Soviet regime 'was premised on an entirely traditional view of "natural" sexual difference' (Ashwin, 2000:11). The Soviet gender order in essence was a combination of communist and traditionalist ethics, a combination of radicalism and traditionalism, which, as one might expect, created multiple social tensions which persisted across the seventy years of Soviet rule (Ashwin, 2000:11-12).

The Soviet experiment was certainly successful in producing a new type of person with very specific vocabulary and morality, ideas about good and evil and his or her own

percent. This percentage remained until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (all figures from Lapidus, 1978: 164-7 and Attwood, 1999).

⁴⁹ Shapiro notes that since 1970 the proportion of working age women within the labour force was close to the biological maximum (1992: 15).

⁵⁰ Aleksei Stakhanov was a Soviet celebrity. In 1935, he mined 102 tons of coal in less than 6 hours (14 times his quota). The Stakhanovite movement, supported and led by the Communist Party, took his name and encouraged working competition among Soviet workers.

heroes and martyrs. Although the reality of everyday Soviet life did not always fit this image because actual people did not often practice the type of conduct prescribed as normative by the official discourse, the Soviet political and ideological system left a heavy imprint on the development and evolution of gender relations in Russia. Several generations of Russian people were socialised into being New Soviet Women and New Soviet Men, the models of which were widely circulated by political propaganda, the education system, art, cinema and literature.⁵¹ These models became the omnipresent ideals against which individual people measured themselves.

In what follows, I look at the performances of masculinity among my respondents that directly refer to Soviet times and Soviet state ideology. I start by reviewing the reference points for masculinity construction related to Soviet militarism and the Soviet version of ‘a-man-should-be-a-breadwinner’ discourse, which not only survived the Soviet gender equality experiment and massive women’s participation in wage-labour, but also seems to be far more radical than its post-Soviet version. Then I proceed to a consideration of the binary opposition ‘integrity/venality’ (*poriadochnost/prodazhnost*), which emerged strongly from the interviews with the older research participants and, as I argue, ties together a particular form of gendered and cultural scripts. Finally I look at the so-called ‘golden hands’ discourse, or masculinity and the do-it-yourself culture, which sheds light on how people negotiated the gaps between Soviet ideology and their actual lives. In the conclusion to the chapter, I discuss the nature of the interconnectedness of these themes and show how they shape a particular ‘Soviet’ meaning of Russian masculinity.

Militarised Socialism and Militarised Masculinity⁵²

Do you have some sort of ideal or exemplar of masculinity that you admire? It could be some historical figure, literary character, or film hero.

Vasilii: Well, maybe not exactly an ideal, but generally speaking all my life my father was a model for me ... Well, I can give the following example from the life of my father. When all the fighting ended, he finished somewhere on the border of the GDR, from there he was discharged and [immediately] went to the East as a volunteer. At this

⁵¹ It is crucial to mention at this point that the Soviet gender policy was not static throughout the seventy years of Soviet rule and has undergone some considerable transformations over time. A detailed discussion of the evolution of the Soviet gender policy, e.g. the key gender and sexuality related legislation, propagandistic techniques and messages that defined the normative frames of everyday Soviet life can be found, for example, in Ashwin (2000) and Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2007).

⁵² ‘Militarised socialism’ is the term I borrow from Michael Mann (1987).

time my older brother was born, in 1945. We still have [my father's] letter. [Imagine] a military train, a conductor brings some canned food, canned meat, chocolate, an American backpack and a letter. "Dear Vera, thank you for the son. Sealed with a kiss, etc. I am heading east to finish off the hydra of Imperialism" – that's it, almost word for word.⁵³ I believe one must have courage and be loyal to the state. There was [proper] upbringing, there was faith, [and] it doesn't matter if the communists were right or wrong... And now we have lost it, I think. [Men] are not being trained into manhood.⁵⁴ But if you take an American or an Englishman, they stand up even at a sport event or some more or less important occasion - they stand up and sing the national anthem. They respect their country. They honour all these things. They are being educated into this, being taught this at home, in school.

Vasilii's response to my question about the ideal of masculinity is a brief but in many ways remarkable illustration of the pre-eminent role military service, military merit and militarised patriotism used to have for a Soviet man's masculine identity and a citizen's status in the post-war Soviet Union. Although the image of the soldier-hero is 'one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions since the time of the Ancient Greeks' (Dawson, 1994:1), this image has a special significance in militarist societies.

The Soviet Union was a militarist country with a strong militarist ideology. When it was not at war, it was actively preparing for war. The Soviet state was not designed for the peaceful life; it existed as a mobilized regime from the first days of its inception.⁵⁵ After the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945),⁵⁶ despite enormous human and material losses (allegedly 26.6 million dead), the Red Army acquired the status of an invincible and legendary defender of the motherland. Post-war emphasis on military-patriotic education

⁵³ From the context of the story, I gathered that Vasilii's father volunteered to take part in the Soviet-Japanese war (August-September 1945). After the capitulation of Nazi Germany, from May to August of 1945, the Soviets, preparing for the war with Japan, transported part of the combat force and military equipment from the Western front to Russia's Far East.

⁵⁴ Vasilii uses the word '*muzhestvo*'. In this particular context it bears both meanings - manhood and valour.

⁵⁵ The Soviet Union took shape against the backdrop of 'shameful' defeat in World War One and Civil War (1917-1922). Furthermore, the Soviet Union bore the brunt of the Second World War. The emergence of superpower rivalry between the United States and the USSR further intensified the ideology of militarism and practical importance of the military for the Soviet regime. The arms race, which emerged as a result of this rivalry, determined the subordination of the Soviet economy to military needs and the prioritisation of heavy industry.

The Soviet economy was overwhelmingly oriented towards military and heavy industry production. The best minds of the country (physicists, chemists and mathematicians) were also working for the war. Their intellectual energy was focused on bombs and other weapons development. In addition to international factors, the Soviet regime was mobilized against internal 'enemies of the state.' Suspicion and conspiracy theories were important political mechanisms, while militarism gradually became one of the most important sources of legitimacy of the state (Eichler, 2012).

⁵⁶ The period of Russian involvement in World War Two (1939-1945) is commonly referred to in Russia as the Great Patriotic War (1941-45)

and the emergence of the cult of the Great Patriotic War in the 1960s established the Soviet Army as an eminent pillar of statehood and a guarantor of peace (Reese, 2000; Tumarkin, 1994; Jones, 1985). At the same time, the significance of the military went well beyond the defence of the country. Militarism of the Soviet state shaped the economy, educational system and culture, as well as Soviet gender relations and notions of masculinity and femininity. The post-war years were a time when military service, obligatory for all able-bodied men in the USSR, was promoted as a sacred duty of Soviet citizenship and the main school of masculinity. The dominance of the militarised masculinity model and militarised notions of patriotism in the Soviet Union ‘derived from the perceived military threat from capitalist enemies, which in turn made the male role of a soldier a primary element in the new masculine identity’ (Schrand, 2002:203). As Ellen Jones (1985: 148) and Maya Eichler (2012: 25) both argue, one of the most important aims of the military service was to subordinate the individual to the collective, forging individual and collective masculine identities that were inextricably connected to the Communist party and the Soviet state.

The story Vasilii told about his father, the story that equates masculinity with militarised patriotism, is a direct reproduction of the militarised masculinity discourse of the post-war Soviet Union. Vasilii is a retired military doctor who spent his entire working life in the Soviet army, so his personal investment in militarised notions of masculinity is understandable. He is, however, not the only research participant who relied on this particular discourse for masculinity construction purposes. References to the Soviet version of militarised masculinity are numerous within the data and come from men of different ages and different life experiences. It is noteworthy that the respondents not only draw on the Soviet legacy of a dominant military culture, but also directly link their responses to the Soviet past.

It is not surprising that Vasilii and several other older respondents who served in the Soviet military are invested in the Soviet version of militarised masculinity and patriotism discourse. The majority of boys born in the post-war USSR grew up listening to wartime stories and patriotic war songs, reading about war heroes at home and at school, watching Soviet films about the war and dreaming that one day they would be warriors and defenders themselves. A massive part of the mainstream Soviet culture was about war, heroism and defence of the glorious motherland. Since one of the hallmarks of Soviet militarism was the merging of military and civilian spheres, most Soviet boys grew up knowing that one day they would be soldiers themselves (Eichler, 2012:17). Apart from the purely ideological benefits, military service ‘qualified male recruits for educational

opportunities, improved eligibility for Party membership, and training and connections for careers both within the armed forces and in the civilian economy' (Schrand, 2002:204).

In the late Soviet years the Soviet military experienced a huge loss of prestige due to the unpopular war in Afghanistan, Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* and the activism of soldiers' mothers, all of which brought public attention to the abuse and horrible conditions conscripts faced during their service. '[I]n the final years of the Soviet Union, the prominent place of the armed forces in society and the militarized gender roles prescribed by the state were called into question' (Eichler, 2012:2). Although the post-Soviet transformations and particularly the transition to the market economy led to an even greater deterioration in the relationship between the military and society, today, as my data shows, the legacy of Soviet militarism is very much alive. This is also the case with the link between Russian masculinities and military service.⁵⁷

Yet as my data and other research on the military and Russian men show, patriotic education and mandatory military service seem to have rather a different significance and outcomes for masculinity formation in the 'classless' Soviet Union with its centrally planned economy and high job security, and in post-Soviet Russia with its market economy, the lack of social guarantees and the growing economic class divide (Eichler, 2012; Kay, 2006). Despite many continuities between the Soviet and post-Soviet army, my respondents regard them as two completely different social institutions: the Soviet army is seen as a social lever,⁵⁸ a place where ordinary men became heroes, and a forge of masculinity, while the post-Soviet army is portrayed as a corrupt and dangerous place, a waste of time and a regrettable inevitability for the poor.⁵⁹

Here is how Georgii answered the same question about his ideal of masculinity:

There are of course a lot of such people. Well, if we take the whole of Soviet literature, any works ... The industry had its own heroes, the war had its own heroes, the civilian sphere had its own heroes. The first aviators who flew over the North Pole, Chkalov, Gaidukov, for example, these are generally fascinating people. The astronauts are heroes, although that's routine work for them. In other words, all those people who could take responsibility for other humans' lives. Our generals are the heroes who led the troops, who were taking them out of entrapments during the Great Patriotic War. A lot of them were killed. Therefore I

⁵⁷ See a detailed discussion of demilitarisation and remilitarisation tendencies in post-Soviet Russia in Chapter Five.

⁵⁸ For example, Pavel, a retired colonel, said that the main reason why he signed a contract with the military after university was the opportunity to earn better money and receive a flat from the state in a shorter period of time. Vasili, a former military doctor, explained his decision to work within the Soviet military by reference to the overall prestige and value military men enjoyed in Soviet society.

⁵⁹ See more on this in Chapter Five.

cannot name any specific individuals. There are thousands and thousands of them. Unfortunately, now it's all gone. Now we have a time that passes without heroes. There is nothing and nobody to say something about, because now the army is different, not to mention that the country is also different. So when somebody gets the Hero of Russia [award], for example, and then it turns out that he was a criminal, fought in Chechnya and was engaged in criminal offenses, this of course is terrible. Sometimes you need to think about who gave him this Order of Hero and what for.

A number of other respondents echoed Georgii and Vasilii's observations about there being two different armies, two different social institutions with almost opposite goals (one serving the state and taking responsibility for other people's lives and the other supplying the corrupt military officials with free labour power) and two different meanings that military service could have for one's masculinity formation (on the one hand that it was a forge of masculinity and a masculine rite of passage, and on the other that it was a place where young men's dignity and health were violently and senselessly destroyed). The perceived difference between the Soviet and post-Soviet armies was strategically tailored to the individual performances of masculinity within my data. The actual and imagined experiences, the personal and political aims as well as the role models that derived from the Soviet military were exclusively used to construct a positive masculine identity, while almost all the references to the post-Soviet Russian military were invoked to discredit the masculinities of those who opted to serve in it or were not smart enough to avoid serving.

To illustrate this particular finding, I provide two extracts from the interview with Stanislav, a 54-year-old manager in a construction company. Stanislav was among the interviewees who advocated the idea that a man is first of all a defender of his family and the motherland. His masculinity performance was mainly based on the notions of defender and provider. Stanislav served for two years in the Soviet airborne troops during his late teens and early twenties. While he passionately advocated the centrality of the military service for masculinity formation and used it to build masculine hierarchies, he confessed that he did not let his own son go into the army. Ironically, the reason he gave to explain why his words contradicted his actions was *dedovshchina* (army hazing and bullying).⁶⁰ He imagined that in the Soviet army *dedovshchina* was used to harden a man, helped him to build his character and prepared him for the civilian life, which would follow his army

⁶⁰ Dedovshchina is 'a seniority-based culture of "hazing" rights that cut across class and ethnic boundaries, enlisting senior conscripts to keep newcomers in line by bullying and beating, while promising the victims eventual access to the same privileges in return for acquiescence' (Galeotti, 1995: 33).

service. Thus he portrayed *dedovshchina* in the Soviet army as a positive experience and positioned himself as more of a man exactly because, in contrast to his current co-workers, he experienced it first-hand and as a result learned to distinguish between ‘dignified’ and ‘undignified’ actions. Yet *dedovshchina* was also the main reason why he decided not to send his son to the army. This time, however, he was referring to the post-Soviet army and portrayed *dedovshchina* as something that should be avoided at all costs.

I'm telling you, I was bloated [with pride] when I was 19 years old [and] we were ripping along on this IFV [infantry fighting vehicle], and I didn't care what was going to happen, if my head would fly off or something. This was the real man's atmosphere when I knew I would have my arse whipped for the slightest mistake. And I served in a fighting unit, in a real fighting unit, and I considered myself a man. And now I have gone soft - I just move from the sofa to the car, from the car to the chair at work. I'm afraid to get cold, I am afraid of this and that. These are the costs of civilization, and the entire West is in this civilization ... This is the reason I don't like Americans, because they didn't suffer, didn't experience [that], didn't lose. That's why the people, the bulk of the population there is so relaxed. For the most part they are all infantile ... Because I believe that the territory on which there was no killings, where there was no war, [and] in America there was no war for the last 250 years, I believe they just grow old and die in their little beds.⁶¹

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I just put these questions to my co-workers: “So you're thirty, and you're forty [years old]. Neither of you served, so tell me, just don't give me these common sense truths about losing two years and so on ... Can you imagine - I say – 1942, the trenches and the cold, and you're so fat. You won't even get up if you don't see any benefits [for yourself]. So if you now get to such and such places, you might not get back [alive]. That's all. And that is not even to touch the question of patriotism... Well, why, for example, in Israel do they not take those who haven't served in the army, who haven't defended Israel, to work for the state? They are not fools. And so why do you think that I'm, for example, a fool because I served in the army, and I lost 2 years? ... At least I know what one can and cannot do. What a dignified act is and what behaviour isn't worthy of respect.” I say: “You're here now talking so freely. Lucky for you it's not the army. Lucky for you you're not in the barracks, where you'd be beaten up for every misstep.” I say, “Well, in other times [other manners], I would have pierced you with a sword

⁶¹ In contrast to Vasili and Georgii's quotes, the Sovietness of militarism that Stanislav is performing might be not immediately visible. It is clear from the content of his words that he speaks ‘from the Soviet past’. The other parts of his interview demonstrate his personal investment in the Soviet version of militarism in a more straightforward way. The quote that I focus on here is an illustrative example of a highly emotional narrative and, more importantly, an example of building an opposition with the USA and specifically American men, which is another important aspect of the Soviet militarist discourse.

for every word you say. And even if I hadn't pierced you with a sword, having known that such a hypothetical possibility existed, you would have been very much watching what you said." You come into the barracks and you simply, without any warning, get a fist flying into your jaw, you're being pushed away. [They] educate [men] well there. If such a threat is hanging over a man, he behaves according [to the rules], and then when he comes out of the army, this stays somewhere in his mind, and if a situation happens, he knows how to behave. In the army, people very much watch what they do and what they say. So for two years it was a very strong disciplinary factor [for me].

M: You said you didn't let your son go to the army.

Stanislav: No, I didn't.

M: Why?

S: The reason is dedovshchina [bullying] there. So I said to him: "If I had known that this is just rumours and that there you'd have to shoot, dig, run, be a part of a team and so on, well, I would have kicked you into the army." But I know what's going on there, there are so many of these [TV] stories about boys who go off to serve in the army, and then do not come back or come back [disabled] ... We had a person who just became disabled, he had his kidneys mashed up. So I'll never let my son go to the army. If it were the Israeli army or German army, he'd be more than welcome to go. I'd send him there with pleasure. But not in ours.

Overall the data that I have collected in Russia and the UK demonstrate that militarised masculinity and militarised patriotism, which had a crucial significance for Soviet state and society, were to a large degree internalised by the Soviet people and continue to influence Russian men's ideas about masculinity and gendered self-representations. A strong bond between the military and contemporary Russian masculinities continues to exist despite the deep systemic crisis of the post-Soviet Russian army. The gender order is changing and the individual men within my study struggle to find their place within it. To analyse this part of the data and understand why the militarist discourse and defender performances are so prominent within my interviews we need to understand the context: the Soviet militarist past and the post-Soviet processes of demilitarisation and remilitarisation. To produce a gender-centred analysis we have to recognise that there is not a straightforward connection between the military and

manliness. The continuous reproduction of this connection is the backbone of the patriarchal social structures and an important root of the persisting gender inequalities.⁶²

Chapter Five continues this topic and, looking the same set of interview materials, coded as ‘military,’ ‘militarism’ and ‘man-defender’ in light of the post-Soviet transformations, explores how contemporary demilitarisation and remilitarisation processes in Russia affect Russian men’s understanding and performances of masculinity.

Selective Traditionalism or Breadwinner Paradox

What do you think about the Soviet ideology of gender equality?

Zakhar (63 years old): It didn’t work. This ideology existed on the formal level but in reality what people did and thought, it did not have anything to do with this ideology. Nobody believed that women were equal. This was far from the case. A woman had to be a housekeeper... On the other hand, in Soviet Russia one salary was simply not enough. My wife gave birth and relatively quickly went back to work, as soon as she could, really, for purely financial reasons. If a woman was not on maternity leave, didn’t have very many children or her husband was not incredibly well paid, then it was necessary for her to work.

The breadwinner model is a family model, where the earner (most often a heterosexual husband) works outside the home to provide the family with income, while the non-earner (usually heterosexual wife) stays at home and takes care of children, elderly family members and the household. In Britain, for example, the breadwinner family model developed among the emerging middle-class towards the end of the mid-nineteenth century. The industrialised economy of that period worked in such a way that skilled labourers and middle-class workers were able to support the entire family unit on one wage. The breadwinner family model became an attainable goal for a considerable proportion of the population (Secombe, 1986; Strange, 2012). Since the 1950s, however, the social scientists and the feminist political movement have criticised the gendered division of work within this family model as oppressive and unfair. One problem with this model is a strong expectation that the breadwinner role should be fulfilled by men (who experience a large amount of stress and are excluded from many of the joys of family life). On the other hand, the male breadwinner model makes women extremely dependent on their husbands and, if the relationship collapses, contributes to women’s financial

⁶² For example, despite the fact that millions of women had served in the Soviet army, fought in the Great Patriotic War and had replaced men in the workforce during World War Two, it was men who were imagined as the true heroes and model patriotic citizens. Women’s military contribution, conversely, was silenced (Krylova, 2010).

insecurity, lack of self-actualisation and self-esteem (Pascall, 2010). The solution is usually seen in balancing the paid and unpaid division of labour, so that men would take an equal share of the housework and become involved fathers, and women would then have the energy and time to commit to professional careers outside the home.

When Zakhar talks about the lack of gender equality in the Soviet Union, which for him is epitomized in the placing of all the housework and childcare on women, he is referring to this specific history of the Western world. Zakhar is 63 years old. He has been living in the UK for more than twenty years. He is a scientist, and in many ways has embraced the so-called 'European' values of democracy, liberalism, feminism, non-discrimination towards people of different cultures and religions and tolerance towards people with different life views. It is noteworthy that men interviewed in Russia have never expressed such ideas.

In fact, in all other cases, older men in both research contexts - men who, like Zakhar, grew up, received higher education and started families during the Soviet time - expressed the most traditional, sexist and even openly misogynistic attitudes towards women, directly reducing them to the roles of mother, housekeeper and sex object. In the older respondents' narratives, a woman was almost never presented as an individual or a professional, which may be seen as a paradox considering all the conversations about gender equality in the USSR and growing gender inequality in post-Soviet Russia. Unlike Zakhar, all the interviewees who were in one way or another invested in the Soviet performances of masculinity (via the language they used, the masculine role models they named or their other references to the Soviet past) were in essence engaging in a highly traditional discourse. This traditional discourse, however, was very much framed by the Soviet lived realities.

The quote from Pavel, below, is perhaps not the most illustrative example of misogynistic sentiments expressed by the older research participants, but it helps to illuminate one of the most important paradoxes of the Soviet gender order – a strong discursive and ideological emphasis on the male breadwinner family model, a model which was practically non-existent in the Soviet context, since practically all women had been officially employed.

M.: Could you in your own words describe what it means to be a man for you?

Pavel (66 years old): Well, apparently, it means something more than wearing trousers and having a mustache. There should be some extraordinary combination of things and virtues. [A man], first of all, is the founder of the family and a breadwinner. What is family? It is a cell of the state. If a family is strong, if a man is strong, then the country is strong too. Bravery is different. Bravery or courage is an essentially different concept. A woman and a child can be brave too. But a man is stronger physically and intellectually, so to speak. A woman is a mother; she is the preserver of the hearth and family. And a man, he is a creator and breadwinner.

M.: And if a man cannot provide for his family?

Pavel: Then he's a bad man. There are, of course, different reasons why he can't do it. Let's say he can't support his family, because for some reason he became disabled. Yes, in this case it is impossible. But when he is just a slacker lying on a bed, well, is he even a man? If you want to [be a man, you have to] provide, here is your family. If you don't want to, your family may abandon you. They have every right to do that. So you can lie down, we'll find another daddy.⁶³

As I have mentioned above, such narratives – and many far stronger – are commonplace within the data. There are three points that stand out in Pavel's comments. Firstly, he states that a man is first of all a breadwinner and the creator of a family; then he draws a logical chain – a strong man means a strong family, while a strong family means a strong state.⁶⁴ Secondly, he says that a man is physically and intellectually stronger than a woman. Thirdly, he explains that if a man does not fulfill his main breadwinning function, a woman can find another father for her children. The English translation of Pavel's words looks like a simple reproduction of essentialist traditional discourse; however the original Russian conveys how Pavel is speaking the 'Soviet language,' or to be more precise, the language of the post-war Soviet family policy and the propagandistic posters.

Pavel is a respondent who has a very special relationship with the Soviet past. When he told me his life story I felt like I was watching a Soviet film or reading a Soviet book. After the interview, I made a note in my field note diary: 'for this respondent, the Soviet past seems to be much bigger than the post-Soviet present.' Pavel has a wife. They met at university and got married just before graduation. Since then both of them have been pursuing professional careers outside of the home. All the same, when their daughter was born, Pavel's wife took practically all the childcare on herself. However, she did not

⁶³ In Soviet times, women had little difficulty in obtaining divorce and custody of the children. Women had a guaranteed right to work and thus economic independence. At the same time both Soviet men and women tended to adhere to traditional ideas regarding natural sex differences.

⁶⁴ This logical chain is one of the most popular refrains from the post-war family policies in the USSR.

become a stay-at-home wife and continued her career path after the maternity leave that every Soviet woman was entitled to. In line with the literature on the Soviet gender order (Bertaux et al., 2004, Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2007) and the majority of post-war Soviet cultural texts, Pavel's family looks like a standard urban Soviet family. Both of the spouses were earners because men's wages were set at a level that excluded the possibility of a breadwinner family model. Like the majority of Soviet women, Pavel's wife was following the prescribed 'worker-mother' gender contract, and the family relied on state benefits linked to women's employment.⁶⁵ Why, then, does Pavel see a man, first of all, as a breadwinner? Why does he ignore the fact that his wife was a breadwinner too? Given the almost full employment of women in the USSR, the persistence of such an idea looks something of a conundrum.

As in many other countries at the turn of the twentieth century, the idea of a man as breadwinner was well established in Russia, where traditional/patriarchal ideology identified women with domesticity and men with money. This idea survived both the Bolsheviks' attempt to erase patriarchal traditions, and women's full employment under the Soviet regime. 'Soviet men continued to think of themselves as breadwinners, and were taught from childhood that a "real man" was one who could earn money' (Kiblitckaya, 2000:91). As Kiblitckaya argues, the preservation of the idea of a man as *kormilets* (breadwinner) could not be attributed to the 'folk memory.' The Soviet state reinforced already deeply ingrained gender prejudices, especially the idea that a woman has secondary status in the labour force and the idea that it is 'natural' for men to earn more (Kiblitckaya, 2000:92), by allocating men to the most powerful and high status positions within the labour force (top managers, political leaders) and by conferring on the largely 'male' occupations (such as mining) a heroic status (Aswin, 2000:12).⁶⁶ By privileging the 'male' industries and professions over female ones (Filtzer, 1992:179 cited in Kiblitckaya, 2000:92) and ideologically excluding men from reproductive labour, the Soviet state established and reinforced the gender hierarchy which it claimed to undermine.

As Pavel's quote illustrates, the breadwinner discourse portrays a man as a superior being. Logically speaking, when women gain economic independence and equal legal rights, this discourse should get automatically challenged. This, however, was not the case in the Soviet Union. Despite the radical rethinking of the role of women in the Soviet

⁶⁵ Apart from the fact that in reality a Soviet husband could rarely fully support his wife, a woman who opted for a conventional lifestyle, such as taking care of the house, giving birth and raising children, faced public scorn as an idler.

⁶⁶ The same cannot be said for comparable female occupations.

Union, the traditional role of men (defined through the roles of defender and provider) was never questioned. On the contrary, it was implicitly and explicitly reinforced by the Soviet regime.⁶⁷ As Ashwin (2000), Schrand (2002), and Kiblitckaya (2000) argue, this is the reason women's emancipation in the Soviet Union remained incomplete.

My data once again illuminates the existing tension between Soviet and traditionalist ethics, between the Soviet announcement of full equality between men and women and the traditionalist emphasis on the gendered division of labour, which was assumed and enforced by the state. In the Soviet Union, both men and women worked outside of the home, but in practice, men were allowed better career opportunities (in part because they were freed from reproductive labour and care work), and, on the discursive level, they were portrayed as the main breadwinners. Moreover, as Kiblitckaya's research shows, both men and women wanted the man to be the main breadwinner and discursively exalted him in this role even when it contradicted the actual reality of family life (2000).

Whereas masculinity as breadwinning is a classical traditionalist reference, what are the implications of the preservation of this meaning of masculinity in the Soviet context? As Elena Gapova points out, 'the Soviet gender order made it difficult to confirm masculinity as constructed through access to "money" (broadly understood)' (2004: 93). And in essence, the Soviet version of the male-breadwinner discourse was not about money. It was about power, status, career advancement opportunities and assertion of male superiority. My contention is that the male-breadwinner discourse is one of the two main foundations on which gender inequality rests. The continuous reproduction of the 'man as breadwinner' and 'man as defender' discourses constitutes two main pillars of patriarchy. In societies where these two discourses are publicly challenged, the structure of opportunity for more gender equal relations arises. However, the emancipation projects that do not challenge these two discourses do not create conditions for gender equal relations. The Soviet example is a highly illustrative confirmation of this historical formula.

Poriadochnost and Prodazhnost

- What does it mean to be a man for you, in your own words?

⁶⁷ As Lynne Attwood's research shows, at certain periods the breadwinner family model was promoted by the Soviet state itself. For example, in the late Brezhnev era there was an attempt to boost the birthrate by means of a propaganda campaign in the media and, just after Brezhnev's death, the introduction of a new school course on 'The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life', which aim was to orient women towards domestic work and men towards professional careers and self-realisation outside of the home (Attwood, 1990: 184-190).

Vasilii (65 years old): Well, first of all, I think you have to be decent [*poriadochnym*] in all respects: decent in the family, decent in your relationship with your wife, decent in relationships with women, decent in your deeds and actions. Decency [*poriadochnost*] makes a man ... If you're wrong, find integrity and conscience in yourself to say that you're wrong, to say that you mishandled the situation. To be a man is not only about courage and sacrificing yourself [when the situation requires this], it is something that you have to do on a day-to-day basis. I believe that the sense of decency and self-respect, respect for others - it should be with you all your life. You don't necessarily have to be a successful, wealthy man or something; you have to be a decent man. You have to be truthful, honest, to have friends...⁶⁸[Today] people have become less responsible. There is no proper upbringing. I think that the majority of young people don't have a purpose [in life]. The main goal is, as they say, to make a fast buck, to earn something. People used to be more decent before. A sense of honour, a sense of decency used to be on a higher level. And now all this is vague. Now one says one thing and does another, the same applies to [people's] actions. I think that people used to have a higher sense of honour and manliness.⁶⁹

The original word Vasilii uses so many times in rapid succession to describe a man is the word '*poriadochnost*' (noun) or the adjective *poriadochnyi*. It could be translated as decency or integrity. It is a moral quality of a person who always respects other people, fulfills his or her promises and is very careful not to cause harm to others. Vasilii's quote and the rest of his interview show that *poriadochnost* is a central concept for his masculinity project. Throughout our conversation, which lasted for several hours, he would continuously return to it and use it in a very consistent way. The literal, straightforward meaning of the word translates well into English, but its cultural meaning does not. This is a word from the Soviet language. Translation loses all the cultural connotations.

From my experience of being a native speaker of Russian, whenever I hear somebody use this word, or read it in a text, which might also explain what a *poriadochnyi* individual should and should not do, I immediately know that this person is, firstly, a representative of an older generation and, secondly, has a special relationship with the

⁶⁸ There is some terminological confusion here. *Muzhestvennost* and *muzhestvo* in Russian can be translated as masculinity, but they also mean courage and bravery. In this quote, Vasilii uses both meanings of the word. There is no such word as masculinity in the Russian language, so during the interviews I would normally use the phrase 'to be a man' instead, which directly translates into Russian (e.g., What does it mean to be a man for you? What are the main difficulties of being a man in the contemporary world?) Although the majority of my interviewees understood me and communicated their vision of masculinity in their responses, there were some who continuously confused masculinity with courage and slipped from one meaning to another, as Vasilii did. This, of course, indicates that courage is an important element of these people's ideas about masculinity. However, for analytical purpose these two meanings should be separated from each other.

⁶⁹ Here again the word *muzhestvo* can be translated as both 'manliness' and 'courage.' However, taken in the broad context, it is clear that Vasilii talks about men (not people in general) and masculinity.

Soviet past, cherishes the memories of it, idealises and glamourises it in one way or another. I would know this even if we had never met or had never spoken about this, simply because younger people or people who have little interest in thinking and talking about the Soviet past do not use this word. That is a cultural code, unwritten and silent.⁷⁰

The notion of *poriadochnost* runs like a scarlet thread through all the narratives of those respondents who seem to be specifically invested in constructing their individual masculinities along the symbolic lines of the Soviet past. As Vasilii and other respondents have explained, *poriadochnost* entails conscientiousness, strong work ethics, trustworthiness, diligence, fidelity to one's principles, respect for other people and honesty. However, to properly explain what *poriadochnost* means and why it is a central concept for understanding what makes Vasilii and some other interviewees' masculinity projects 'Soviet', I need another word from the Soviet language, a word which is also frequently used by the same people who claim that *poriadochnost* is a constitutive feature of a man. This word is *prodazhnost* (from the verb 'prodat' - to sell). It constitutes the complete antithesis of *poriadochnost* and forms a binary opposition with it. I translate *prodazhnost* as 'venality.'

Usually when I asked the question 'Is there anything a man can do after which you would stop seeing him as a man?' the response was 'to betray,' 'to rat out,' 'to sell somebody out' or 'a betrayer is not a man.' This response is almost universal across all the data. This is 'the right' answer. It comes automatically. The respondents do not hesitate or take any time to think about it. However, when I ask for a clarification or some examples, they would often struggle to provide them. This situation specifically refers to younger men. When I ask younger men to think of an example, they backpedal, say that actually it depends on the circumstances, that everything is relative, that it depends on the perspective, etc. In contrast, the older men would know the answer and provide examples: one can betray or sell out the motherland, other people or a friend.

This is how Georgii, a 51 year old businessman, explained to me what a man should and should not do using the examples of the characters he read about in books when he was young:

⁷⁰ In this part of my analysis, I rely on my personal and professional intuition. I shared my thoughts with several friends and colleagues from the post-Soviet countries, spoke with my parents and urged them to ask their friends and colleagues. Most people confirmed that *poriadochnost* is a functional word, it is widely in use but somehow it is Soviet or it became Soviet at some point. It is rarely used to describe the realities of contemporary life.

There is this famous phrase from O. Henry ‘Bolivar, he’s plenty tired, and he can’t carry double.’ It belongs to Shark Dodson - the main anti-hero. It’s terrifying, of course. When a close friend betrays you in the most terrible moment, he just kills you and takes your horse, saying that Bolivar can’t carry double. This is something that is very much present in modern life. One should never abandon a friend, shouldn’t betray him, as often happens today. For example, when someone has an opportunity to pursue better pay and he abandons his friend, saying, ‘I’m sorry, but they pay more. Sorry, Bolivar can’t carry double.’ This, of course, is a terrible feature of our time. So all that I’m saying [about what makes a man a man] is integrity, honesty, unwillingness to be and disgust towards smart-ass people who are trying to find their own mercantile interests in any situation.⁷¹

The men I interviewed generally agreed that a venal man (*prodazhnyi chelovek*), a man who prioritises money and personal profit over friendship, his word, decency or anything that the word *poriadochnost* entails, is not a man. However, in Russian culture, the word *prodazhnost* is bigger than this straightforward meaning. *Prodazhnyi chelovek* means a traitor, betrayer, Judas. However, when we think about who sells whom, and for what in the Soviet context, we can see that it is not about money. It is about people’s blood and death caused by somebody who was a friend, an insider, and a part of ‘us.’ *Prodazhnost* is about backstabbing. Probably the most powerful cultural image of the *prodazhnyi chelovek* is ‘politsai’ – *hilfspolizei* (literally from German auxiliary police). This term was applied to a person who was a local collaborator with the Nazi regime in German-occupied Europe and the USSR. Politsai was called ‘*shkura prodazhnaia*’ (literally a person who sold his own skin). In Soviet films, literature and visual culture they were presented as the most terrible kind of traitors, those who betrayed their own people for personal comfort and safety. Their people’s blood was on their hands. Politsai (pl.)⁷² are even worse than fascists.⁷³ In comparison, if we look, for instance, at the black market dealers of the late Soviet period, who inflated the prices of the goods they had been selling tenfold or even twentyfold, nobody really judged them for this. They were the objects of people’s amusement but nobody used the word *prodazhnyi* in relation to them.

⁷¹ In the USSR, the phrase ‘Bolivar, he’s plenty tired, and he can’t carry double’ from O. Henry’s story ‘The Roads We Take’ (1979) became a saying and a proverbial phrase by virtue of a comedy film of Leonid Gaidai, *Business People* (1962). The film was based on three short stories by O. Henry: ‘The Roads We Take,’ ‘Makes the Whole World Kin,’ and ‘The Ransom of Red Chief.’ Even those Russian people who never read O. Henry know this expression very well.

⁷² When transliterated from Russian, the singular and plural form of this word look the same.

⁷³ Usually, Nazis formed the auxiliary police on the occupied territories from a pool of volunteers (war prisoners or local people). Such auxiliary police units existed in all the occupied countries.

It is noteworthy that when Georgii speaks of *prodazhnost* or venality he mentions that this is a ‘terrible feature of our time.’ Vasilii also puts a sense of decency and a desire to ‘make a fast buck’ in direct opposition to each other and claims that people (men) used to have more honour and, as a result, more manliness. Both of them see *poriadochnost* and moneymaking, the Soviet past and the capitalist present, as opposites. To understand this binary opposition, we have to recognise that Vasilii and Georgii refer to the social, political and economic conditions of the Soviet past and specifically to the Soviet anti-capitalist ideology.

The meaning of money and the moneymaking process is different in capitalist and non-capitalist societies. In societies, which are striving to establish Communism, the overwhelming emphasis on monetary relations and commodity-money relations is unacceptable. Such a political and economic system is in large part constructed in opposition to the capitalist world. This affects all of the social dynamics and people’s identities. In a system which defines itself by its ideological opposition to the capitalist West, to sell somebody out is the worst possible crime. The meaning of *poriadochnost* and *prodazhnost* in democratic and non-democratic spaces is also different. Where the Party’s leadership is interested above all in securing its own interests and position of power, and where human rights are openly neglected, to sell somebody out implies much more damage than in a context in which democratic procedures work and public opinion is an instrument of political pressure.

To sum up, whereas the terms *poriadochnost* and *prodazhnost* are crucial for understanding Soviet masculinities and broader social dynamics, both of these concepts are untranslatable, as their true meaning does not come across in translation. I also argue that explaining what each of these terms means separately would not be enough, for the two are different sides of the same coin. Interestingly, when these terms are applied to a woman, they both refer to her sexual conduct. *Prodazhnaia zhenshchina* is a prostitute, while *poriadochnaia zhenshchina* is a virtuous woman or a faithful wife. Thus my contention is that these terms are antagonistic, dialectical terms that tie together a particular form of gendered morality in the Soviet era. For this reason they are losing their relevance in contemporary Russia, where neoliberal politics and the ideology of individualism have taken over during the last two decades.

In the next part of this chapter, I look at another important theme that emerged from the interviews with Russian men in Russia and the UK, the so-called ‘golden hands’ discourse or masculinity and do-it-yourself culture. As I will show, this discourse is

directly related to the lived reality of the late Soviet period and sheds light on one of the important gaps between Soviet ideology and people's actual lives.

'Golden Hands' or Masculinity and Do-It-Yourself-Culture

There is this stupid stereotype of the Soviet system. Many women seem to be fixated on this idea. *//Speaks sarcastically/* He can be an alcoholic, a plumber working at a plant, but his hands are golden! Many people expect you to be able to help them in any repair work, carpentry, plumbing, fix a faucet, put up wallpaper. Several times I've been in quite unpleasant situations. *//Mocking the people who express such expectations/* 'How so? We really hoped you'd bolt this and this on' /... many people don't do something because they don't want to, but no one can believe that I really don't know how to do it. Not because I don't want to, but because I can't. I know how to mow, to dig a trench. But to fit a door lock ... that is, I need to fit a door lock in the wind porch. So I look at this door pillar - I don't even know where to start. Well, many [men] can do that. Let's say, not just many, but almost all... When I'm at work it's always if some socket gets broken, they immediately go: 'Sergey, please do it! You're a man.' I say, 'I can't!' [They say] 'How so? Are you a man or not a man?'

Sergei, 32 years old, Russia

Here I provide a short extract from Sergei's lengthy complaint about what he perceives as an inextricable connection in Russia between masculinity and what is seen as men's manual work. He is seemingly angry at this 'stupid stereotype of the Soviet system', in accordance with which women and co-workers expect him to be good at repairing and making things with his own hands; but he is even more angry with himself for not being able to live up to these expectations. He confided to me that his hands are not 'golden'. He was born this way. At school he hated handicraft classes, while his classmates all loved them. When it was time to go this class his heart sank because he felt that in contrast to other boys, what he tried to make 'never turned out right'.⁷⁴

In what follows, I provide an analysis of the 'golden hands', which evaluates a man on the basis of his skills in producing and repairing things and equates masculinity with certain areas of technical expertise. I also outline the historical background to explain why Sergei and other research participants see this discourse as a Soviet legacy and argue that the do-it-yourself/repair-it-yourself culture continues to be an important marker of and crucial resource for making masculinity in Russia, especially among working class men.

⁷⁴ Schoolchildren of different genders in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia had their handicraft classes separately. Boys were mastering industry-related skills (basic elements of carpentry, simple operations with metal and timber and manufacturing of some basic furniture like shelves and chairs), while girls mostly did cooking and sewing.

Almost half of my respondents (16 out of 40) referred to the golden hands discourse in their articulations of masculinity. All of them noted that masculinity is associated with physical labour and being skilled in ‘man’s work’. Some respondents talked about the golden hands masculinity in a positive and affirmative way and bragged about their manual skills and accomplishments (‘I’ve built a house by myself without hiring anybody’, ‘I’ve stripped down and reassembled my motorbike’, ‘I’ve replaced a water-pipe’). Others, like Sergei, have an intense dislike of these types of activity and explain that they have experienced a strong social pressure to be ‘the kind of man who repairs things’ at home and at work.

What exactly should a man be able to do with his hands so that other people would call them golden? My data reveal that the golden hands masculinity includes all possible varieties of amateur and professional skills, including electrician, electrical engineer, plumber, painter, auto body refinisher, tiler, roofer, carpenter, locksmith, mechanic, auto mechanic, builder and high-rise building construction worker. This discourse also presupposes that a man in Russia is expected to be skilled and enthusiastic about any type of men’s agricultural work (e.g. chopping wood, cutting grass, digging up the ground) and to possess all the basic home repair and maintenance abilities. Although these are seen as traditionally masculine activities in various world cultures, we can still question why the respondents believe that a man should ideally be good at all of them, and why they think that this rather unrealistic expectation originates in the Soviet era.

As Golubev and Smolyak have explained, the Soviet do-it-yourself culture emerged in the 1960s as a response to, first of all, the chronic shortages of commodities, materials and paid services in the late Soviet era and, second, to ‘the fact that Soviet consumers were often unwilling to accept Soviet commodities as “stylish” or “of good quality”’ (2013: 2).⁷⁵ The do-it-yourself and ‘golden hands’ discourse was not aimed solely at men, though it takes very different forms in relation to men and women. Women were expected to be good at making things with their own hands. These were, however, completely different types of things and skills that mostly had to do with sewing, making clothes and decorating the home (e.g. embroidery or lace making). In the context of the permanent shortages of consumer commodities it was not only an important pragmatic solution, but also provided women with some self-fashioning tools (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013: 4). The development of do-it-yourself culture received wide-scale support from state propaganda,

⁷⁵ All the page numbers of Golubev and Smolyak (2013) refer to the electronic version of this article. Available at <http://monderusse.revues.org/7964?lang=en>

operating for the most part via Soviet women's magazines, which contained myriad instructions on how to make clothes and home decorations, and men's magazines, which gave instructions on amateur engineering. During the Brezhnev period there was a sharp rise in the circulation of books and magazines which offered step by step guidance on how to make things with one's own hands using available materials (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013: 2).⁷⁶ This was not only a pragmatic solution to the problem of shortages, but also a way to structure people's tastes and practices and promote the Soviet version of modernity, the idea and vision of how human reason, diligence and creativity transcend the constraints of the material world (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013).⁷⁷

The emergence of the do-it-yourself culture is also connected with labour education in Soviet schools. The handicraft classes (*uroki truda*), which Sergei was talking about, were introduced by Khrushchev as a part of his educational reforms in the 1960s as a compulsory subject and were separate for male and female students (Kelly, 2004: 128). Extracurricular hobby groups (*kruzhki* and *seksii*), which existed in most schools as well as the Young Pioneer Palaces, complemented handicraft classes for children and youth. Many of these hobby groups were about developing do-it-yourself practices; needlework for girls and various aspects of amateur engineering for boys.⁷⁸ All this gradually led to the popularisation of gender specific do-it-yourself skills (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013: 2-3).

Due to the ubiquity of discourse on do-it-yourself practices, the strictly gendered do-it-yourself culture gradually became an essential part of the Soviet symbolic order and an important component of Soviet identity and gender performance. 'In a wider socio-cultural context, one's ability to make nice, stylish and reliable things was generally a marker of positive identification used in such epithets as "*master na vse ruki*" and

⁷⁶ See Lynne Attwood on the role of magazines in the making of gendered social roles (1999). Here are the numbers that Golubev and Smolyak provide: 'The circulation of *Modelist-Konstruktor*, a journal for amateur engineering and replica design, grew from 140,000 copies in its first year (1966) to 850,000 copies in 1982 and further to 1,800,000 copies in 1989, the peak year. The first issue of *Katera i Yakhty*, a journal for amateur boat and yacht builders, was published in just 10,000 copies (1963), and by 1982 its circulation had grown to 165,000 copies. The circulation of *Rabotnitsa* [Working woman], a women's magazine with a free appendix featuring different do-it-yourself designs (usually clothes), grew from an already impressive 4,600,000 monthly copies in 1964 to a monstrous 13,580,000 in 1982. Another Soviet women's magazine, *Krestianka* [Peasant woman], also with a do-it-yourself appendix, boasted an increase in circulation from 3,500,000 copies in 1964 to 6,800,000 copies in 1982' (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013:19).

⁷⁷ The Soviet do-it-yourself culture 'resonated with another discursive trend constitutive for Soviet official culture and ideology: discourse on the Soviet person as a creative subject, a representative of the species *homo creativus*. The official Soviet theory interpreted "mass creativity" as a compulsory trait of a socialist personality' (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013: 17). This discourse aimed to shape the Soviet subject as the master over the material world itself. All this implied that 'human ingenuity should not be limited by the material resources at hand; instead the only limitation was the human imagination' (ibid).

⁷⁸ All of my respondents who were born in the USSR reported attending one or several of these groups in their childhood years.

“*masteritsa*” for men and women respectively’ (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013: 3).

‘[E]pithets could be negative as well, as in the case of derogatory terms such as ‘*bezrukii*’ (unable to do something with one’s own hands - literally “without hands”)’ (Golubev and Smolyak, 2013: 19).

The following conversation with Slava, a 55 year-old site manager at a construction company in Russia, illustrates the change that took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Interviewer: Do you think you’ve inherited something from your parents?

Slava: Of course I did. The main thing the men in the family, my grandfather and my father, passed on to me is - how to put it? – ‘we’ve got hands.’ We can do many things with our hands. Well, I mean men's work. My son has gained this as well.

I.: Can you give me some examples?

S.: To sharpen knives, carpentry, woodwork or some other work around the house. In my childhood, he [father] involved us in this. We made things ourselves together. I still have a toy gun I did in the fourth form, a very good copy. So it was this meticulous carpentry, woodwork, some other work around the house or just something for fun. Apparently he [the father] was interested in all that. And so he taught us and engaged us. He always had various tools, everything was laid out on shelves, everything was in order. And this is what has been transmitted to me and my brother. And then my son too. Of course, now some things are a bit different. Now, of course, I’m not doing it, but in Soviet times, when I bought my first car, I did a lot of things with my own hands. Well, and so on. At home too, I can do everything, hang something, repair things.

In the late Soviet years, ownership of a car required having some knowledge and skills for its repair and maintenance. In 1963, in Moscow, there were seventy thousand privately owned cars but only eight service stations. In 1980 both numbers increased, but so did the enormous gap between them - 250,000 cars and thirteen service stations (Siegelbaum, 2008: 244). The rest of the service industry in the late Soviet era functioned in a similar fashion.

Slava’s responses to my questions illustrate that today it is no longer necessary to repair your own car (‘Now, of course, I’m not doing it’). The free market has overturned the severe deficiencies in car service centres. The same happened with the rest of the service industry, which experienced an explosive development. Today if you have money you can buy any type of service; there is no need to know how to repair your car or fit a

lock. However, for those for whom money is a scarce resource, these types of skills are still in high demand. This is particularly the case for working class men. That is why the golden hands masculinity practices are an alternative way to prove one's masculinity. It is still a very valuable resource, something that women and other men admire, praise and almost never fail to mention in many types of casual conversations.

Another point that stands out in my interview with Slava is the importance of manual skills education and practices in father-son relationships. For some people these practices were not only important but a determining factor in the relationship with their fathers.

- You mentioned you went fishing with your father. What else did you do together? How did you spend time together?

Georgii (51 years old, Russia): Well, in general, we didn't. I guess I was not of great help to him in life, because when I was a kid, he was trying to get me to help him to repair a car in the garage and other things. I reacted badly to it, ran away, found a bunch of reasons not to help him. That is, I did not have a strong spiritual connection with him. Basically, my father did not pay much attention to me. He was busy with his career, his job; he was trying to write a thesis, to achieve something in life. I was completely in my mum and grandma's hands. They concerned themselves with almost 100% of my time and guided my activities. Dad only joined in on some serious matters when, for example, there was an issue at school or some financial questions.

So with my dad the only thing was when I was already a rather grown-up person, at the end of high school, in the 10th form,⁷⁹ and in my first and second years at university, I helped him a little bit to make some extra money on the side, to make some money for the family. Well, of course, I was earning money for myself. We painted pagodas, repaired roofs in his spare time, when he asked for leave of absence at work. But in my childhood I almost didn't have any common grounds with him... My [younger] brother was also in the hands, in quotation marks, of mum and grandma. They were fully engaged with him. He was a second [version of] me. In general, he was following precisely the same scheme of development that I did in this family. The only thing is that he had a closer relationship with [our] father, because, apparently, he had more technical inclinations. In contrast to me, for example, he helped him out in some technical issues, helped him to repair cars or something else. So his relationship with father, if we compare me and him, have been in this sense closer to be honest. That's a fact.

Georgii explains his distant relationship with his father as a result of his lack of interest in all the technical manual work and uses the same reason to explain the fact that

⁷⁹ 10th form was the last year in high school in Soviet Russia.

his younger brother was much closer to their father. Research participants who have sons express almost identical attitudes. Answering my question about his strategies concerning the upbringing of his son, the first thing that Anton (42 years old, Russia) said was:

I want him to follow in my footsteps... now he knows how to do everything, because when I decide to hammer in a nail, to put it crudely, he holds the nail and I hammer it, i.e. we do things together. Of course I can do everything without him, but I would not do it. I'll wait until he finishes his breakfast and everything and only then I go and start doing something together with him, so he knows how to do it not from the Internet, from some written instructions, but from practice, from doing it... As the saying goes, a real man has to do three things: plant a tree, raise a son and build a house. And then he is a real man. I think that women also like this type of man. So you teach your child to have a love of work; he should grow up being able to do something with his hands.

Sergei, whom I quoted at the start of this section, mentioned that although the usual order of things is that the father teaches his son how to do things with his hands, it was not the case in his family. Gera, the son of a Soviet-era ambassador and representative of the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian elite, made exactly the same point. Both men regretted the fact that their fathers had not taught them manual technical skills:

If I had had a normal father, many mistakes could have been avoided ... if my father had shown me at some point... maybe I would have understood how cars work ... Although if I give it more thought, no, my father never applied his hands to it. He would not have taught me anything. In principle, yes, I'd probably want my father to know how to do it and pass that knowledge on to me. It would be useful to me now. Well, actually now there is Google, I can do everything all by myself.

Gera, 27 years old, England

When I looked at Gera, I saw a posh, mannered, highly educated and expensively dressed 27-year old man. I saw a person who spent a considerable amount of time in well-to-do society. The way Gera spoke and moved made me feel uneasy and unsophisticated. Before expressing his regrets about not having a 'normal' father and not having technical skills, Gera mentioned that at home his family members only ever eat with silver cutlery. Even the thought of eating with 'ferrum' makes his mother very uncomfortable. It was hard for me to imagine Gera repairing a car or doing any manual work. Despite his upper-class background, however, just like other respondents, Gera expected his father to teach him the golden hands masculinity skills. The bigger story is that Gera was not in contact

with his father at the time of the interview and in general was very upset about him. His father did not pay much attention to him while he was little and later became intimidating and emotionally abusive to all of the family members. It is nevertheless noteworthy that Gera defines a 'normal father' as someone who would spend time with his son by teaching him some technical skills.

The intersection of the golden hands masculinity discourse with fatherhood within my data becomes particularly interesting in light of the fact that none of the respondents portrayed their relationship with their fathers as close, open, loving or caring. On the contrary, 38 out of 40 respondents described their fathers as absent or not involved in their lives; quite a few people told me that their fathers were rough or even emotionally and physically abusive.⁸⁰ More research is needed to investigate this particular intersection. However, my data suggest that the practices of men's manual labour (the golden hands masculinity terrain) can be not only important but sometimes the only site and activity for father-son communication, bonding and relationship development in late Soviet and post-soviet Russia.

Existing research and my interviews indicate that the golden hands masculinity discourse was internalised by the Soviet people⁸¹ and remains influential today. Within my data some men in their twenties and thirties (people of the so-called transitional generation, born in the 1980s) continue to rely on this discourse when articulating their ideas about what it means to be a man. Notably, within my data, this discourse is far more significant for working class men. Although the class division in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia is a highly complicated issue, and the general binary 'middle/working class' does not work in this context in the way that it does in some Western societies, I consider the concept of working class as analytically relevant. If we compare how different respondents use the golden hands discourse, it is clear that, for example, Sergei (a driver), Anton (security guard), and Oleg (illegal immigrant and tattoo master) are far more invested in it than Georgii (business owner), Arkadii (PhD student) and Ilya (graphic designer).

⁸⁰ While the narratives about the respondents' childhood years and their relationships with their fathers is a very important part of my data, they are not thoroughly reviewed in the context of this work. This decision has to do with the chosen analytical strategy and organisation of the research findings. However, since these narratives form a huge part of my data they will be subsequently reviewed and analysed in a separate journal article.

⁸¹ On the popular culture level, one of the most prominent examples of the importance of the golden hands discourse is the Soviet Oscar winning film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, in which a highly successful executive director of a large factory, Katerina, falls in love with a metalworker with golden hands, Gosha. See a detailed discussion in Golubev and Smolyak (2013: 14-15), who argue that the protagonists of this film are 'exemplary representations of what the new Soviet man and woman were supposed to be by the early 1980s' (14).

To conclude, the golden hands practices became a vital performance of masculinity in the late Soviet years. This is not to say that golden hands masculinity did not exist before the 1960s; working class masculinities have traditionally relied on manual labour practices. However, in the late Soviet Russian context it became the norm and was to a large degree internalized by men of all backgrounds and occupations. The formation of this norm, on the one hand, was a result of the Soviet people's response to the problem of the permanent shortages of consumer commodities, but, on the other, was strongly supported by the state itself as a way to fill the gaps in a dysfunctional economy which was oriented towards heavy industry. Arguably golden hands masculinity became one of the normative models even for the Soviet intelligentsia, which was not the case before. More importantly, since the golden hands masculinity became a widely accepted social norm, a clear and recognisable social hierarchy developed in which men who possess multiple and advanced technical and manual labour skills occupy a higher position than those with fewer or less advanced abilities to repair and make things with their own hands.

Collectivism, Gender Inequality and Masculine Hierarchies

In her famous work *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, Joanne Scott argues that gender and political power construct one another, explaining the process by which this takes place as follows: '[C]hange may be initiated in many places. Massive political upheavals that throw old orders into chaos and bring new ones into being may revise the terms (and so the organization) of gender in the search of new forms of legitimation. But they may not; old notions of gender have also served to validate new regimes' (Scott, 1986: 1073-74). The literature on the gender order in the Soviet Union and my own research shows that this was exactly what happened in Soviet Russia. The 'old' notions of masculinity and femininity informed the gender politics of the Soviet regime and, despite the massive labour mobilisation of women and the proclamation of full gender equality, gender relations remained unequal across all four dimensions outlined by Raewyn Connell (1987; 1995; 2002; 2005).⁸² Men were still represented as a dominant group; gendered division of labour was challenged in the public sphere but persisted in the private sphere; and gendered symbolism to a large degree remained in place.

That said, the Soviet political regime created its own, in many ways unique gender order, within a culture which had always officially emphasised and prioritised collectivity over individuality. My analysis shows that the official ideology and legislation handed

⁸² Power relations, production relations, emotional relations and symbolic relations.

down by the Communist Party had a significant, although not always straightforward, effect on people's understanding and representations of masculinity. Although the notion of collectivity, selfless patriotism and devotion to the Communist idea strongly manifested themselves in militarised performances of masculinity, the breadwinner paradox and the golden hands discourse point to the gaps and inconsistencies of the Soviet system and Soviet ideology, while the binary opposition of decency/venality (*poriadochnost/prodazhnost*) show that Soviet masculinities were centred on loyalty to the people rather than loyalty to the state or the communist ideal.

My data shows that individual Russian men interviewed in 2013-2014 continue to appropriate the Soviet past, Soviet lived experiences, Communist ideology and its role models, as resources for negotiating their individual gender projects. The reference points for masculinity construction rooted in the Soviet past remain an important instrument for establishing and contesting the masculine hierarchies and reinforcing gender inequality. For instance, the image of a male soldier who fights fascists and is glorified as a defender of the Motherland, is still used as a negative reminder to younger Russian men, who have not taken part in a big and honourable war, that they might not be masculine enough. The same image presents Russian women with the historically false idea that war has an unwomanly face. The cherished memory of a world in which a simple peasant could achieve a breathtaking political career intensifies the feeling of hatred towards the capitalism of the post-Soviet regime and still serves as a moral compass which dictates to some older people what is right and what is wrong. Men's inability to be the family's sole breadwinner, and the powerful historical discourse (which survived the Socialist project) identifying women with domesticity and men with money, continues to generate masculine anxieties in the post-Soviet era and, among other things, prevents many men from being involved fathers.

The socialist project in the USSR was contradictory. It aimed to achieve the complete liberation of society by putting it under full Communist party control (Yurchak, 2006:11). As I show throughout this chapter, the Soviet gender equality project was equally contradictory. It is hardly surprising that this project has left an even more ambiguous legacy for the era that came next.

Chapter 4. Heading Into the Unknown: Russian Masculinities of the Transition Period

The dissolution of the Soviet Union touched all aspects of life in Russia. The post-Soviet transformations can be best understood as a constellation of interconnected political, economic, social, ideological and cultural processes, which gradually led to radical changes in all of these respective spheres. From state socialism and a centrally planned economy Russia moved to capitalism and a free market. The immediate results of the economic policy of ‘shock therapy’ adopted by Boris Yeltsin’s government, and the rapid transition to the free market, were plummeting living standards, economic insecurity and rising unemployment. On a broader scale, the collapse of the Soviet welfare regime and redistribution of economic and political power resulted in new social stratifications (along the lines of age, class, gender, nationality, etc.), broke some barriers and built others, ridiculed the ‘old’ values and created new ones, granted personal freedoms to some people and took many lives in exchange.

At the same time, the lessening of ideological control and restrictions, media freedoms (relaxation of media censorship) and public re-evaluation of the Soviet past (processes that started with Gorbachev’s policy of *glasnost*), open borders and a boom in political pluralism (after several decades of one-party rule) gave many Russians a heady feeling of hope and enthusiasm and introduced many previously non-existent social dynamics, cultural norms and political practices. The new values of freedom, market economy, free prices and competition seemed to become universal values. People who looked back to the Soviet past and expressed anti-market and anti-democratic views were seen as un-progressive and out of date. In the beginning of transition, the common belief was that through the market economy Russia would achieve the kind of prosperity enjoyed in the West.

All these transformations - dynamic, contradictory and taking place at an uneven pace - changed the relationship between the state and society and reformed the gender order in Russia.⁸³ Diminishing state control over the economy and political liberalisation promised new opportunities for self-actualisation for both men and women. However in reality the early post-Soviet years in Russia were marked by the weakening of the

⁸³ As I elaborate in the theoretical chapter, gender relations are reconstructed every time there is a struggle for the redistribution of power in a given society. Although this struggle always includes gender, its purpose is not gender relations themselves, but the acquisition of social power, which these relations are a part of (Scott, 1999).

underfunded state,⁸⁴ the rapid privatisation of state assets in a way that was very unfair for the majority of the population, and the spread of market rationality which redefined the cultural notions of masculinity and marginalised those men who could not successfully integrate into the market economy. While a detailed discussion of the transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet gender order in Russia can be found elsewhere (see Ashwin, 2000; Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2007), my focus is on the transformations of Russian masculinities.

In this chapter I discuss three important developments that took place in the 1990s, namely: the emergence of the 'new' bourgeois ideal of gender relations; the masculinisation of economic success and the rise of private entrepreneurship; and the expansion of criminal culture.

'New' bourgeois ideal of gender relations

Against the background of the demise of state socialism, the weakening state and the rule of the free market, the long familiar bourgeois ideal with a male breadwinner and a woman returning to the private, domestic sphere becomes the 'new' ideal of gender relations (Gapova, 2002). As I discussed in the previous chapter, this ideal was not actually new. It was rooted in the pre-revolutionary gender order in Russia and has subsequently survived the Soviet gender equality experiment and massive women's participation in wage-labour. Although the breadwinner model of gender relations was practically non-existent in the Soviet Union (since practically all women had been officially employed), its preservation was not accidental. Ironically, it was a logical outcome of Soviet gender policies and the contradictions within these policies. On the one hand it was due to the unfulfilled commitment to gender equality through emancipation from above. On the other, as Lynne Attwood's research shows, at certain periods the breadwinner family model was promoted by the Soviet state itself. For example, in the late Brezhnev era there was an attempt to boost the birthrate by means of a propaganda campaign in the media and, just after Brezhnev's death, the introduction of a new school course on 'The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life', the aim of which was to orient women towards domestic work and men towards professional careers and self-realisation outside of the home (Attwood, 1990: 184-190).

⁸⁴ There is a popular view that women were 'potentially the greatest losers in post-socialist restructuring' (Gapova, 2002:641).

As Zdravomyslova and Temkina write, the Soviet gender order was constructed around a single legitimate and state-promoted gender contract – ‘the working mother’ (2007; also Rotkirch and Temkina, 2007). Women were expected to contribute to building socialism by working outside of the home, as well as procreating and taking care of the household and the rising generation (hence performing a double burden). In return, the state protected the working mother by providing extensive maternity and welfare benefits, which allowed her to manage her state and domestic duties and emancipated her from financial dependence on men (Ashwin, 2000; Attwood, 1990; Issoupova, 2000; Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2007). In reality, the ‘working mother’ contract was not universal even though the absolute majority of women undertook both motherhood and official employment due to the law and economic necessity. In contrast to men, married women with children had a legal right not to work. In the military and nomenclature families, a wife’s employment was often the exception rather than the rule. Therefore despite the norm of full women’s employment, the official ‘working mother’ contract allowed some deviations towards a traditional woman’s role, which was supported by the ideology of a woman’s predestination (Rotkirch and Temkina, 2007: 180).

The ‘working mother’ contract remained the main foundation of the Soviet gender order throughout the Soviet period. All the same, in the Brezhnev era, the notion that men and women’s ‘natural’ gender roles were distorted by the Soviet gender equality experiment was promoted by the state in an attempt to boost the birth rate by persuading women that their main role should be motherhood and childcare. During the 1960s-1970s, a time of partial liberalisation of Soviet life and society, the private sphere of the family for many Soviet citizens came to be perceived as a site of authenticity, passive resistance to the mass culture promoted by the Communist party, and a refuge from the intrusive Soviet state (Stella, 2015; Shlapentokh, 1989; Einhorn, 1993; Oswald and Voronkov, 2004). In the Gorbachev era, the idea of ‘unnatural’ and distorted gender roles promoted by the Soviet regime was put at the forefront again in an attempt to disguise the anticipated unemployment which would result from the economic changes. According to this view, the Soviet state had ‘masculinised’ women by granting them financial independence and access to traditionally male occupations and ‘emasculated’ men by reducing their authority in the family.

Thus despite the fact that for economic reasons the Soviet state could not relinquish full female labour participation, by the end of the Soviet regime, the idea of the ‘unnaturalness’ of the gender roles in the USSR had already long been a popular media

refrain. As Rebecca Kay puts it, 'Small wonder that such a barrage did not leave its audience untouched as they considered the kinds of social relationships which could or should be constructed in Russia after socialism' (2006:13). Therefore since the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been a revival of essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity as rigidly defined opposites grounded in biology (Kay, 2000; 2006; Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2007).

In early post-Soviet years, a shift occurred towards a more pluralistic gender order. Alongside the old 'working mother' contract, newly legitimised contracts for women emerged. Temkina and Rotkirch describe them as follows: the 'career-woman,' the 'housewife' (stay-at-home wife of a male breadwinner), and the 'sponsored woman' (a mistress of a wealthy lover who pays her expenses) (2007: 187-200). Despite the fact that the practices, norms and values of the Soviet past and the 'working mother' gender contract remained highly influential for the majority of people,⁸⁵ the 'housewife' and 'sponsored woman' contracts in the context of market capitalism supported by the neoliberal state achieved cultural hegemony in media discourses (ibid: 196).

Elena Gapova links this development with the process of class-formation and reconfiguration of post-Soviet masculinities. She writes:

Possession and consumption of women, as a class marker, has become an important way to reclaim masculinity as part of a Western-type, middle-class formation, defined through possession of resources, opportunities of income, and mode of consumption. Essentially, 'you are a man, because you can afford a woman,' which leads to an objectification of women in the process. Limiting women's access to resources and marking them as non-productive and 'retailable' is built into class formation (2002:658).

The ideological roll back to the bourgeois family ideal suggests that an individual man, a winner of transition and privatisation, becomes the dominant agent. In contrast to Soviet man, he is imagined as in possession of material resources to support motherhood and, no less important, female attractiveness, which has been turned into an object of trade and exchange by the market mechanisms (Temkina and Rotkirch, 2007: 190). The image of such a man correlates with the late Soviet family values, the consumerist middle-class culture of the Western world, and the idea of stability and nostalgia for the 'real' man (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2002). The idea of the man as main or sole provider now becomes officially idealised. In contrast to the Soviet period when the state monopolised

⁸⁵ 'Nonetheless, in the post-Soviet period the state's support for women declined, which meant additional pressure on women who already had a double burden.

the legitimization of the gender order and gender contracts,⁸⁶ in the post-Soviet period the prosperous middle-class contracts lay claim to practical or symbolic domination. Despite the growing social stratification, diversification of gender norms and practices in various social layers and the multiplication of personal life styles, the main agents and role models of the new gender ideology were educated middle-class men and women (Rotkirch and Temkina, 2007:178). The idea of gender equality became associated with the Soviet past and widely discredited (Kay, 2000). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, women's participation in the labour market was no longer publicly promoted and the importance assigned to women's responsibility as mothers became even more pronounced (Buckley, 1989; Posadskaya, 1994; Bridger et al., 1996).

In summary, during the early post-Soviet period, gender relations in Russia underwent a historical revolution. These changes had dramatic implications for the ways men and women in Russia came to understand themselves and their roles in society. It is important to note, however, that the bourgeois or breadwinner model of gender relations was much less prevalent in reality than it tends to be in people's imagination and media representations. In fact, the changes in the gender order in the 1990s combined both patriarchal and egalitarian tendencies.⁸⁷

Masculinisation of Economic Success and the Rise of Private Entrepreneurship

The economic transition has profoundly affected men's identities and societal notions of masculinity. The emergence of economic social stratification has promoted class-based definitions of masculinity.⁸⁸ Masculinity has become directly tied to a man's success in the market economy. Material wealth and the level of income became a defining feature of masculinity very soon after the Soviet Union's collapse. The new rich in the newly capitalist Russia found themselves at the top of all of the masculine hierarchies. The 1990s

⁸⁶ The usual point of departure for scholars writing about various aspects of gender relations in the Soviet era is the *etacratic* nature of the Soviet gender order (e.g., Ashwin, 2000; Attwood, 1999; Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2007). The term 'etacratic' (from the French word *état*, meaning the state, and *κράτος*, meaning power or strength in Old Greek) refers to the system in which the state exercises tough governmental control over citizens' private lives. Research on the Communist ideology and Soviet state policies of different times convincingly testifies that the project of forging a 'new Soviet woman' and a 'new Soviet man' was strategically set out from above.

⁸⁷ This topic is explored in greater depth in Buckley (2008), Kiblitckaya (2000), Pilkington (1996), Rotkirch (2011).

⁸⁸ This is not to say that the class differences did not exist in Soviet Russia. A working class/middle class divide was there but it was a divide based more on education, occupation and cultural capital. Economic stratification, as it exists in contemporary capitalist societies, was nonexistent in the Soviet Union. The representatives of different professions earned roughly the same salaries. Transition to capitalism and a free market introduced a completely different social dynamic and gave rise to new social hierarchies. See Tsipursky (2015) on class differences in the Soviet Union.

in Russia are commonly referred as the time of wild capitalism, when the right of free development was perceived to be an unquestionable right and the freedoms of those who were economically strong were not effectively restricted by the state.

In an extremely short period of time, Russia was transformed from a country in which ‘businessman’ and ‘entrepreneur’ were equivalent to ‘thief’ and ‘outlaw’, to the most welcoming and appreciative environment for businessmen and entrepreneurs of all kinds. Private entrepreneurship developed as a primarily male sphere of activity (Yurchak, 2002). The dominant notions of masculinity thus became tied to capitalist values and the prototype of the businessman, making it difficult for non-business men to live up to prevailing notions of masculinity. Elena Meshcherkina writes: ‘[S]uch men are now embracing the values of risk, independence and individualism. This is part of a wider rehabilitation of entrepreneurialism in contemporary Russian society – a rehabilitation which links entrepreneurship with values which are being culturally defined as masculine’ (2000:109).

Businessman as the Omnipresent Reference Model of Russian Masculinity

I think that my father is one of those people who are so infected with Sovietism, those people who liked living in the Soviet Union. After 1991, when [the collapse of the Soviet Union] happened and life went to a new level, he started to grow more and more feeble really quickly. He often recalled: ‘In the Soviet Union, this was like this and that was like that.’ And I even think that his illness was due to that. He was unable to fit in [adapt to the new life]. It was suggested to him that he go into business several times, he was a good doctor, but for some reason he didn’t take the risk. I don’t know why.

Sergei, 32 years old, Russia

Sergei comes from a family in which most of its members are medical professionals. His parents and his older brother are all doctors, as well as his uncles and several cousins. Why does he think that his father, whom he considers to be a good doctor, had to go into business? Why, by ‘fitting in,’ ‘adjusting to the new life’ and ‘overcoming the Soviet past’, does he really mean ‘take a risk and go into business’? Furthermore, what does he mean when he says ‘go into business’ (*zaniatsia biznessom*)? Does it mean to transfer from the state medical sector to the private one, which emerged in the 1990s, or to set up one’s own start-up company? Sergei did not specify and I did not ask for clarification. While interviewing him I was in the early stage of the data collection and simply did not realise at

the time how prominent the theme of private entrepreneurship and businessmen was going to be within my interviews.

Although most of my research participants situate their masculinity projects in the market economy (e.g. breadwinner, professional men), the businessman model that refers to an autonomous, independent male owner of a private business has a special place in their narratives. The image of a risk taking, financially prosperous and assertive entrepreneur emerges as a prominent reference point in many research participants' life stories. Even though only two people I interviewed were entrepreneurs running their own businesses, other research participants explicitly and implicitly measured themselves against this model. For instance, some people openly expressed regrets that they personally did not have an entrepreneurial spirit, which they understood as a natural gift that inspires a person to become the best they can be, as having passion, ambition, leadership qualities, willingness to take a risk and the resilience to run their own enterprise. Like Sergei, a number of informants expressed regrets that their fathers had not opened their own businesses in the 1990s. These narratives usually relied on a binaristic logic and evaluated a man on the basis of whether he was a businessman or not, managed or did not manage, found his way or did not find his way, found his bearings (*'sorientirovalsia'*) in the new Russia or could not adjust to the new environment.

Curiously, private entrepreneurship, which was illegal in Russia only a couple of decades previously and was seriously frowned upon by the Soviet people, after 1991 turned into a conspicuously positive phenomenon that many men in Russia wanted to be associated with. The 1990s in Russia saw a great rise in entrepreneurial activities and positive attitudes towards private entrepreneurs.

What do you think is the most difficult thing about being a man today, in the modern world?

Boris (51 years old, England): I think that it is money. To earn enough money doing what you want, what you can, engaging in skilled labour. If you have a good business head, 'buy-sell', so to speak, you know how to do fast footwork, you will make money. Nothing's wrong with it. And if you have a real profession, for example, an engineer, then earning decently in the modern world, no matter where you are - here or there [in Britain or in Russia], is practically impossible. You'll always be on meagre government salaries struggling to make ends meet. And this, of course, interferes with your own sense of self. Especially if you are lacking in confidence and have evaluated everything via some external values: a lot of money, a big house and so on. When you start to evaluate yourself through these things, then life becomes really difficult.

Boris makes it clear that he is not a person who evaluates himself via external values and symbols of wealth. He also wants to show that he rose above Soviet era prejudice against private entrepreneurs. At the same, the way he speaks about the ‘buy-sell people’ reveals a deep contempt for them and the capitalist world that has brought them to the top. Boris is a person who was socialized in Soviet times and deeply embraced socialist values. He feels displaced and mistreated living an immigrant life in England, a life that he now regrets and wants to ‘give back’. However he feels even more displaced and mistreated by capitalism and its principle agents – businessmen.

The number of regrets about not being a businessman and aspirations to be one expressed by my respondents suggests that this model is a very important part of how Russian men understand and experience masculinity. Of the 12 men under 40 years old interviewed in Russia, six wanted to become businessmen. Eleven out of the 20 respondents in Russia directly measured themselves against the businessman model. The situation with the immigrants is more complicated. While the businessman model is also present in the immigrants’ narratives, firstly, is it less prominent in their accounts, and secondly, some interviewees in Britain ridicule the fact that everybody in Russia is obsessed with businessmen.

Philipp (37 years old, England) confessed that he recently started to watch Russian TV shows and series. He gave an example of a show called ‘Let’s Get Married’ and made a sarcastic comment about the male-participants in this show:

There are many widowed fathers there. They all claim to spend a lot of time with their children but at the same time they’re all businessmen, they have their own businesses, they are all financially backed. Almost all men [in this show] are like that. I don’t see any losers there. If he is a positive hero, then, as a rule, he’s got his own business. Having your own business is a certain type of a cult there. A man should be a businessman.

Phillip’s quote should be read as an ironic remark. Although he did not say it directly, I gathered that Phillip found some sort of a guilty pleasure in watching this show. It gave him a feeling of superiority and a chance to laugh at Russia’s backwardness and narrow-mindedness with regard to gender roles and relations. From the perspective of an educated European, the ‘Let’s Get Married’ show is a wild and farcical game. In each episode, a ‘fiancé’ or ‘fiancee’ (that’s how they call the participants: ‘*zhenikhi*’ and

'*nevesty*') is offered a choice of three candidates for his or her 'hand and heart.' These candidates are ready to fight for them. They show their talents, surprise the main hero or heroine with dancing, singing, culinary skills, acting techniques, etc. Many people bring presents. I have seen an episode in which a man gave a 'fiancé' a real goat. All the participants bring friends and relatives to help them choose their future wife or husband. Three women, rather aggressive in their judgements and approach to the participants, lead the show: the main host, the 'marriage broker' and the astrologist. They ask the participants difficult questions, study them meticulously and make sure that the men and women strictly follow traditional masculine and feminine roles. If this is not the case, the candidate is usually publicly humiliated.

In his quote, Phillip makes a very relevant observation regarding the expectations this show puts on its male participants. The programme's hosts, the fiancées and the audience all expect a man to be not only financially independent but willing to fulfil a breadwinner role and provide his future wife with the bourgeois comfort of a consumption-oriented family life. Philipp ridicules the show's obsession with businessmen and questions the system of gender relations where the only culturally approved way to be a good man is to be a businessman. By making his sarcastic remark, he seems to be pointing out the enormous gap between the actual reality and diversity of social life and the bourgeois fantasy that the 'Let's Get Married' show is selling. However, the immense popularity of this show in Russia might be due exactly to the fact that this particular fantasy is in high demand.

Entrepreneurship as a Life Style and Exclusively Masculine Terrain

On the one hand, it was a difficult period, but on the other, the prospects were exciting. Most importantly, at that time private entrepreneurship was legalized... I returned to Russia in 1993 after the anti-Gorbachev [attempted] coup. For all these 3 years from 1990 to 1993, I was [abroad].⁸⁹ Therefore, the question was what should I do after my return? This question concerned not just me, but all young guys about my age, they are not even 35 yet, who understood that they were in the new Russia and they had to do something there. It was easier for the oil workers, because many of them returned to their previous jobs in 'Bashneft,' 'Tagneft' or 'LUKOIL' ... However everything depended on one thing: if a man was

⁸⁹ Georgii worked as an oil-industry worker in a joint Soviet enterprise for oil and gas exploration abroad. Before that he worked in the Russian Far North, where he moved in the 1980s, at the age of 24. The Russian Far North was a special, fast-developing region at that time. Salaries there were several times higher than everywhere else, and employees got relatively quick promotions. At the places of oil or gas field development, reservoir engineering and oil or gas extraction, one could build a career and make good money (to some extent this is still the case today). These were the reasons why Georgii decided to move there.

able to set up his own business, even a small one that would just support him and his family and, let's say, create a few jobs. Or someone was capable of something large-scale. While another man wasn't capable of anything relating to entrepreneurship and would like to spend the rest of his life working as a wage employee at some plant or factory. Different strokes for different folks based on one's psychological makeup, one's character, depending on the way one decided to position oneself in the new life, in the new Russia. Because it all was fundamentally different from that distribution system in which we had lived up to the 1990s. These were worlds apart. Well, it concerned me too [and] I made my choice. I decided not to go into wage labour. I knew that on my return I would search for some type of activity that could make me an independent person. We found ourselves in a free market. Privatization was in full swing, various private companies and commercial firms emerged, so I didn't want to go into some kind of a state structure for a small salary, with an unknown outcome. [I didn't want] to return to the factory or to the oilfield. In 1994 I organized my own company... I found the finance, bought the necessary equipment and became a private entrepreneur. I went into freewheeling. This is how it is to this day and always will be.

Georgii, 51 years old, Russia

Georgii seemed to enjoy telling me his story of entering the world of private entrepreneurship in the early 1990s, of his success, of how he rose above other men. This rather lengthy quote is only a short extract from a long and detailed story of his 'ascent' to private entrepreneurship and reflections on the choices he and people around him have made in life. He has a lot to be proud of. He started as a mechanic in a plant and at the present time is the owner of a company that manufactures equipment for industrial plants and facilities. He built this company on the basis of his own experience and expertise in the field of oil production. The experience of living abroad might have introduced him to some alternative life and economic development scenarios, which most Soviet people had little idea of. Also, as Georgii acknowledges, the oil-industry workers had an advantage over other people in the early years of transition and severe economic crisis. The development of the oil and gas industry made it one of very few highly profitable areas in post-Soviet Russia. Experienced specialists were in demand and had more choices and opportunities than the workers in other industries. Therefore he had significant resources for building his company.

In regard to the masculinity construction strategy, Georgii's narrative reveals the same logic and the same type of masculine hierarchy that Sergei and Boris were talking about. However, in contrast to the non-business men I interviewed, who positioned themselves at the lower end of this business hierarchy and who regarded (male) business

people with reverence, though often mixed with bitterness, Georgii looked down on those men who had not secured their place in the sun. He drew a three step hierarchy: men who ventured and succeeded on a grand scale, those who took a risk and opened a small business which created a few jobs, and men who were afraid during the period of great opportunities and decided to be wage-earners for the rest of their lives. The hierarchy that he and other respondents built differentiates people on the basis of their ability to be enterprising and to take up opportunities.

How did you experience this transformation in the country, the transition?

Georgii: I really liked everything because this transformation opened up tremendous opportunities for enterprising people. You could do anything. Everything depended only on your brain, on your connections, on your luck, on your ability to communicate with people and negotiate ... The main thing was that these events have opened up opportunities and made a huge number of people free. The individual himself began to choose what he did. It was great, of course. It secured my freedom. And there is nothing more important for a human being than freedom. No freedom - you don't feel like a human. You feel dependent on other people, on circumstances that are pressuring you. As soon as you get freedom you spread your wings, switch on your brain and you fly ... I just see how many people around me live, they don't have the same amount of freedom that I have. They don't have that normal level of life, which I have. I'm now 51 [and] I feel very good. There are things that I'm afraid of. I'm afraid of being sick and old. When I am an old man, and I get various illnesses, like all people do, I'd like to make sure that I'm still quite an independent and wealthy person. I now see some of my peers' parents at the age of 75-80 years, who are simply thrown out of life and eke out a miserable existence in poverty. A lot of older people have simply built their lives in a way that could not secure them one very important thing - a safe old age.

I look at Georgii's case closely because he passionately engages in the performance of business masculinity, describes the particularities of this model in the Russian context and in many ways embodies this model himself. Georgii is the type of businessman that other respondents are measuring themselves against. The story of his life tells us that everything is possible and there is no limit to the human's mind and spirit. This is the story that is being promoted and valorised by neoliberalism, the story that consumerist culture wants us to believe. Although Georgii mentioned the difficulties of the transition period, he never went into any details and only spoke about his personal advances (never any missteps, failures or disappointments). The overall rhetoric of 'free personal choice', diligence, ambition and determination, along with complete disregard and even denial of

the role of structural factors that have left millions of people in poverty after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, shows that Georgii wholeheartedly embraced the ideology of neoliberalism. He is a mouthpiece of this ideology.

Georgii's masculinity project is a breadwinner who supports his family. He believes that the qualities that make a man a man are, first of all, independence, initiative, ability to earn money and to get the lay of any type of land, in any situation. He speaks of himself as of a locomotive that hauls the family forward by earning money and seeking new opportunities. He sees himself as the head of the family and a leader, and struggles to imagine that there are other ways to be a man in this world (i.e. he does not believe that there are other respectable ways of being a man). His biographical narrative is very performative. Most importantly it illuminates different aspects of a crucially important theme for understanding post-Soviet Russian masculinities – the theme of private entrepreneurship and its role for masculinity construction among Russian men.⁹⁰

Throughout the interview, Georgii employs different means to construct 'respectable' businessman masculinity and to highlight the superiority of this model. As I have shown, he has invoked such binary oppositions as 'businessman vs. non-businessman,' 'freedom vs. absence of freedom' and 'strong and decisive men vs. weak and hesitant men.' Georgii, however, does not stop here. As the contemporary theorising of men and masculinity shows, no masculinity model and specifically no masculine hierarchy can be logically complete without women.

Georgii: I really don't like businesswomen. I don't like mercantile women, women who try to calculate everything. For me, a woman should be gentle, sensual, and sensitive. A woman should be a good mother and a good wife. She shouldn't be independent from [her] man; on the contrary, she should depend on him and fuel him with emotions. [She should be] his spiritual guide, influence his mind, his soul, be his guardian angel. I believe this is her main function.

M.: And why don't you like businesswomen?

Georgii: Well, what turns me off is that they are more like men who I have to deal with doing my business. I absolutely do not want to build a business relationship with a woman. All my experiences of building business relationships with women ended up in failure, resentment, unfulfilled contracts and obligations, etc. I believe that a woman should be kept away from [business]... Well, maybe I'm not explaining it well. When I say

⁹⁰ The topic of entrepreneurship lies at the intersection of class, gender and nationality in any other world context. However the case of a country that came through a transition from socialism to capitalism is a particularly fruitful field of analysis.

businesswomen, I mean women who are building their own businesses, the business owners and CEOs. Naturally, I don't mean women who work in manufacturing, in finance, in banks. These types of job aren't a lifestyle for a woman; these are [only] professions for her. So if, for example, a woman is the head of the Logistics Department in a corporation, then I'm fine to deal with her. I just deal with a person who, so to speak, is an employee. But I think it's better not to communicate and work with a woman, who is building her own business, some kind of a construction company or a commercial structure, for example. There is a great mismatch between a woman's appearance, her functions [he means children and domesticity], between the way I would like to see a woman and what it takes to do this kind of job. This is a sharp dissonance. Because a woman who yells over the telephone about unfulfilled contracts and punitive sanctions, a woman who scolds her subordinates or draws up a contract trying to anticipate the points on which she can gain an advantage, is not quite a woman. All these are harsh types of activities. I believe they are utterly alien to a woman. She will inevitably carry these things over to her family, children and husband.

As I outlined earlier in this chapter, the 'redomestication' of women becomes an important way to claim respectable middle-class masculinity in post-Soviet Russia. Seen in this context, Georgii's quote in many ways is self-explanatory. Georgii wants to explain that the business world is exclusively a man's world and arena for masculinity validation. He deliberately and rather aggressively excludes women from the areas of big responsibilities, independent decision-making and risk-taking in business and strives to prove that a woman stops being a woman when she steps into the business terrain. The most curious thing about the way Georgii builds this gender hierarchy is that, as a man who has spent half of his life in the USSR, he does not debar women's right to education, professional career and professional ambitions. Female heads of departments, managers and supervisors do not trouble his gendered system of values and beliefs. He does not see these types of career as incompatible with 'women's functions' in the family. What does offend him are women whose power is not supervised by a higher authority, women with access to serious material and symbolic resources, women who he has to treat as equals if he wants to achieve meaningful and productive cooperation.

As I show in this chapter, the masculinity of a successful private entrepreneur becomes the most prominent and culturally appreciated model of masculinity in post-Soviet Russia. But this model was not the only prominent masculinity model to emerge in the 1990s, for there was another strategy of economic accumulation and upward social mobility. During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, professional criminals, street gangs, and various semi-criminal networks through the use of violent means 'became

important players in taking control of resources during the period of rapid disintegration of the Soviet system' (Ledeneva, 1998; Humphrey, 2002; Nazpary, 2002 cited in Stephenson, 2011:324-325). The next section of this chapter looks at the immensely complex social, cultural and structural phenomenon of the expansion of criminal culture in post-Soviet Russia and reflects upon the reasons why references to this culture and specifically references to criminal masculinities are widely present within the interview accounts of non-criminal Russian men.

Expansion of the Criminal Culture

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and transition from state socialism to capitalism created historically unique circumstances in Russia and other post-Soviet countries. Previous state structures were weakened or destroyed either by design or as an outcome of rapid social change. Entrepreneurial people willing to take risks could take multiple advantages of the dismantling of the system of central distribution of provisions and services, rising unemployment and privatisation of state assets. However, these adventurous actors, who wanted to get a piece of the pie and take part in the redistribution of resources, received almost no protection from a now largely dysfunctional legal and judicial system. For almost a decade following the disintegration of the Soviet Union the usual dichotomy between legal and illegal in post-Soviet Russia was absent.

During this decade the Russian underworld came to the forefront and became an active participant in the building of the new Russia. Shady entrepreneurs, organised crime groups, youth gangs and even state security services and police, which themselves often functioned as racketeering groups in the 1990s (Volkov, 2002), all strived to take advantage of the opportunities presented by market changes. Some of them took part in the violent redivision of assets and resources, while others became predators who, using threats and offering 'protection' to the emerging private companies and individual businessmen, took hold of some of these companies' income and shares (Stephenson, 2015).

Like any other professional criminal organisations, prison communities or mafia groups in different parts of the world, which construct their identities and collective ethos through informal conventions and rules, the Russian world of organised crime has its own code of conduct. In Russia, this code, or the criminal quasi-law, as I call it, is known as *poniatiiia*. As Svetlana Stephenson argues, *poniatiiia* 'has become the language of the Russian transition to capitalism' (2015: 234). One of the most important findings of my

research project is that the interviewees in both research contexts fluently speak this language.

Twenty out of 40 interviewees in one way or another referred to *poniatiiia* and/or spontaneously articulated their ideas about masculinity using notions, classifications and the language of the prison and criminal value systems. Three out of these 20 have served time in prison. The Russian prison system is a very rigid hierarchical social structure that imposes an indelible imprint on its inmates. As the specialists working on prison reform in Russia have explained, a person who has spent three or four years in prison in this part of the world is never the same person again (Abramkin and Alpern, 2005). Accordingly their use of terms of reference taken from prison culture is understandable. However, the cases of seventeen other respondents, who have never been imprisoned and presumably have never had serious problems with the law, but still relied on the criminal quasi-law or *poniatiiia* in their articulation of masculinity, require special consideration. It is especially curious that these men only drew on the discourse of criminality when they talked about masculinity or homosexuality, while the other parts of their biographical narratives were almost always completely free of criminal language and norms.⁹¹

Poniatiiia or Criminal Quasi-Law: Origin and Evolution

The criminal quasi-law or *poniatiiia* is an umbrella term for various codes of conduct including those that work in lawful contexts. It is extremely difficult to define and to comprehensively describe. Different social groups and networks in Soviet and then post-Soviet Russia each had their own interpretations of *poniatiiia* as well as different levels of commitment to its rules. Another key difficulty facing anyone who wants to research *poniatiiia* in Russia is that the object of study is extremely volatile even inside a particular network. Although it is possible to get an idea about this set of norms and values while studying multiple cases of their usage, it turns out that these rules are ambiguous and their implementation depends on many factors, including the eloquence, authority, or physical strength of the person defending their version of such norms (Chalidze, 1977).

In the popular conception, *poniatiiia* is directly connected with prison and the world

⁹¹ Due to lack of space, I do not include the discussion of the interview material on the intersection of criminality and homophobia, which shows that homophobic attitudes on the part of the respondents were very often informed by, and imbued with, the atrocities of prison, where a 'fag' identity is a lifelong sentence resulting in isolation, violence, loss and humiliation. This discussion can be found in an extended version of the following part of this chapter on the intersection of *poniatiiia* and masculinity in post-Soviet Russia, which was published as an article 'Masculinity, Criminality and Russian Men' by Sextures: E-journal for Sexualities, Cultures, and Politics. 2015. Volume 3, Issue 3: 46-61.

of thieves (*vorovskoi mir*). This world was born in Soviet prisons, and the term ‘thief’ (*vor*) in this context refers not to the common usage of this word (somebody who steals other people’s property) but to an elite group of leaders of the criminal and prison world. The thieves follow their own rather exotic law, which dictates that a true thief should only make his living by crime. Thieves could not work, could not marry and could not accumulate individual wealth and property. They had to put criminal incomes into a common fund and never cooperate with the official authorities regardless of whether it harms or benefits the thieves’ community (Chalidze, 1977). The basic principles of the *vorovskoy mir* include an uncompromising attitude towards denunciation, the primacy of collective interest over private, brotherhood between prisoners, and the need to provide help to those who find themselves in a difficult situation. In the thieves’ understanding, *poniatii* is an alternative law, which in contrast to the state’s law, dictates that one lives and acts according to one’s conscience.

As Volkov convincingly demonstrates, in the 1990s ‘the world of thieves has been challenged by a new type of criminal structure – the world of so-called “bandits”’ (Konstantinov and Dikselyus, 1998 in Volkov, 1999: 744). A bandit is a member of a criminal group specializing in the use of violence (Volkov, 2002: 195). In contrast to thieves, who strive to keep a low profile and whose main ‘task is to steal (in a broad sense) and avoid being caught’, bandits are highly socially visible and claim the ability ‘to apply and manage organised force’ as well as ‘to effect business transactions’ (1999:744). Volkov describes the ideologies of these two social groups as follows: ‘The ethics of thieves is a projection of values and rules of prison life into civic (‘free’) life. Prison and labour camp terms are the major source of thieves’ authority, respect and career advancement to the highest title of thief-in-law. The bandit’s reputation and his rise to the elite position of *avtoritet* (authority) is built on precedents of vigorous and successful use or management of violence’ (1999:745). The bandits’ power rests on coercive capacity and is a kind of ‘political power’ (Poggi, 1990:1-18 cited in Volkov, 2002:60), while ‘[t]he power of thieves is much more dependent on moral authority and tradition; it is an example of normative power’ (Volkov, 2002:60).

In capitalist Russia, the thieves, ideologically separated from mainstream society, gradually lost their influence in the criminal world to more flexible and entrepreneurial bandits and street gangs (*gruppirovki*) involved in criminal activities in certain territories, who were better prepared to face social and economic changes. However, the thieves’ strong moral principles and a strict adherence to *poniatii* retained a lasting influence in

criminal circles. The criminal quasi-law changed along with the changing realities of life in Russia; however, the bandits and gangs' code of conduct and their systems of violent regulations retained the language and many basic principles of the thieves' *poniatiia* (Stephenson, 2015). Both codes of conduct prescribe unconditional loyalty to the group; rely on strict and straightforward masculine hierarchies;⁹² determine a man's reputation in accordance with his ability to stand by his word and use physical and discursive violence; and ideologically exclude women from 'professional' activities.⁹³ Moreover, the thieves' code and the gang code both prescribe that the members of these communities behave 'as representative[s] of the elite and never being equated with "commoners"' (Stephenson, 2015: 174).

The criminal quasi-law adopted by bandits and territorial gang members in post-Soviet Russia aims to reproduce tough, aggressive, competent, sexist, but fair-minded masculinity that relies heavily on physical and discursive violent practices and promotes a rigid hierarchy among men. This hierarchy is rigorously policed and regulated by entry and exit rituals. A complex set of punitive sanctions is applied to those who fail to comply with the general rules (Kosterina, 2006:23). In this world, violence is perceived as a social norm and a form of social communication (Beumers and Lipovetsky, 2009). Men with rough masculine bodies and tempers, as well as those who are willing to take risks, are actively involved in the system of mutual supervision of each other's masculinity and occupy the top positions in both the street and criminal worlds. In these worlds, the value of brotherhood and solidarity co-exists with intense competition between men eager to demonstrate their masculine vigour and bravery.

The paradox of the situation with *poniatiia* in Russia is that on the one hand, law-abiding citizens perceive prison and the criminal world as unambiguously negative, and they do not want to have anything to do with it. On the other hand, rules and norms that originated in prisons are widely present today in various areas of Russian life (Tishchenko, 2007:5). *Poniatiia* permeates mainstream culture and the lives of ordinary people through a variety of cultural and linguistic practices, such as jargon, tattoos, gestural language, gang signs, underworld songs, literature, and other mass media productions. Oleinik's research

⁹² Examples of these hierarchies may be prison castes ('*blatnye*' or 'thieves', '*muzhiki*' or 'blokes', '*kozly*' or 'goats', '*petukhi*' or 'fags') or well know criminal and street hierarchies that derived from my data: 1) '*brodiaga*' (vagabond) and '*kommers*' (businessmen); 2) '*avtoritetnyi patsan*' (respected lad), '*baklan*' (gobshite) and '*pidaras*' (faggot); 3) '*Patsan*' (lad), '*banchila*' (fence or pusher) and '*bliad*' (slut or hooker); 4) '*Patsan*' (lad) and '*lokh*' (sucker).

⁹³ The ideological exclusion of women does not mean that they were actually excluded from all collaborative illegal activities.

demonstrates that criminal quasi-law is incorporated into the activities of legal institutions and is widely used in various layers of contemporary Russian non-prison society (2001a; 2001b).

Valerii Abramkin, the Director of the Moscow Centre for Prison Reform, argues that the relevance of *poniatiia* in prison and in society as a whole can be explained by its proximity to the norms, values and attitudes of traditional Russian culture. *Poniatiia* is built on the popular (in contrast to legislative) understanding of justice and national culture in Russia. ‘Informal principles that we use when making decisions are very different from the state law... to solve a problem in a human way almost always means renouncing the law, not going to the courts or the police’ (Abramkin, 2007).

The popular concept of justice in Russia does not coincide with official law, as the Russian population perceives the state as hostile. One of my interviewees (who had never been to prison) put it this way:

Here in Russia two different laws regulate our lives: the rule of thieves and the rule of democratic rights. At all times people consulted the thieves for justice. Thieves dealt with the core of a problem. There is even this notion: thieves’ laws are the people’s laws (*kak po vorovski, tak i po liudski*). They are more trustworthy. They are more knowledgeable about life. They made a decision and people really trusted it. They decided reasonably and competently in contrast to bold-faced bureaucratic pigs who have sold out for their careers. They are people who suffered a lot in exile in Siberia.

Vitalii, 29 year old, Russia

Drawing on the institutional analysis of Russian society, Oleinik shows that institutional structures in Russian prisons and society are ‘similar, related, and congruent’ (2001b:42), and argues that the reason for the dissemination of criminal culture in Soviet and then post-Soviet Russia lies in the organization of Russian society and the specificity of power relations (2001a; 2001b). Volkov’s research sheds light on the crucial role that criminal groups, violent entrepreneurship and their code of conduct played in Russian state building after the Soviet Union’s collapse (2002; 2012). While the overlap between *poniatiia* and the ideology of masculinity is apparent, this body of scholarship nevertheless leaves the gendered nature of this connection outside the scope of analysis.

Another important factor which determined the popularisation of *poniatiia* in post-Soviet Russia was the heroisation of thieves and bandits in the popular media. Ratings for Radio Chanson, which broadcasts songs of the underworld, indicate that this station has been in the top five most popular Russian radio broadcasters for many years (Synovate Comcon, 2002-2007). Today, one in ten Muscovites listens to Radio Chanson and more

than 7.5 million people in Russia listen to it daily (WCIOM, 2012). Films and TV series about ‘honourable’ bandits, exploring the ways in which men obtain masculinity, power, money and respect through criminal means, continue to be extremely popular in post-Soviet Russia. Balabanov’s films *Brother* and *Brother 2*, where the protagonist Danila constructs his ‘respectable’ masculine image by making a great deal of money working as a hitman for the Mafia, being sexually and romantically involved with multiple women and at the same time expressing ‘an (ironically) moralistic view that opposes domestic violence and theft’, honouring his word and protecting ‘the innocent’, are pertinent examples (Heller, 2011-2012:3). Such media projects, along with the romanticisation of the image of the bandit, actively deconstruct the positive image of alternative legal professional groups such as the police and armed forces (Salagaev and Shashkin, 2005).

Could you explain in your own words what the expression ‘to be a man’ means to you?

To be a man? I'm not sure I'll give you a precise answer or any answer at all. To look at it from the street lads' perspective: how do they classify the population?⁹⁴ They are divided into a respected lad (*avtoritetnyi patsan*), gobshite (*baklan*) and faggot (*pidoras*). What is a respected lad? A lad who stands by his word (*otvechaet za bazar*). What is a gobshite? He is in general a normal lad, but he doesn't stand by his word (*za bazar ne otvechaet*), he spouts a lot of crap (*baklanit slishkom mnogo*). A faggot also gabs (*baklanit*) too much and doesn't stand by his word (*za bazar ne otvechaet*) and just generally is not a man, you cannot change or straighten him out. Here is a certain tendency, an archetype of a street character. This tendency helps form the understanding of what it is to be a man. A man - this is someone who stands by his word (*otvechaet za bazar*). Well this is of course a very serious matter; it is just being expressed in an anecdotal form here.

Victor, 45 years old, Russia

Victor is a university professor, highly educated and very articulate. He has never been in prison, never been involved in street gang activities or had serious problems with the law. Interviewing him was easy. As an experienced public speaker he was used to talking to people and was able to clearly and vividly formulate his thoughts and ideas. Narratives such as the one shared by Victor are very familiar to me and extremely common among street lads, petty criminals and prisoners in Russia. What made a mature intellectual or, for example, a financial adviser in Manchester who had spent more than 20 years in the UK, and a well-travelled and the well-educated 22-year-old university graduate, people

⁹⁴ The term ‘lad’ (*patsan*) is commonly used from the late 1980s in Russia to describe street gang members (Stephenson, 2015: 3).

seemingly as far from the criminal world as one can imagine, illustrate their understanding of manhood using a street perspective and criminal jargon?

According to Victor and some other respondents, the main characteristic of a man is a non-negotiable commitment to stand by his word. It is difficult to translate the words he is using into English. The Russian concept that Victor uses, *otvechat za bazar*, is very common in the interviews with the other respondents who articulated their understanding of masculinity in criminal terms. This expression is part of criminal jargon, which currently has a remarkably widespread use in Russian culture. *Bazar* means a conversation, *bazarit* means to speak or talk, *konchai bazar* means ‘stop talking’, and *est’ bazar* means ‘we need to talk’. The expression *otvechat za bazar* has now slipped into everyday language and has even become a generic designation for those who rely on or enact criminal culture codes. It is not uncommon to hear this phrase used in a humorous way, when bandits and street characters are being mocked. However, in the prison world and the world of violent entrepreneurship, under certain conditions the price of not standing by one’s word is loss of safety, health, or even life.

The *Otvechat za bazar* principle maximizes the identification between words and actions. This rule constitutes the main pillar of criminal masculine ideology for very practical reasons. If a man promises to do something or uses threats, these threats should be carried out at any cost, because consistency of words and actions allows one to build a reputation and deal with certain issues without resorting to force or coercion but simply by means of verbal communication and intimidation (Volkov, 2002). Secondly, provided that one’s reputation in criminal circles is being rigorously policed and categorized, a single deviation from this principle would lead to the loss of all the symbolic and social capital that a man has. In other words, the functional purpose of the *otvechat za bazar* rule is to minimize physical and economic damage while resolving a certain matter and building and maintaining social hierarchies between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities.

When used by criminals themselves, the principle of responsibility for one’s word may be seen as the normative epitome of a specific regulatory power regime, which determines the conversion of a reputation into economic and social benefits (Volkov, 2002). However, what does loyalty to this principle do for non-criminals in the post-Soviet context? Victor, along with a number of other interviewees, seemed to be very invested in the rule of identification between words and actions. Our further conversation showed that for him the value of this principle could not possibly be overestimated.

And you know this manifests itself very strongly in my professional activities. Let's say I've established a theorem, proved that I stand by my word (*za bazar otvetil*) and then let's say some humanitarian writes some essay on Nietzsche. Well, what has he done? He has taken some quotations; if he is smart enough, he has developed a hypothesis; but he has not substantiated anything. Here, you see, it's the same terminology. You claim something? (*Ti pred'iavliaesh?*) Prove it, lad! (*Obosnui, patsan!*) But he can't prove it! And here is this progression. When I argued with my colleagues and acquaintances in the humanities, I gave the same example. Guys, I'm a respected lad (*avtoritetnyi patsan*), I stand by my word (*otvechaiu za bazar*), while you're just gabbing (*baklanite*)... And maybe it was, well, I can't say that this is what led me to my profession. When you start thinking about it, you start to question yourself: Who are you? What are you doing? Well, maybe you're not the best person in the world, but at least you stand by your word. Know this and be at peace with yourself.

Here it can clearly be seen that Victor draws on the criminal ideology and hierarchy for a specific purpose - to construct his own masculinity. Victor appropriated criminal and/or street masculine hierarchy as a resource for making masculinity. He did it by positioning himself on the top of this hierarchy and simultaneously constructed his humanitarian colleagues as subordinate. I argue that by doing so he is firstly relying on the cultural model which is extremely familiar both to him and to other Russian people, and, secondly, that he is considering this model to be hegemonic in his socio-cultural context. Although previously he has denoted the street lads' hierarchy as '*anecdotal*', he is simultaneously very proud to position himself at the top of it.

It is noteworthy that Victor, while explaining to me how gender double standards work, also specifically emphasized that the *otvechat' za bazar* principle by definition does not apply to women and 'faggots', who are both in his opinion just incapable of 'watching their tongues'. To my next question, what he meant by 'faggot' and if this term referred to homosexual men, Victor replied:

No, no, no, this is different... This is actually a multifaceted word, it does not always mean sexual orientation. It's just not a man. It's fairly easy to describe this type but, again, on a teenage level. This is someone who's discussing his street problems while having a cup of tea with his parents. Like there was a fight and Petya kicked his arse, Petya's bad. So the parents put in a complaint to the police and Petya gets busted.

Victor's example of how a man stops being a man and becomes a 'faggot' by denouncing someone and seeking help from the police again refers to the criminal value system according to which these actions are considered to be a major offence.

Later in the interview, placing a strong accent on the perceived costs attached to masculinity, Victor again aligned women's and faggots' social experience and concluded with the next formula of gender relations: 'You're a man, you have to. I'm a woman, I'm allowed to. And that is about the same. You're a man - you have to, I'm a faggot - I'm allowed to.' The very next moment he anxiously clarified that this is all absolutely unfamiliar to him and in fact he has never come into contact with homosexuals, whom he quite habitually calls 'fags' or 'faggots'. By feminising homosexual men or gender-non-conforming men as weak, irrational, irresponsible, and unreliable, while simultaneously masculinising himself as mentally strong, rational, responsible and reliable, Victor engages in the making of hegemonic masculinity that legitimates hierarchical gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men (Messerschmidt, 2012: 66).

Another respondent Arsenii, a 32-year-old psychologist, was part of street gang for several months in his late teens, when all the youngsters dreamed of occupying an honourable position in the criminal hierarchy and, in his words, becoming 'onlookers' (*smotriashchie*).⁹⁵ Arsenii confirmed that women and girls were actively excluded from the criminal men's world.

Those guys who started to mess with [criminality]... girls immediately disappeared from those friendship groups, because you know this 'bros before hoes' lads' saying. Most likely, though, there was no place for a woman as a full participant in all this. She was perceived as, yes, she's got tits, yes, it'd be nice to sleep with her, but nothing more than that really.

It is crucial to note that the respondents' attitudes presented in this subchapter are not solely formed by the criminality discourse but are a part of the wider patriarchal culture which informed the socialisation of young men in Soviet and post-Soviet societies. Among other things, this culture has conditioned and reinforced a culturally specific set of gender double standards, including the expulsion of women and girls from the public sphere. Therefore I argue that a consideration of the intersections between the criminal culture in Russia and mainstream constructions of gender is vital for understanding the specificity of the region and its gender dynamic.

⁹⁵ A *smotriashchii* is a person who is looking for compliance with the criminal quasi-law in a prison cell or enforces this law onto a certain territorial community at liberty, which he is in charge of. A *smotriashchii* is personally appointed by a thief-in-law, and has many special rights, authority, and enjoys a very high status in the criminal hierarchy.

Compulsory Criminality

Not all of the respondents who drew on the discourses of criminality when they talked about masculinity did so in the same way. While some respondents celebrated the criminal culture's values and norms and strove to construct their own masculinity in accordance with them, some of the interviewees spontaneously distinguished themselves from 'this kind of man'. Anatolii's story is illustrative in this sense.

I remember that my father wanted to make some kind of a sportsman out of me – well, not a sportsman exactly, but a fighter. So [he said] you need to do sports, boxing, wrestling, all this crap. From his words, it seemed that the world only consists of fighting without rules. At that time he had to do a lot of business with bandits, communicate with them. Well, it was not his business, he just worked in a big company ... He told me: 'Yes of course, you are a smart boy, but you'd better go in for sports'. Well, anyway I remember that it all turned my stomach. How can I put it? This machismo a la 90s, when thugs are all around and one needs to be able to repel them and stand by his word... Plus, at this time my uncle, who happened to get put in jail in the Andropov years for a fight in a pub, was still alive. And when he got out of prison he began to tell us his stories about prison life using jargon. I don't remember anything good [about him], though he was sort of a normal person, but all this thieves' talk, all these existential maxims of prison life. How terrible! I am sick of it! I myself can use it with a lot of irony. I clearly remember when I was 14-15 years old and my father told me about "bazar" and all this stuff ... That said, he was a person with two degrees. Well, as the saying goes, social settings shape you. In the 2000s, when this banditry had blown over, he, in my opinion, very seriously rethought his so-called values. Now of course he sees it all as a terrible time in his life.

Anatolii's relationship with criminal *poniatiia* is very different from those of Victor. Firstly, he ridicules and disagrees with the criminal type of masculine bravado, and secondly, unlike Victor and Arsenii, who admitted that they engaged with the criminal value system on the streets, Anatolii had encountered it not only among his peers but also at home: 'For Christ's sake, my school was full of *gopniks*,⁹⁶ and then you come home and your father tells you the same things.' In his words, he experienced considerable pressure from his family members to internalise criminal and prison norms in order to build an adequate masculine identity. His father was a key figure in applying this pressure on him.

The main reason why Anatolii's father wanted to equip his son with knowledge of the *poniatiia* and encourage him to become a skilled fighter was to prepare him for 'real life'. In the morass of the 1990s, the period that Anatoly refers to, 'real life' in Russia and

⁹⁶ *Gopnik* is a derogatory term for young 'street' people. They are seen as violently colonising the city space and being involved in turf fights, attacks on young people who are not members of their local groups, small-scale delinquency, and crime (Stephenson, 2012:69).

particularly life around the processes of building a market economy was to a considerable degree controlled by the organised crime networks. At this time, violent entrepreneurs of different levels (organized crime groups, private protection companies, informal units of state police acting as private actors) started to play a crucial role in creating the institutions of a new market and the processes of social regulation (Stephenson, 2012; 2015; Volkov, 2002). According to Anatolii's testimony, his father had to do a lot of business with these violent entrepreneurs.

One of the main skills required for carrying out violent entrepreneurship is the competent use and demonstration of physical force. Strong, well-trained bodies and fighting skills were considered a prerequisite for the process of control and establishing order. In the 1990s, physical force could be transformed into economic benefits and was one of the main methods of confirming masculinity. Men who could not rebuff physical and 'conversational' violence (the term of Collins, 2008) directed at them became victims because they did not embody hegemonic masculinity and thus were not considered 'real men' (Salagaev and Shashkin, 2004). Relying on the principle that 'might is right', a man could use his fighting skills to claim social and even moral superiority (Volkov, 2002). Another important skill that Anatolii's father and uncle wanted him to acquire was fluency in criminal norms and values. They assumed that in presenting himself as a bearer of such norms, a man in post-Soviet Russia identifies with the strong dominant group in the street, criminal, and business spaces, and thus obtains a solid reputation and individual power (Salagaev and Shashkin, 2004). In other words, the adequate masculinity that Anatolii was pressured to learn comprised a high level of physical strength, an active position in life, aggression, and determined use of violence. Within the confines of his family settings, a powerful and straightforward criminality discourse emphasised tough, hegemonic masculinity that he felt obliged to reproduce.

In his narrative, Anatolii constructs criminal culture norms and discourses as ugly, aggressive and pathological manifestations of a lack of cultural and educational competency. For him, this characterized the 1990s in Russia. It is nevertheless curious that while Anatoly connects the existence of criminal masculinities with a particular historical period, which according to him ceased to exist in the 2000s, he still pays considerable attention to reasoning about the criminal world and repeatedly stresses that he is not like 'this kind of man'. One of the reasons why this topic is so important to him is his involuntary sense of familial belonging to this culture. However Anatolii's story of being deprived of the freedom to choose whether to internalise or reject criminal masculinity

accords with the stories of other respondents, who in different ways implied that the criminality discourse had been compulsory for them, had a disciplinary character and in general characterised the daily relations of authority and submission in various social settings. These findings are supported by the conclusions of Beumers and Lipovetsky who state that during the 1990s in Russia discursive violence, ‘in particular that of a criminal culture... rapidly subordinated the field of social and economic communication... [while] the virtuosos of “popular” communication by means of violence, and those who assimilated these languages, formed the new elites’ (2009:63).

Reconfiguration of Masculine Hierarchies and Masculine Privilege

Michael Kimmel, in his work on the history of masculinity in the United States, demonstrates that economic factors are the key variables that initiate change in cultural conceptions of masculinity (1996). Russian history confirms this theoretical insight. The emergence of a capitalist economy in Russia changed the cultural meaning of masculinity. My data shows that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union the two main symbols of masculinity – a builder of Communism and defender of the Motherland – that were promoted by the Soviet state for several decades and, as I show in the previous chapter, left a heavy imprint on Russian people’s identities, quickly gave way to a number of masculinity models directly tied to a man’s success in the market economy. Russian men became divided into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of the transition, while the masculine role models of the early post-Soviet era were businessmen and entrepreneurs of all kinds, including the so-called violent entrepreneurs (Volkov, 2002). Although these models have evolved along with the changing macro parameters of the 2000s and 2010s, my data shows that they continue to be important reference points for Russian men who want to be seen as masculine.

As I have discussed in this chapter, the new rules brought on by the transition from state socialism to capitalism and the free market brought with it new strategies for success. The new forms of domination and subordination became explicitly gendered and inextricably tied to individual economic success. Discursive construction of new masculinities worked as a veil for the process of economic class formation and was built around possession or control of resources (Gapova, 2002: 658). Coincidentally, the new rich and powerful, the winners of the transition, were almost exclusively male, while women, at least on the mass scale symbolic level, themselves became an important resource to control. Intensive sexual consumption of women, as well as the protection and

redomestication of women, became culturally celebrated markers of manliness and a symbolically 'meaningful' way to reclaim masculinity, a way to take it back from the oppressive Soviet state which monopolised resources and ideological hegemony to define gender roles.

The three themes that I have discuss in this chapter (the emergence of the 'new' bourgeois ideal of gender relations, the rise of private entrepreneurship and the expansion of criminal culture) all point to the single most important process that took place in the 1990s in Russia – the process of economic class formation. Alongside the new rich and powerful, this process produced other groups, the poor and disempowered. Non-middle class, non-bourgeois, non-entrepreneurial men, as well as men who could not or did not want to violently fight for a place in the capitalist sun, receded into the background.

Over the course of the 2000s, with the modernisation of the economy and the strengthening of the state, the class formation processes in Russia took a different shape. Under Vladimir Putin, state institutions managed to gain the upper hand in the systems of economic and violent regulation, and the entrepreneurial opportunities for people not belonging to the new ruling elite or engaging in criminal gangs' activities contracted. Putin's ascent to power coincided with the drastic increase of the global price for fuel resources (from 2000 to 2007 the oil price tripled) and, as a result, a sharp rise in living standards in Russia, which doubled during Putin's first two presidential terms. Russia moved up from the 20th largest economy in the world to the seventh (Rutland, 2008). The improving economy and the promise of security and protection helped Putin to receive widespread support among the Russian population and created favourable conditions for his centralisation reforms and phasing out of the democratic liberties of the 1990s. Russia entered a new historical era, characterised by a whole new set of political, economic and social processes and dynamics. In this new era, however, gender and masculinity has still remained 'a primary way of signifying relationships of power' (Scott, 1986: 1072-1073).

Chapter 5. Searching for the New Russian Identity: The Remasculinisation of Russia

People say ‘Putin this’ and ‘Putin that’, but it was he
who took our Russia out of the sewer. He put things back on track
Pavel, 66 years old, Russia

Until there is an alternative to Putin, let him tighten the screws, let him
show those comrades abroad who’s boss. I disapprove of him for many
things that are happening around us, but I don’t want Nemtsov’s lot in
power, I don’t want Prokhorov’s people in power. I don’t want any of these
people.⁹⁷

Stanislav, 54 years old, Russia

Pavel and Stanislav’s words in many ways are indicative of the current condition of the citizen/state relationship in Russia. Both respondents claim to understand everything and disapprove of Putin; of the incredible level of corruption ‘comparable to genocide’ in its consequences, of the ‘pocket’ court system, of political oppression and the blatant hypocrisy of the contemporary political elite. At the same time they state that they will not support anybody else because Russia needs a strong ruling hand and Putin has proved to have one. Curiously, their accounts provide a rather accurate description of both the content and result of the state propaganda in Putin’s Russia, the aim of which is to make people believe that it is Putin who has brought stability, increased the living standards, level of security and international prestige of Russia.

Although, as I showed in the previous chapter, the ‘winners’ of the economic transition in Russia were able to secure a positive masculine identity for themselves, the collective Russian identity in the 1990s was one of demasculinisation (Ryabova and Ryabov, 2011: 65-66). A dramatic decline in living standards across the nation, defeat in the Cold War and the loss of superpower status, the flagging prestige of the Russian army, drastic rise in draft evasion and two highly unpopular Chechen wars (1994-1996 and 1999-2000), dependence on financial aid from international organisations and the alcoholism of president Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) gradually came to be perceived by Russians as a major humiliation (Ryabova and Ryabov, 2011; Riabov and Riabova, 2014). Public opinion polls indicate that in December 1999, Boris Yeltsin’s rating was four percent (FOM, 1999). ‘Thus the politics of identity conducted by the new Russian authorities

⁹⁷ Mikhail Prokhorov and Boris Nemtsov are prominent political figures in Russia and former leaders of the liberal anti-Putin opposition. Boris Nemtsov was assassinated on February 27, 2015, a year and a half after I conducted the interview with Stanislav.

under Putin had to take into consideration the demands for the restoration of national (and male) pride' (Riabov and Riabova, 2014: 25).

As Ryabova and Ryabov explain, '[r]eviving national dignity was Vladimir Putin's trademark since as early as his prime ministerial appointment in September 1999. Already then he went on record as saying: "Russia may rise from her knees and fetch a good blow.'" (2011: 66). Subsequently, the task of rehabilitation of national 'manliness' and remasculinisation of Russia's image becomes a core component of the new nation building project and one of the main legitimisation strategies of Putin's political regime (Riabov and Riabova, 2014; Sperling, 2015).

The remasculinisation of Russia relied on three distinct but closely interconnected strategies. First, it included creating appealing and respected images of national masculinity. The hyper-masculine image of Putin came to occupy central place in bringing this strategy into play. Putin's image has been militarised, eroticised and presented as a national symbol (Ryabova and Ryabov, 2011; Sperling, 2015). The Kremlin's image-makers put into the spotlight his attractive, physical masculinity and made him appear as reliable, responsible, sober and strong. Over the years of his presidency, Putin showed off his martial arts skills, saved a crew of journalists from a Siberian tiger, taught cranes how to fly and migrate, discovered ancient Greek amphorae beneath the waters of the Black Sea, divorced his wife - who, it could be argued, made him seem old - and even 'took' Crimea. His personal qualities (strength of character, virility, activeness, sense of responsibility, integrity, reliability) are presented as 'being relevant to politics', which, in its turn, makes effective use of a tradition 'to personify the states as their key statesmen, which results in international relations appearing as relationships between men' (Ryabova and Ryabov, 2011: 60).⁹⁸

As I discuss in Chapter One, historical research into masculinities shows that 'masculine entrepreneurs' emerge in times of large-scale social, political and economic transformations, in which the meaning of masculinity is in flux. Masculine entrepreneurs can be defined as 'individuals who – either by accident or by design – became incredibly well known for and associated with transformations in masculinity' (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016: 43-44). Vladimir Putin should be seen as a masculine entrepreneur in that his

⁹⁸ It should be noted that Putin's image was first constructed in accordance with Western masculine canons (as a rational, practical and cool manager). 'Soon, however, instead of a Western manager, the electorate was offered a "father tsar" image, a man who defended his subjects from the West's intrigues and from the bribe-taking negligent officials' ((Ryabova and Ryabov, 2011: 64).

ascendance to power and popularity both marks an important transition period in the Russian history of gender relations and actively shapes this transition.

As a second key strategy, the project of remasculinising Russia under Putin's rule (both as a president and a prime minister) relied on attributing masculine characteristics to the country, such as a continuous emphasis on the revival of military strength, independence and sovereignty (key masculine features in traditional cultures). The new image of Russia placed strong emphasis on national military might and the athletic achievements of sports teams representing the country at the international level. 'The idea of "sovereign democracy" became an ideological cornerstone of Putin's second term. Sovereignty is seen as an opportunity for Russia to decide its own fate, to render it less dependent on international financial organisations, to make it a subject rather than an object in world politics' (Riabov and Riabova, 2014: 27). During Putin's third presidential term, the push for sovereignty resulted in the infamous law on 'foreign agents', which requires non-profit organisations which receive foreign funding to register and declare themselves as foreign agents.

Third, the remasculinisation of Russia in public and media discourses was also supposed to be achieved by the demasculinisation of external and internal Others. Western countries and former Soviet states, especially the states located in Central Asia and those that have undergone colour revolutions, were constructed as the most important external Others for Russian identity.⁹⁹ While the West was a historically important Other for Russian people, the Othering of former Soviet states was a relatively new phenomenon. The internal Others in Russia, according to public opinion polls and the official state narrative, were 'ethnic minorities' (understood as external and internal migrants from Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus)¹⁰⁰ and the liberal political opposition, which is commonly accused of collaboration with the West and described as a 'fifth column.'¹⁰¹ Following massive anti-government protests in December 2011, the Russian authorities, the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and public intellectuals and media personalities loyal to the regime sought to consolidate public opinion around the notions of

⁹⁹ In the context of political propaganda in Putin's Russia, colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine are usually attributed to U.S. political interests and influence, while Georgia and Ukraine are depicted as lacking independence and sovereignty, and thus masculinity (Riabov and Riabova, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ On the relationship between race/ethnicity, religion and citizenship in the narratives of the research participants, see below in this chapter.

¹⁰¹ The concept of 'internal enemies,' which originates in Stalin's era, came into active use in the middle of the 2000s and served to legitimise 'Russia's political regime by repeatedly identifying, and then demonizing, various groups purported to be "enemies" of Russia... During Putin's third term, the state-aligned media have intensified the search for "enemies" through well-orchestrated campaigns that tend to target people against whom there are widespread societal prejudices' (Tolz and Harding, 2015: 461).

unity and patriotism, ‘traditional values’ and fear of the country’s purported enemies abroad and within. In the mainstream media these enemies were systematically portrayed as ‘anti-Russian’, ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘not masculine’ (Tolz and Harding, 2015).

It is important to mention that apart from the ideological project of remasculinisation of Russia, gender and sexuality issues in post-Soviet Russian politics were not subjects of active state concern until the second presidential term of Vladimir Putin (2004-2008). However, beginning from the mid 2000s, gender issues became highly politicised. This started with identifying of a demographic problem in Russia. The government argued that one of the ways of solving this problem was to increase childbirth. Women were encouraged to have more children by means, among other things, of the introduction of maternity capital.¹⁰² Some amendments were also made to the law on reproductive rights. Various initiatives started to call for radical revision of Russia’s very liberal abortion law, or even a ban on abortion. Members of the Russian Orthodox Church, pro-lifers and people radically opposed to women’s reproductive rights suddenly started to receive extensive TV coverage (Hutchings and Tolz, 2015). These radical conservatives who wanted to ban abortion have not achieved their goal. However changes in the law on abortions were introduced, and some of these amendments resulted in the tightening of this law. A further development was the infamous law banning the ‘propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships to minors.’ The introduction of this law sparked considerable international outcry and is now commonly viewed as the culmination of the conservative mobilisation and a part of the Kremlin’s nation-rebuilding scheme.¹⁰³

However, the project of remasculinisation of Russia and the conservative turn in gender and sexuality politics, albeit highly effective in many regards, have been taking place in the context of an increasingly global world and the intensive development of online media and new information technologies.¹⁰⁴ The latter have ‘led to the extension, diversification, and acceleration of global cultural flows and an increase in the intensity, volume, and speed of cultural exchange and communication’ (Pilkington and Bliudina,

¹⁰² According to the law on maternity capital, any woman who gives birth to or adopts a second, third, fourth, etc. child after January 1, 2007, is entitled to 250,000 rubles (£4,901), an unprecedented amount for Russian social services.

¹⁰³ The pushback against LGBTQ rights in Russia is almost always framed by human rights organisations and the international media as part of a broader suppression of positive liberties, a reaction to the massive anti-government protests in December 2011. Whereas other anti-liberal policies introduced by the government at almost the same time, restricting the freedom of assembly, free speech, the Internet, NGOs’ activities and foreign adoptions aroused Russian people’s disapproval, the so-called anti-gay law has found broad support among the Russian population.

¹⁰⁴ Ironically, May 2000, when Putin’s first presidency started, was the month I connected my home computer to the Internet for the first time.

2002:1). Since the new global media infrastructures are increasingly controlled by a handful of the 'First World' multinationals, 'contemporary global interaction is conducted primarily through the media of Western popular culture and business communication' (ibid, reference to Held et al., 1999:341). Western media and business advertise a range of class- and culture-specific lifestyles and ideologies, something which has a very complex outcome in the Russian context. On the one hand, the propagandistic messages of the current political regime depict the West as Russia's main enemy, which strives to weaken and turn it into a third world country. On the other hand, however, the economic, technological and cultural advances of Western countries make them the object of envy and role models for the rest of the world, including Russia.

Considering that the content of political propaganda, which aims to convince the population that Putin's Russia has occupied a prominent place in the world order, and specifically in the project of rebuilding national identity, to a large degree relies on refuting supposedly Western models of gender relations as well as the Western cultural and political projects of gender equality and non-discrimination of LGBTQ rights, the evolving gender order in Russia in the 2000s and early 2010s is characterised by growing tensions and diversifications of gender regimes.

Pavel and Stanislav's quotes at the beginning of this chapter exemplify how a very specific historical political propaganda transforms itself directly into people's speech. However, as a researcher who is primarily interested in how gender relations change and evolve and how gender hegemony reproduces itself, I am less interested in straightforward reproductions of Putin's propaganda (which are abundantly present within my data) than in the narratives that show how the effects of this propaganda intersect with the effects of globalisation, and the hybrid forms and performances of Russian masculinities that are born at the intersection of powerful global (Western) and local (Russian) discourses. In the context of this chapter, I look at the gendered self-representations of younger, well-educated immigrant and non-immigrant Russian men who were born or came of age during the post-Soviet years, men who were growing up in the open global media space. These respondents are quite often very critical of Putin's politics and lay claim to cosmopolitan identities. They are people 'looking West' and are often invested in the construction of liberal, fair-minded, progressive and gender sensitive masculinities. However, as my analysis shows, this does not make them immune to the highly gendered propaganda of the contemporary political regime. A close reading of their biographical narratives shows that these seemingly progressive self-representations can simultaneously reinforce existing

gender and racial hierarchies, work to conceal systems of power and inequality in historically new ways and be creatively in line with the contemporary political messages in Russia.

Demilitarisation and Remilitarisations of Post-Soviet Russian Masculinities¹⁰⁵

The post-Soviet period in Russian history has witnessed contradictory and parallel processes of demilitarisation and remilitarisation. In this part of the chapter, I outline the context and reasons these trends took place.

As discussed in Chapter Three, in the Soviet Union the military was considered a key pillar of the state, masculinity and society. In the late Soviet period, however, the eminent public image of the Soviet army began to be eroded. As Maya Eichler explains, '[t]his was due to a combination of factors involving the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979-1989), Gorbachev's reform policies (1985-1991), and the activism of soldiers' mothers (starting in the late 1980s)' (2012:27-28). Gorbachev's policy of glasnost' created an opportunity for an open discussion and critical examination of the war in Afghanistan and Soviet military in general, which was simply impossible before. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers played a crucial role in steering this conversation and opening up the military to public scrutiny (Eichler, 2012; Elkner, 2004; Galeotti, 1995). The first official number of Soviet troops that had been killed during the ten-year war in Afghanistan was 13,833.¹⁰⁶ The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers calculated that largely due to *dedovshchina* (army hazing and bullying), 38,000 noncombat deaths had occurred in the Soviet army during the same period (Galeotti, 1995:97). Growing public awareness of *dedovshchina* and the unclear purpose of the Soviet-Afghan war made people reconsider the idea of serving in the military as the civic duty of all men and important for their masculine socialisation. Draft evasion, a marginal phenomenon in Soviet society, started to gather pace. 'The final years of the Soviet Union were also accompanied by military retreats – from Afghanistan, Eastern Europe, and parts of the former Soviet republics – and the humiliation of having “lost” the Cold War. Thus the late Soviet state period was characterised by a partial demilitarisation of state and society' (Eichler, 2012:33).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 exacerbated the military crisis and reinforced demilitarisation processes on every level: the state, the military, society, and the

¹⁰⁵ '[M]ilitarization [is] any process that helps establish and reinforce a central role for the military in state and society, and demilitarization [is] a process through which the military's position is questioned and undermined.' (Eichler, 2012: 4; Encloe, 2000).

¹⁰⁶ This number first appeared in the newspaper 'Pravda' on August 17, 1989. At a later date, the total figure had slightly increased.

individual. The ideological crisis of the military that started in the 1980s, and public awareness of the systemic violence and humiliation conscripts were exposed to, were supplemented in the early post-Soviet years with a severely reduced state military budget, highly unpopular Chechen wars and the transition to capitalism, which created new notions of masculinity. As I show in Chapter Four, the new understanding of masculinity was tied to financial success in the market economy, and entered into conflict with the patriotic, militarised masculinity of the Soviet times. The breakdown of the Soviet social contract on which men's soldiering rested and the failure of the post-Soviet state 'to back up men's militarization with tangible rewards, whether for ideological or economic reasons' (Eichler, 2012:140), radically undermined individual Russian men's willingness both to serve, and to define military service as a key institution for developing their masculine identities.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, military service remained a constitutional duty of Russian men. However, if in the 1970s the Soviet state drafted 70 to 85 per cent of draft-age men (Jones, 1985:56-57), during the first one and a half decades of its existence the new Russian state was only able to call up for military service about 10 to 30 per cent of men in the draft pool (Eichler, 2012:59). The rest avoided conscription through legal and illegal means. The main reasons for such a drastic rise in draft evasion were terrible living conditions, poor food and health services for conscripts, *dedovshchina* and the two Chechen wars. Due to greater press freedom during the first of these wars (1994-1996), information about inadequate military preparation and widely publicised stories about untrained conscripts sent into battle, draft evasion quickly became a social norm.

The rapidly growing social stratification, which was an effect of the transition to a market economy, had another serious impact on conscription in Russia. Since men from relatively privileged backgrounds can buy their way out of the army or get a draft deferment as university students, the majority of conscripts in post-Soviet Russia 'come from the most disadvantaged, least affluent parts of society' (Human Rights Watch, 2004:7). Thus, military service in post-Soviet Russia became 'increasingly tied to a marginal masculinity differentiated by class' (Eichler, 2012:71-72). Another significant effect of transition to a market economy was the dissociation of militarised masculinity with patriotism. The growing social inequalities have increased tension between patriotism and individualism, with the former increasingly giving way to the latter (*ibid.*: 80).

This situation with the military and patriotism has become a matter of concern for the political leadership since Vladimir Putin came to power. A renewed ideological call for

a stronger military was supposed to re-establish the link between masculinity and patriotism. The rise in Putin's popularity itself was closely connected with his personal appeal to militarised patriotism and public displays of deep respect for the military. In the context of the late 1990s, when many people became disillusioned with capitalism, liberal democracy and the West, a promise of strong leadership and masculinised-militarised protection was something that many Russians craved (Eichler, 2012:49). The second Chechen war and the fear of terrorists helped to justify the need for the revival of militarism.

However, despite the fact that renewed state ideology of militarised patriotism contributed to Putin's personal popularity and was partially successful in making militarism one of the sources of legitimacy of the new Russian state, the material challenges that continue to weaken the military forces have not been resolved. The Putin regime also failed to reassess the ideological component of military service. The overall rhetoric of renewed militarised patriotism almost entirely relies on the ideals of the Soviet era (Eichler, 2012:84). Thus the notions of patriotic, self-sacrificing, militarised masculinity in Russia remain in sharp disagreement with a masculinity informed by capitalist notions of individualism. What effects did all these contradictory and parallel processes of de- and remilitarisation have on Russian masculinities? In what follows, I provide an overview of my research data and, placing it in the context of post-Soviet transformations, consider the evolving role of the ideology of militarism for masculinity construction amongst Russian men.

Military Service: The Experience of Research Participants

Despite the fact that 31 out of 40 respondents had never been involved in actual military service,¹⁰⁷ conversations about the military, warriors, heroic deeds and defenders of the family and the motherland constitute a very substantial part of the data. In fact, my NVivo code 'man-defender', which includes military related narratives as well as other references to individual self-representations that portray a man as, above all, a defender of his family, women, children and the elderly, emerged as the largest within the data. The idea that half

¹⁰⁷ Among the 40 people I interviewed, three were professional military men, four had served two years in the Russian army (this was before 2008, when the term of service was reduced to one year), one had served two years in the Armed Forces of Turkmenistan and another had served one year in the Estonian army. Nine research participants were enrolled in a reserve officer-training program while at university ('*voennaya kafedra*'), which qualified them for exemption from actual conscript service. While this university course usually includes a 2 or 4 week military exercise training it cannot be compared with the actual experience of serving in the military. Thus I do not count these respondents as people who have been involved in actual military service.

of the population (men) by definition are warriors and defenders and the other half (women) are in need of protection, appears in almost half of the interviews, but looms larger and more vividly in the data collected in Russia.¹⁰⁸ Taken as a whole, Russian men interviewed in Britain are much less invested in this idea and the corresponding performance of masculinity.

It is noteworthy that when I asked the research participants what exactly they wanted to protect women or their families from, and which sources of danger they saw as more real than others, this usually resulted in hesitation, uncertainty, and reference to diffusely imagined enemies (gunmen in the woods or hooligans in the street). My constant impression was that many respondents might not have thought of this before or did not have the experience of physically defending someone in an extreme situation. Just as in many other world cultures, in the Russian cultural tradition, 'man is a defender' is the 'right answer' and a link that is culturally cultivated. Research that builds on scholarship in feminist International Relations and/or pro-feminist masculinities studies suggests that the continuous reproduction of this link is crucially important, firstly, for state justification of male conscription and the waging of war by men, and, secondly, for reinforcing gender inequality between men and women, between masculinities and femininities and between men themselves (Eichler, 2012; Enloe, 2000; Young 2003).

The parts of the interviews that I coded as 'military' and 'man-defender' were usually highly emotionally coloured. My personal impression is that military service specifically is a sore subject for many men I interviewed. Sometimes, after being asked 'Have you ever been in the army?', even informants who generally tended to give quite laconic answers to my questions would start on a long vehement speech about the Russian military, world wars, global conspiracy, and, in one case, how much of a man he had felt when he had protected a girl in the 5th form. There was a lot of abstract reasoning about external threats to the family and the state, many stories about childhood dreams of becoming a soldier, multiple references to literature about the Great Patriotic War and numerous fantasies about heroic deeds, as well as regrets, excuses and contemplations about their alternative life paths, starting from the words 'if I had gone to the army' or 'if I had not gone to the army'. Emotional colouring of these narratives was either overly positive and admiring or strictly negative and dismissive; it was very rarely measured and

¹⁰⁸ For 17 respondents (12 in Russia and 5 in the UK) 'defender' is either a key performance strategy or the central notion of masculinity. 15 people intensely advocated this idea, while one informant in Russia and one in the UK passionately contested it. Several other people interviewed in the UK at times attempted to challenge this idea but did so either in vague terms or contradictory ways.

detached. The overall content of the militaristic or defender narratives was full of categorical judgments and was generally rife with contradictions.

Naturally, the narratives of those who had some military service experience were rather different from the narratives of those who had never been in the army. Although the accounts of the professional military men and former conscripts were equally emotional, they were much better informed and showed a deeper understanding of the role the military plays for the state and society. In contrast, men without any military experience often demonstrated a total or partial lack of understanding of what military service is actually about, how military subordination functions and the purpose of military-type discipline. Many younger men's reflections about the army revolved around the topics of the personal gain and costs attached to the military service, and about individual comfort and discomfort. At the same time their accounts were imbued with fantasies of masculinity and heroic exploits, which bore no connection with reality. It is noteworthy that those respondents who had never joined the army seemed to feel an acute need to explain in detail their reasons.

For the purpose of my study, it is significant that both older and younger men, those who had served in the military and those who had found a way out of mandatory military service, and immigrant and non-immigrant research participants, all made abundant use of militarised masculinity discourse. It is also striking that while doing so they talked about two different armies: the 'victorious' Red Army with its spirit of male bonding and camaraderie and the 'disgraceful' post-Soviet army, where younger conscripts are viciously hazed and exploited for personal ends by older soldiers and military officials. While Chapter Three focuses on those respondents who strongly hold on to Soviet notions of militarised masculinity (militarised patriotism, military service as a sacred obligation and central institution of male socialisation), the following section explores post-Soviet militarist and anti-militarist discourses.

Between Russia and Britain, Between Militarism and Antimilitarism

Militarization never is simply about joining a military. It is a far more subtle process... Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal. Militarization, that is, involves cultural as well as institutional, ideological, and economic transformations. (Encloe, 2000: 2-3).

I remember one time in Moscow underground I saw how some blokes were needling some nerd: 'Have you been to the army? What's wrong with you mate? They'll make you a man there.' In my understanding, the army exists to defend the country, not to make men. I don't care if it's a man or not a man, as long as he's properly doing his job ... Well, fortunately I don't have anything to do with the army. But of course, it's obvious that I have a negative attitude [towards the army]. A place where they make men out of people rather than do real work, I have zero interest in this institution ...

Danil, 38 years old, England

I definitely didn't want to go to the army. I think it's a waste of time. I don't think that I owe anything to any country. And I believe that the concept of 'duty to one's motherland' serves to brainwash people, to make people go to serve in the army, [where today in fact they] do different construction works, build factories, buildings, lay rail tracks, do something for free. This is just a cheap [or] free labour force. People are working two years or a year for food and somewhere to sleep. Of course, you have to brainwash them [to make them do so]. If you don't brainwash them, then who's gonna go there? Bring up a boy telling him that in order to become a man, a real man, you have to go in the army. Tell him this for 17 years, of course, he'd want to go. This is just brainwashing of a certain social group, to get them do what the state wants them to do to save money on contract soldiers.

Roman, 26 years, England

Danil and Roman both express a consistent antimilitarist position. Both emigrated from Russia in their mid-twenties and have never been in the army. Both are highly educated men who currently live in the UK. Like many other respondents in both research contexts, they critique the state of the contemporary Russian army and deny the notion of the military as the main masculine socialisation institute. In contrast to the majority of the interviewees, however, they seem to have escaped from the grip of Soviet and post-Soviet militaristic state propaganda. They know how this propaganda works, who its main target is, and which people are more affected by it in Russia. These are less educated people, people from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds, people from rural areas and men who feel their masculinity is being marginalised. None of the immigrant Russian men in my study had been in the Russian army.¹⁰⁹ This is due to various factors, including immigration and health issues, but most of them stated that the main reason was their

¹⁰⁹ The only respondent in the UK with actual military service experience was Alexander. Alexander (36 years old) spent a year in the post-Soviet Estonian army, which in his words bears no comparison with the Russian army. He describes the Estonian army as a much more humane organisation than the Russian army, which 'simply disfigures people' and 'turns young men into criminals'. The Estonian army, in contrast, 'doesn't try to break a man'.

personal unwillingness to serve. As discussed in the methodology section, the immigrant men in my study are, in different ways, privileged people, and, as noted in the previous section, privileged Russian people no longer go to the army.

Yurii's case is interesting in this regard. Although he did not serve in the army, he told me he had wanted to. A 34 year old financial expert, he had applied to join the contract army in Lithuania, where he had graduated from high school, but was not accepted. Here is how he explains his intention:

Yurii: I wanted to train myself as a man. To serve in the army is also an integral part of being a man. It's not about shooting someone, but about facing difficulties, living in a tent, exercising constantly, it's about a new social environment, *dedovshchina* (bullying) - you must go through all of this. You can build up a character there.

M: So you see the army as a strict regime training camp?

Yurii: Yes, yes. It's also free of charge, and you even get paid there.

M: You seem to be very focused on your career and at the same time you want to go to the army. I heard that many people, on the contrary, want to dodge the draft, believe that today [the army] is a waste of time.

Yurii: Well, I don't think so. For your career, it doesn't really matter if you start two years earlier or two years later. [The army] can do you more good than harm in your life, because there you'll harden your character, and this will be useful for you [because] your career then will go faster. You'll start later, but attain a high place faster.

Yurii did not want to shoot anybody, defend any country or commit any act of self-sacrifice. During the three hours in which I interviewed him it became clear that he was very much invested in and oriented towards his career in finance. His personal masculinity project is best described as 'professional man'. His intention to serve in the military had nothing to do with the concepts of 'sacred duty' or 'militarised patriotism'. All he wanted was to become physically stronger, sturdier and more emotionally resilient. Military service for him was a place that would benefit him personally.¹¹⁰ He imagined that after military service he would be fitter, more prepared for any type of situation, more disciplined, tougher, and more experienced in life. In other words he would be more of a man. It is noteworthy that he saw military skills as easily transferable to other areas of life and made straightforward links between militarised masculinity on the one hand, and

¹¹⁰ Whereas here it is me who introduced the concept of army as an intensive sport camp, in other cases it was the interviewees who used this description.

personal gain and professional growth on the other. If we compare his account with those of the men invested in the Soviet version of militarised masculinity (which I look at in Chapter Three), we can see the clearest illustration of the difference between individual and collective masculinities, between socialism and capitalism, and between the gendered past and the gendered present.

What unites the respondents in Russia and the UK is a generally positive attitude towards a volunteer, contract-based military. Although almost every research participant criticised the state of the post-Soviet Russian army, most of them said that in theory the army is an important institution, provided that it is voluntary, professional, well organised and pays fair salaries to recruits. Notably, no one other than Yurii expressed a desire to undertake military service itself. Younger men interviewed in Russia also often balanced a strong anti-militarist position with the selectively incorporated militarist performance of masculinity.

Anatolii (32 years old, Russia): I think it's time to stop conscription now. What does it have to do with manhood when a person is being forced into the army? It makes the whole system ugly, there is nothing about being a man here.

M: Well, as they say, the army makes a man out of a boy.

A: Well, it used to, perhaps, in the past. But now I don't know. I think [this expression now] has turned into meaningless words. A lot of these proverbial phrases no longer mean anything in modern life.

Anatolii, like many other respondents who have not served in the military, rejected the notion of militarised masculinity linked to compulsory military service and stated that the military as a primary institution of male socialisation is a relic of the past. He admitted that he bribed his way out of mandatory military service; however, he was in a hurry to add:

Well, actually, of course, [I remember] when buildings were being blown up [by terrorists], all these things - well, I don't rule out this [military service] possibility for myself completely. I'm not a pacifist at all. And when I learned about these explosions and Beslan in 2004,¹¹¹ it made a really strong impression on me. I can say that I empathised greatly. It seemed to me that we had to do something. Let's all go fight [terrorists], rub them out, so it never happens again.

¹¹¹ Anatolii is referring to the Beslan school siege when over 1100 people were captured as hostages in a school in North Ossetia. 334 people died and more than 800 wounded.

The two Chechen wars, the Moscow apartment bombings in 1999, the Nord Ost theatre siege in 2002, the Beslan school tragedy in 2004 and some other high profile terrorist acts created a widespread fear of terrorism in Russia. As Eichler writes (2012), this provided a particularly favourable context for Putin to play his tough and militarised masculinity card. The fear of terrorism helped to justify violent measures against Chechen separatists during the second Chechen war (1999-2009), centralisation of the state at the expense of democratic freedoms and a revival of Russia's military might (Eichler, 2012:48-50).

Anatolii, like many other respondents, did not see any contradiction between his militarist and anti-militarist sentiments. He was against obligatory draft but at the same time he used militarism to fulfil a narrative function of performing masculinity (Petrovic, 2012: 86). He balanced militarist and antimilitarist positions in a way that helped him to construct a progressive, 'civilized' masculinity of a man who embraces capitalist values, including the value of professionalisation and commercialisation of military service. He rejected the notion of man as a defender but at the same time signalled that he was not a pacifist and would be prepared to fight if there was a 'real' threat to the country. His position accords with another particular argument that kept recurring in my interviews: respondents stated that while they did not want to undertake any military service, they would be willing to fight in a 'real' war like the Great Patriotic War.

Although the respondents have embraced demilitarisation trends, only a small proportion of them consider military service to be senseless and unnecessary. Sometimes respondents who struck me as being as far from the military as one could imagine would step onto militarist ground to establish, evaluate or negate their masculinity.

Matvei (38 years old, England): The army? That's a dangerous place for people in general, but I perhaps would have benefited greatly there, if it [the Russian army] had been a normally functioning organisation.¹¹²

M.: Why do you say that you would have benefited from it?

P: I have certain character flaws, quite noticeable. This includes a lack of masculinity ... Well, to me the army would have been a place where I would have been forced to socialise, because the army, the military by definition is a male profession. Everything there is built to ensure that you, how to put it? Well, probably [had I been to the army] I would have fitted into the social definition of masculinity, I think. In my view, a man should be able to

¹¹² Like the rest of research participants, Matvei is highly critical of the current state of the post-Soviet Russian army.

physically protect his family. Unfortunately, that's not something that I can do. I'm a mathematician [who is] ill-adapted to life.

In Chapter Three, I demonstrate that the men who served in the Soviet army characterise military service as consisting of three main components, namely a 'deeply patriotic act', a 'sacred duty' and a 'masculine rite of passage'. When we turn to the post-Soviet context, however, the first two components disappear completely from the narratives of the research participants.¹¹³ In the post-Soviet context nobody sees military service as a duty or expression of patriotism. The third component of this formula remains in place, however. Men from a privileged background who have never been in the army continue to imagine military service as a masculine rite of passage. However, it should be noted that this is a different rite of passage. From a universal obligation it has become an optional sports camp where individual men can update their individual masculine skills.

In light of all the negativity surrounding the military service in post-Soviet Russia and the fact that the majority of my respondents have never served in the military, clearly had no plans to do so in the future and were harshly critical of the current state of the Russian army, their insistence on a positive nature of military service appears illogical. None of the respondents said that the military is an unnecessary institution. It may be a waste of time for them personally, but in theory we all need armies. Moreover, many men claimed that if the situation requires them to defend, they will be defenders. My contention is that it is still not entirely socially acceptable for Russian men to speak out against the military and conscription. To reject the military would not only undermine their masculinity but also their love for their country. This is partly due to the strong legacy of the militarism of the Soviet period and partly because militarism is one of the main foundations of patriarchy, which separates people into strong men and weak women, protectors and those who are in a constant need of protection. Furthermore, for those living in immigration, the notion of loyalty to their motherland is already problematized, and questioning the Russian army implies the additional risk of being seen as unmanly.

The performances of militarised masculinities within my data shed light on the unfolding of history. They show how the collapse of the Soviet Union and consequent political and social transformation changed one army into another. The institution once designed to forge collective masculinity is being radically redefined and adapted to the needs of the individual actor and consumer, who carefully plans his life path and chooses

¹¹³ All the references to patriotism were either invoked by the older men, who served in the Soviet army, or clearly pointed back to the Soviet past.

how to equip his personal skill set and ensure a better position in society. Physical stamina and emotional toughness continue to be valuable and desirable masculine qualities. The army is seen as a place where one can obtain these qualities and earn some masculine currency that in a patriarchal society can be easily converted into a number of benefits in different social domains.

The demilitarisation processes that I discuss in this chapter are by no means unique to post-Soviet Russia. Demilitarisation is a worldwide trend. Militarism is not disappearing, but it is changing. As in other Western post-military societies, in Russia and in the Russian speaking community in the UK, militarism still holds appeal at the rhetorical level. The citizen-soldier turns into the militarised citizen-spectator (Webber and Zilberman, 2006 cited in Eichler, 2012). My data shows that the military remains an important gendered terrain on which masculinity is contested and achieved. The political elites in Putin's Russia, who continuously look for effective legitimisation strategies, are trying to use this ground to forge a compelling form of the new masculinised and militarised national identity. Reproduction of the link between masculinity and the military also has crucial importance for the reproduction of unequal gender relations, as militarism portrays men as inherently militaristic and women as naturally peaceful and thus relies on notions of both masculinity and femininity (Eichler, 2012; Encloe, 2000; Young, 2003).

'Looking West' - or Fair-Minded, Progressive and Gender-Sensitive Russian Masculinities

- Today we and society are facing new challenges. Will our strict adherence to the stereotypes of the past solve the problem of the changing world? I'm not sure... I'm not saying that all men should become like this [progressive and open to change]. As we know, Darwinism is not so much about the survival of the strongest, but rather about the survival of those who can change and adapt. And we're evolving. Somewhere there was matriarchy, now it's gone. Somewhere there was patriarchy, and it's gone too. We respond to these challenges. On the one hand, we want to save what we consider fundamental in ourselves, but on the other, we have to sacrifice some misoneisms for the sake of survival.

- Are you personally willing to change and revise your views?

- Oh, well, that's a question. 'You shouldn't buckle under in the face of the changing world. It's better if it buckles under us.'¹¹⁴ I think, yes, the world is changing, and we must take this into account. There are some things we can

¹¹⁴ This is a famous line from a song by Andrey Makarevich, a Soviet and Russian rock musician.

change, but some things we just have to accept. There are things that are out of our power. The trick is to know the difference between them.

Timofei, 30 years old, England

Interviewing Timofei was a pleasure. It was a stimulating conversation with a like-minded person, a conversation full of jokes (many of which would probably only make sense to Russian expatriates in Western academia), full of intellectual reasoning about the nature of social changes, transnational migration and social construction of norms and meanings. Listening to Timofey's life story I felt that we shared much common ground and went through many similar experiences. Like me, Timofei is a doctoral researcher, well-travelled, educated in different countries, with an extensive experience of living abroad and quite advanced understanding of contemporary social theory. His identity project consists of presenting himself as being well-equipped for life in the increasingly gender-equal world, refuting rigid gender roles and stereotypes and having a better 'cultural fit' with progressive Western societies. This type of identity project in fact was not uncommon in my interviews. It was particularly (but not exclusively) prominent among educated middle-class men in their twenties and thirties, the first generation of Russians growing up in the global media space, men who were socialised and came of age after the Soviet Union's collapse, a time of massive cultural and material inflow into Russia from the West.¹¹⁵ Apart from age and class, two other socio-demographic factors that are directly connected to, and, in fact, predetermine the engagement with this discourse within my data, are homosexuality and the experience of living abroad (non-immigrant, well-travelled men also tend to fall into this category). In other words, in the context of this research, men who were involved in the construction of fair-minded, progressive and gender sensitive masculinities were either immigrants or gay or well-travelled people, or any combination of these three.¹¹⁶ Men who did not fall into any of these groups either did not raise the topic of gender equality or expressed a harsh gender equality backlash.

The accounts of interviewees who presented themselves as progressive, forward moving and West-looking advocates for gender equality are very different. It is hardly

¹¹⁵ Following Piirainen (1997) and Gapova (2002) who adopt a Weberian understanding of class for analysing the post-Soviet context, I understand class differences in terms of unequal access to the economic life-chances that people have. '[T]he life chances accessible to different groups of the population are distributed unevenly as a collective outcome of the activity of individual economic agents who differ with regard to power in the market' (Piirainen, 1997:29).

¹¹⁶ Gay men in both research sites position themselves as strong advocates for gender equality. However in contrast to immigrant gay men, those who are living in Russia show a very high degree of heterosexism and internalised homophobia.

possible to find a ‘representative’ story line to exemplify this part of the data. Some respondents critiqued various traits and behaviours associated with toxic masculinity (e.g. brutal macho men) and argued that qualities such as sensitivity and compassion should not be divided by gender and should be culturally accessible to both men and women; others appealed to common sense, human history, evolution theory and economic reality to prove that ‘there is no reason for gender inequality in the twenty-first century’. Some respondents reported aversion to those ‘who view women as second class people,’ while others celebrated women’s achievements in business and politics. Some were consistent in articulating these views and beliefs throughout the interview, while others only engaged in a ‘progressive’ or ‘twenty-first century’ masculinity performance (as they often called it) fragmentarily - i.e. they used it while talking about a certain topic and ridiculed it in other parts of the interview. Perhaps the only thing that unites the respondents who in one way or another have engaged in the ‘twenty-first century man’ masculinity performance is a shared feeling of the inevitability of a more gender equal future. Like Timofei and men in the Western countries, they seem to know that either they will go with the tide and walk freely into the future of greater gender equality or they will be dragged into it (Kimmel, 2013:xii).

Yet a close reading of the interviews with the ‘twenty-first century men’ reveals a number of serious inconsistencies. Firstly their justification of, and logic for, advocating gender equality rests on the very assumptions and beliefs that create this inequality: (a) their understanding of gender equality is based on a strict binary opposition between men and women; (b) they almost universally rely on heavily popularised versions of bio-determinist or sex/gender role theories to explain gender relations (e.g. they explain change in gender relations and differences between different countries/cultures by using a metaphor of ‘closer-further away from nature’ – thus more traditional Russia is closer to nature, whereas more civilized Britain has gone much further away); (c) they acknowledge the existence of discrimination against women in the public and private spheres, and deem it unfair, but actively use double standards to explain or justify this order of things; (d) almost all of them suggest that feminism and feminists ‘go too far’, ‘don’t understand what fair balance is’, ‘play a one-sided game’, or ‘overreact and overstep the mark’.

Generally speaking, all of the men within my study provided various blends of normative and essentialist definitions/understanding of masculinity. The ‘progressive’ men that I discuss in this section were by no means an exception. However, in contrast to respondents who did not make a claim for ‘progressiveness’, their gendered self-

representations were increasingly complex and/or inconsistent and confusing. Front-staging of gender sensitivities and a strong emotional appeal to gender justice and gender equality often camouflaged deeply traditionalist, patriarchal and paternalistic attitudes. Similarly, at times open-minded masculinity performances, which laid claim to tolerance and acceptance of alternative life styles and sexualities, were accompanied by hate speech and the construction of social hierarchies.

Secondly, 'progressive' men often failed to understand the difference between 'equality' and 'sameness'.¹¹⁷ It allowed them to use differences between men and women for the justification of anti-equality rhetoric. The 'progressive' men combined gender sensitive masculinity performances with the age-old argument that women would never be fully equal to men because they were biologically different (less physically strong, more emotional, had different brain chemistry, etc.) or they said that full equality was dangerous because women would start to be like men (manlike or butch).

Thirdly, more often than not, the 'twenty-first century men' masculinity performances were delivered in a rather self-congratulatory and complacent fashion. Some of the men were almost bragging about how progressive and enlightened they were and simultaneously directly or indirectly deemed men 'stuck in traditional attitudes' as backward, ridiculous and in one way or another inferior to them. Therefore gender sensitivity and progressiveness was an important foundation for masculine hierarchy building. To a different extent all three points were usually present within the narratives of the 'progressive' men.

Flirtation with gender equality among young, white, privileged men is not a unique Russian phenomenon but a tendency that is gathering pace in the Western world. Following the body of research on men and masculinities, I use hybrid masculinity framework to analyse this part of the data (Arxer, 2011; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2010; Messner, 2007). Bridges and Pascoe define hybrid masculinity as 'selective incorporation of performances and identity elements associated with marginalized and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities' (2014: 246). The research on hybrid masculinities empirically addresses recent transformations in men's appearances, behaviours, opinions and self-representations within the Western contexts (contexts with a history of strong feminist movements, where patriarchy has experienced a major loss of

¹¹⁷ Some of them do seem to understand this difference. However I probably would not even call these cases exceptions but rather glimpses of humanity and intelligence.

legitimacy). Claiming that hybrid masculinities are widespread within Western societies (most of this research takes place in the USA), this body of scholarship poses the following question: Do recent changes in masculinities signify an increasing level of gender equality or demonstrate the flexibility of systems of inequality? While there is a certain degree of disagreement between different theorists of masculinity regarding the answer to this question, the aforementioned authors' research convincingly demonstrates that hybrid masculinities not only reproduce various systems of gendered, racial and sexual inequalities but also work to conceal this process as it is happening (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014:247).

How have your ideas about what it means to be a man changed since you moved away from Russia, after your encounter with other cultures?

Timofei: Well, maybe I became a little bit more of an emancipation supporter, but, on the other hand, I like chivalry, I don't see a problem in helping a woman to carry her suitcases. I don't see any gender discrimination in this. But this post-Soviet Russian idea that a man is a sugar daddy, half-pusher ['baryga'], half-sugar daddy, macho man, after I spent some time in other countries, I liked the fact that I could contest this idea.¹¹⁸ A man can be like this but this is only one of many options. So first of all, [I experienced] this diversification of masculinity models, and understood that a man doesn't necessarily have to be a sugar daddy or a macho. So you don't necessary have to have a big jeep [to be a man]. But, on the other hand, when you go through a temporal denial of a Russian model of masculinity, if such a model even exists, when you see that abroad everything is different, then at some point you still notice that even [those foreign] men who are seemingly farthest from Russian masculinity, still have some common masculine features, something manly in them. This may be a small detail. Well, for example, a Frenchman can look like a delicate metrosexual, but if the situation requires it, he won't shy away and will just punch you in the face. A delicate and slender man, despite his fragile appearance, may happen to have a strong inner core and will nail his colours to the mast.

Despite all the cultural differences he has encountered, despite his understanding of the plurality and flexibility of gender models and norms, despite his jokes about gender stereotypes and his active stigmatisation of cultural stereotypes, despite his very nuanced understanding of social and political processes (from the broader context of the interview), Timofei still reproduced the idea of 'masculine essence' and defined a man as a decisive person with a 'strong inner core' who can punch other people (men) in the face to prove his point. He presented strength, bravery, willpower and decisiveness as natural resources

¹¹⁸ Timofei uses the work 'pozdnrossiiskii'. I have never heard this term before. Timofei plays with language a lot. In this context, he means post-Soviet and clearly refers to the 'wild' 1990s, banditry imagery.

for men and thus perpetuated gender inequality by reaffirming qualities that typified hegemonic masculine forms and dominance (Brides and Pascoe, 2014:251). In Timofei's narrative, the image of a prim young Frenchman who 'will nail his colours to the mast' becomes an appealing hybrid, a sexy blend of delicacy and hardness, of the civilized world and the aggressive nature of men.

If we look at Timofei's masculinity performance, on a surface level it is more progressive, more enlightened, certainly more informed and nuanced than 'mainstream' manifestations of Russian masculinities. It is fundamentally different from the competitive, emotionally detached, sexually objectifying performances of masculinity. However if we shift the focus of attention from style to the institutional position of power that men continue to enjoy in most world contexts, we will see how hybridisation works (Messner, 1993:732) and how hegemonic masculinity can reconfigure itself and adapt to the specificities of new historical conjunctures.¹¹⁹ As Demetriou puts it, hybrid masculinities unite 'various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy' (2001: 347-348).

In the Western European context, where patriarchy experienced a major loss of legitimacy, privileged men have turned from rigid traditionalism to 'soft essentialism' (Messner, 2011). They acknowledge and support change, redefine traits previously associated with marginalised and subordinated masculinities and femininities and incorporate these traits and gender performances into a repertoire of culturally celebrated masculine identities. However, shifts in the cultural and personal styles of masculinity do not necessarily undermine the conventional power relations between men and women. In fact, the contrary may be true (Messner, 1993, 2011).

What do you think of the changing position of women in the world?

On the one hand, in Western Europe where these changes are taking place, this probably leads to the fact that society is becoming more urbanised and civilised, less aggressive, at least inside a particular country. Perhaps aggression is redirected somewhere outside [of the country] or against certain problems. But, on the other hand, what is going to happen if, let's say, there is a conflict between a strong, masculine, traditional country, in which there is more aggression, and a country which is already not so masculine? Does this mean that in the end the less masculine country will give way? Probably, this situation is possible. However, having said that, in Europe, at least four countries have already produced a precedent – a woman Defence Minister,

¹¹⁹ Ironically the very first quote from Timofei at the beginning of this section provides the best self-analysis of his personal gender project.

and nothing bad happened. I personally don't see any problem here. Women serve in the army there. Again, it's clear that this isn't happening everywhere. Perhaps this demasculinisation doesn't necessarily lead to the loss of defence capacity. If there were no conflicts in the world, if the whole world was like the civilised Western countries which don't go to war with each other, this issue wouldn't exist. However, since we still have some confrontations between traditional and postmodern societies, for me it's a matter of [being able to withstand] conflict. Who will eventually preserve the status quo? This question worries me somewhat.

Timofei's masculinity performance appears to be more enlightened and egalitarian than those of most other respondents.¹²⁰ The very fact that he does not see a problem in appointing a woman to the post of Defence Minister makes him stand out in the pool of my research participants. However, we can see that in his narrative the underlying basis of male privilege and power not only remains fundamentally unquestioned, but in fact is reinforced by portraying Western countries that pursue the politics of gender equality as demasculinised and thus unable to preserve the status quo. In his view, some countries are more civilized than others; some countries are more masculine than others, and those which are more masculine are inherently stronger. As Messner (2011) argues, since gender inequality is institutionalised, ideologies of difference are sometimes all that is necessary to perpetuate existing inequalities.

What is particularly important in a conversation about 'progressive' men is that many of them, like Timofei, build their 'progressive' self-representations by invoking a comparison with men from 'less-civilised' and 'more aggressive' countries or regions. Most often these were the Arab countries, Central Asia, and the Northern Caucasus region of the Federation. Roman's quote is a typical example of how this presents within my data:

In contemporary society, male and female characteristics have intermingled with each other. Everything is so mixed up nowadays, to the extent that any particular [gender] scheme just doesn't exist anymore. In Russia it does, though. And in the Arab world it exists to an even greater degree. It depends on the level of development of society. The more developed a society is, the more freedoms this society enjoys. Unfortunately, in this sense Russia is far behind, let's say, Western Europe, the States, Australia. But at the same time, the Arab countries, they are even more behind than Russia. It will come to Russia, too. Everything comes later to us. Russia is just a country which lags behind. Well, give it another 30-40 years or so.

¹²⁰ As I have mentioned, Timofei is a very intelligent respondent and I do believe that he treats the women in his life with great respect. During the interview, when he had to choose between masculinity and humanity, he chose humanity. In comparison with other interviewees he is indeed progressive and gender sensitive. 'Progressive' transformations of masculinity are complex and not unidirectional.

The next section looks at this particular discourse that depicts the Western countries as a postgender world that enjoys an unlimited level of individual freedoms, and the Arab or Muslim world as a backward and barbaric realm of cruel men and oppressed women. The respondents always placed contemporary Russia inbetween these two worlds. However some people, like Roman, frame this inbetweenness as a moderate backwardness, while others proudly declare it ‘the golden middle ground’.

Race/Ethnicity, Religion and Citizenship

Take up the White Man’s burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

R.Kipling (1899). ‘The White Man’s Burden’

This poem by Rudyard Kipling, an English journalist, poet, writer and novelist of the last century, is rather controversial by present day standards. Yet Anatolii used it to explain to me his views on human rights and the concept of the white man’s burden, and express a deep contempt for Muslim men in both Russia and Europe.

Anatolii (32 years old, Russia): I’m against all these leftist ideas about human rights. I think that the Western world has stepped back from its [former] position. Britain has stopped carrying the White Man’s burden. I think the objective reality is that there are some nations which you can’t change, can’t do anything about. Some representatives of these nations go to university and become different people, they rise up above their tribal lifestyle; but the rest of them, even those who are living in France, find nothing better to do to their women than cut their clitoris. What can you do about them? It can’t be remedied. If a person does this operation on a six-year-old girl with a kitchen knife in Paris, well, what then? I think the only solution is to have his head cut off, that’s it ... I think it’s easier to kill people who behave like beasts than to reform and re-educate them. I see that all these backward people from Tashkent or Dushanbe, they are all coming here.¹²¹ And those who are coming aren’t people with PhDs, so to speak. So

¹²¹ Tashkent and Dushanbe are the capitals of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

I don't approve of all this. I think it's necessary to put up barriers. Slavic - or to be more precise, Russian - people didn't manage to civilize these nations in 70 years of Soviet rule, so now it's necessary to fence ourselves off from them ... There are uneducated people, how's it called? [Those who wish to go] back to the Middle Ages, to the feudal system or those who haven't even emerged from there yet. And there are white people. I mean white not by skin colour, but by values, mentality... There are people who are leaving these highland republics. Those who are more decent leave Dagestan and Chechnia. They don't leave for no reason, but because they're tired of this bestial [zoo]. They understand that his [sic] education and mindset place [him] on a different level. But the thing I don't understand is why the hell, after having left their zoo, they organise it among other people out there in England, for example?

If we look closely at Anatolii's quote, there are three points that stand out. Firstly, he equates Arab people and people from Central Asia and the North Caucasus. Secondly, he sees Islam as the root of the problem, as the source and cause of Muslim people's ignorance and depicts them as people who are in need of enculturation and enlightenment. Thirdly, Anatolii explains that the concept of whiteness is not about skin colour but about mentality and values. All three points are a typical manifestation of what scholars call cultural racism. This form of racism is sometimes called 'new racism', suggesting that 'old' racism was about skin colour and biological difference, while new racism is about essentialised cultural differences (Barker, 1982).¹²²

The theme of 'progressive' men within my study is inextricably connected with cultural racism and the notions of race, ethnicity, religion and citizenship. As exemplified by the interview with Anatolii referred to above, one of the techniques the respondents use to emphasise their progressiveness and realise their personal masculinity projects is to stress their cultural 'whiteness' and invoke a comparison with Arab countries, the Northern Caucasus and the countries of former Soviet Central Asia, which they often conflate and present as some homogeneous realm of radical Islam. As the research of Nikolay Zakharov demonstrates, 'the notion of "civilized country" was and remains in Russia a synonym for racial whiteness... Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in fact, the race imagery has been used as a reliable anchor keeping Russia firmly within the "family of civilized peoples"' (Zakharov, 2015:2).¹²³

¹²² In fact, since the nineteenth century, racial theories have been based on the mixture of supposed biological and essentialised cultural differences.

¹²³The Soviet regime officially declared itself to be immune to racism as something that only occurred in capitalist and colonial countries with histories of racialised slavery (Zakharov, 2015). In the official Soviet

When the respondents invoke the notions of race, ethnicity, religion and citizenship, they resort to a linear interpretation of historical progress, drawing an imaginary line, on the far side of which stand Muslim countries, way behind European or Western countries in terms of cultural development. Muslim countries are depicted as shamefully backward, ignorant, wild, stuck at the childhood stage of civilisational development. The respondents' comments about these countries and regions almost invariably relied on totalising and essentialising characteristics and examples. For instance, they often emphasised that women in the Muslim countries are horribly oppressed, men throw stones at them if they do something wrong, they are not allowed to drive, they are not allowed to eat at the same table as men or leave the house on their own. All these examples are framed as abnormal, as abuses of human rights. A strongly negative emotional colouring of all these issues serves to emphasise righteous anger and fair-minded masculinity.

Western countries, in contrast, are imagined as places where gender equality and cultural tolerance have gone far beyond any reasonable boundaries/limits. In the West, all the differences between men and women have been completely erased, homosexual couples adopt children, men are feminised and women are masculinised. In other words this is another type of chaos and total denial of nature and its laws. The Russian gender order is depicted as being somewhere in the middle. Some research participants interpret this middle ground as a lesser manifestation of backwardness, while others portray it as a golden perfect medium.

Interestingly, this vision of the world and gender relations falls neatly in line with the anti-immigration (against a 'Muslim migrant') campaign which appeared on the two main state-aligned television channels in Russia (Channel 1 and Rossiia), starting in May

definition, race was a purely biological category, with racial classification being mostly based on skin colour. The Soviet classification system was based on nationality or ethnicity. It was mandatory to have a nationality/ethnicity indicated in one's passport along with gender and year of birth. Therefore in the Soviet era, the degree of essentialisation of ethnicity was very high. As a characteristic perceived to be inherited by a Soviet citizen from his/her parents, nationalness in popular understanding became a quasi-racial category (Zakharov, 2015). See the analysis of the official debates among Soviet scholars (anthropologists, cultural historians and legal scholars) in a more open atmosphere of the 1960s and the 1970s about whether or not ethnicity/nationalness had biological aspects in (Shnirelman, 2011: 328-360). There are different approaches in the literature regarding this issue. Some scholars identify ethnicity and race within the Soviet context in respect to their functions in the social processes and argue that ethnic discrimination in the Soviet Union resembled racial discrimination in other parts of the world. Outside the Soviet field, the literature on how clearly ethnicity and race could and should be distinguished is vast. An excellent summary, with the conclusion that 'where ethnicity ends and race begins' is often difficult to pinpoint is given by Rogers Brubaker (2009).

2012 and running for 18 months until the autumn of 2013.¹²⁴ This campaign promoted the narrative of Russia as the last bastion of European conservative values, which was adopted by Putin's regime in 2012, and both encouraged and reflected this worldview.

[D]uring the anti-immigration campaign Russian federal broadcasters reduced Islam to a small number of negative characteristics associated with backwardness and threatening behavior, and represented it as the main Other of Europe's Christian values, in order to buttress conclusions about the inability of "a migrant" ever to integrate into European societies (Tolz and Harding, 2015:456-457).

Following massive anti-government protests which began in December 2011, the regime switched from ideological vagueness and ambiguity of official discourse regarding interethnic relations (the 'unity in diversity' and 'multiethnicity as strength of the country' discourses) to a clearer ideological narrative, which 'represents Russia as the bastion of traditional, conservative values that have long been under assault in the West because of the ill-conceived multicultural policies of Western governments and misplaced "political correctness"' (Tolz and Harding, 2015: 462). Tolz and Harding argue that this ideological shift in official political narrative is not accidental but an outcome of and a reaction to the growing public hostility in Russia towards migrants documented by public opinion polls.¹²⁵ This anti-immigration campaign ended following the rise in the number of ethnicity-motivated riots in the summer of 2013. After these riots, broadcasters returned to somewhat more measured reporting (Tolz and Harding, 2015).

As we can see from the interview with Anatolii popular xenophobic sentiments in Russia, including those that were expressed by the main state-aligned television channels' anti-immigration campaign of 2012-2013, are deeply gendered and almost always include a straightforward hierarchy. It is always Muslim and/or ethnically and culturally other men that are depicted as a danger and the guardians of 'backwardness,' while 'their' women are portrayed as victims. At the same time, when the conversation concerns Western men, it is their turn to be portrayed as victims of over-emancipated, over-empowered feminist Western women.

¹²⁴ My interview with Anatolii took place in July 2013, that is at the point when this anti-immigration campaign had been running for over a year.

¹²⁵ According to Levada Center (2012) surveys conducted in 1996, 2003, and 2012, attitudes toward migrants among Russia's citizens have been getting progressively more hostile. Tolz and Harding's research indicates that it was not solely the Kremlin authorities who forged the new conservative ideological agenda, following massive anti-government protests in late 2011 – early 2012. The leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as public intellectuals and prominent media personalities loyal to the Kremlin took an active role in developing the regime's new ideological narrative (2015).

By depicting undereducated, religious, working-class and migrant men as the bearers of uneducated, backwards, toxic and patriarchal masculinities, educated, middle-class and ‘culturally White’ men ‘boost their masculine capital’ and reaffirm these groups of men already subordinated within Russian and Western contexts as deviant, thus reinforcing existing systems of power and inequalities (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014:253). One of the strategies ‘progressive’ men employ includes presenting their own masculinities as less meaningful in comparison to those of ethnic others and/or Muslim men. For example, Anatolii and some other respondents not only actively use the notion of a ‘man of the twenty-first century’ and divide all men into those who belong to the twenty-first century and those who are stuck in the past, but also ridicule how serious the ethnic other and/or Muslim men are about their masculinities. ‘[When I hear] the expression “to act like a man”, I immediately sense some Daghestani nonsense behind it, some backward mentality’ (Anatolii). By saying this, Anatolii and other ‘twenty-first century men’ within my data symbolically align themselves with a supposedly postgender Western world, which commits to the gender equality principle.

The case of Alex, a 28-year-old unemployed man I interviewed in Russia, looks like a curious exception from the rest of racialised masculine hierarchy building within my data. He seemingly adopts a totally opposite approach to the topic by depicting the patriarchal gender norms and practices of the people from the Northern Caucasus as a lost ideal. Moreover, Alex strategically appropriates (or borrows) some ‘Muslim’ elements for performing his own masculinity. Yet, as I show below, in essence this is the same hierarchical and racialised worldview, based on the idea of the clash of civilisations, i.e. the same approach and interpretative apparatus, but inverted.

Alex: There are a lot of different cultures in me. Probably, I took a lot from the [Northern] Caucasus.

M: Why from the Northern Caucasus?

A: Well, because I’ve been socialising with these people for a long time. I’ve got many friends who live in the Caucasus - Ossetians, Chechens, Dagestani. I very much like their way of life in some parts, not all, of course. In the first place, [I like] how they treat their family, how they treat their women, their children. [I like] how their women are brought up [in complete orthodoxy]. They practice some radical things that I disagree with though. I don’t think that it should go to such extremes as men and women eating at separate tables. But their life is so well arranged in terms of morality, there is no fornication there. Their religion has eliminated fornication. When a girl starts having her period, she is separated

[from boys]. She doesn't have much contact with boys to prevent this Lolita story or something else. Women can only be around other women. They aren't allowed to hang out in the company of men, to go somewhere like a cafe in the evening. A woman should have one husband, and a husband should have one wife. I used to think of myself as a womaniser. I've always had a lot of girls, didn't have any problems with that. In school, I kept changing girlfriends. But now I've changed a lot. I think that one should have one wife, one partner in sex and in life ... People from the North Caucasus have a different approach. They don't talk about love, don't say 'I fell in love, I'm suffering.' [If you say that] they'll look at you and say: 'Are you a turkey or what? What are you worried about? What love?' There is a woman; there is a man. She's yours, and that's it. She raises children, she doesn't have to work, she performs her functions. All that concerns the home and family - it's hers. And if she performs these functions well, no one will ever say anything to her. And there's no such absurdity as she should always stay at home, wear hijab and never go anywhere. Well, men too have much greater responsibility over there...

As we can see, in contrast to other respondents who expressed strong disdain towards people from the Northern Caucasus, Alex reports that he has many friends from Chechnia and Dagestan. He also has great appreciation for their culture and specifically idealises the 'consistency' and transparency of gender roles in the Northern Caucasus: strict female subordination, rigid division between male and female roles and occupations, etc. Alex both relates to and distances himself from the men of the Northern Caucasus. On the one hand, he wholeheartedly supports their gender arrangements, but on the other, he points out that sometimes they go too far (when they force their women to wear the hijab or do not allow women to sit at the same table as men). Thus, he illustrates the cultural affiliation he feels with the Muslim men's identities that he sees as full of meaning and respect and simultaneously calls for progressiveness and Europeanness. A few minutes later in the interview, when he draws a direct comparison between 'them' (men from the Northern Caucasus) and 'us' (European men, among whom he includes Russian men), it becomes clear that, just like Anatolii, Alex adheres to the idea of the clash between 'Christian' and 'Muslim' civilisations and draws on the same racialised hierarchy, but in an inverted way.

I now look at young people. Men from Northern Caucasus are becoming stronger. Muslims are becoming stronger than us. It seems to me that there definitely will be a war with the Muslim world, because you see they're all coming here now. There are a lot of them here now. And they are stronger because they have ancient traditions. They know all their distant relatives and ancestors. They know their origins. So you're actually studying how men change when they go abroad, right? This is the reason why the men of the

Northern Caucasus are strong, because they have ancient customs and they don't change... I think that we, European men, we forgot about the purpose of being a man. Men here now don't understand who they are. They don't foster their masculine essence, they're not warriors, they don't understand who they are in life. And a man, in the first place, is a warrior, a defender, who should protect his family from any danger no matter what. Whether it's a hail storm, a blizzard or war, you have to defend, because it's your blood, and you must protect your blood.

Alex, like many other respondents, draws a continuum between Muslim men and European men. As I discuss earlier in this chapter, in the research participants' narratives, Russian men are usually situated inbetween, but, in Alex's interpretation, Russian men are European men in that they have let go of traditionalist attitudes and have changed along with the changing world. The changing nature of gender arrangements and masculinity is interpreted as a sign of weakness and decline. Like Anatolii, Alex portrays European (and Russian) masculinities as less meaningful when compared to the masculinities of men from the Northern Caucasus, who resist cultural revolutions and fight to stay exactly like their forefathers. Their identities are forged in battle with the changing world. Alex's identity work focuses on partial reframing of himself as a member of the Muslim world. Through this process, he frames himself as a strong man connected to the past generations of strong men who used to live in an 'ideal' world where men and women all knew their places and were happy performing their gender functions.

In the Russian context, as a rule, 'Muslim' attitudes to women (especially to 'our' Slavic or European women) are seen to be indicators of the 'bestial,' 'barbaric,' 'uncivilised' nature of the racialised others. The question is why, in contrast to this general attitude and other research participants, Alex employs a positive interpretation of gender relations in Islam. On the one hand, this positive borrowing can be associated with an appreciation of the closeness and willingness to 'stand up for each other' of non-Russian ethnic groups, which is seen as something 'lost' by Russians.¹²⁶ But on the other, both extracts from the interview with Alex show that his views and performance of masculinity have to do with the masculine hierarchies and a perceived loss of masculine privilege.

In contrast to Anatolii, a middle-class, educated, well-travelled and highly ambitious professional, Alex is an undereducated, unemployed 'street lad' with a working class background and a petty criminal past (but without any formal problems with the law).

¹²⁶ His case can also be seen as another illustration of how hybridisation works. Alex sees a change (a lot of men from the Northern Caucasus come to Russia, they appear strong and aggressive), thus he tailors his masculinity performance to fit into the changing world.

Since Alex lacks any real form of valuable social capital in terms of profession, occupation, education and social status, his ‘masculine capital’ (del Aquila, 2013) becomes increasingly important for his self-representation and his sense of self-respect. My contention is that this is one reason why he appropriates the ‘traditions’ of Northern Caucasus, where, in his imagination, a person automatically acquires a respected social position simply by virtue of being biologically male.

The racialisation of Islam and the Muslim world within my data is an important angle for understanding Russian masculinities and the evolution of gender relations. In this sense, an interesting question is how far these attitudes are Russia specific. The works of Nadine Naber (2005), Elizabeth Poole (2011) and Khyati Y. Joshi (2006) suggest that they are not. The very same processes have taken place in the US and EU media post 9/11. The international media often also represent Islam as a violent religion which directly undermines the foundations of European (Christian) civilisation. The difference in the Russian context is in that there are far fewer constraints on what can be said publicly without provoking a negative reaction and disapproval.

Existing research on race and ethnicity in the Russian context suggests that ‘Russia is a part of globalized Europe not just geographically, but also in terms of the processes that are in play, the most obvious example being the racialisation of migration’ (Zakharov, 2015:9). The similarity between the meaning and cultural value of whiteness as well the logic of cultural racism in the Russian and many other world contexts is not accidental, but has to do with the struggle of former colonies, including those of formerly colonial Soviet Russia, to maintain ethnic, national and cultural hegemony (Hughey, 2012; Ward, 2008).

Globalising Masculinities, or, When Russia Meets Britain

This chapter has looked into how the changing macro-parameters of the 2000s and early 2010s created new conditions for negotiating masculinities among Russian men. The major development of this period was a powerful ideological call for, and practical emphasis on, the rebuilding of a strong state and the restoration of national pride. These aims were officially proclaimed to be matters of state concern and an area in which active measures have been taken since Vladimir Putin came to power. Secondly, active political measures interacted with a number of gender and sexualities issues. During Putin’s third presidential term, gender politics in Russia took a sharp conservative turn (justified, officially, by a demographic crisis), became increasingly visible and intensely discussed not only within the country but also at the international level. Strong critique of this conservative turn from

the Western media has led to an increase in anti-Western sentiment, which is actively promoted by the Kremlin.¹²⁷ Gender and sexuality became increasingly politicised. Thirdly, in the aftermath of two devastating Chechen wars, active attention was paid to the issue of inter-ethnic relations - potentially the most dangerous area and the thorniest issue for the current political regime (Hutchings and Tolz, 2015).

However, all these developments have been taking place in an increasingly globalising and transparent world and, as my interview material shows, have had a very complex and at times contradictory effect on the masculinity construction strategies among Russian men. As Connell and Messerschmidt argue, although the existing research on global masculinities (e.g., Connell and Wood, 2005; Hooper, 2001) does not suggest that masculinities in global arenas overwhelm national or local masculinities,

...the evidence on global dynamics in gender is growing, and it is clear that processes such as economic restructuring, long-distance migration, and the turbulence of 'development' agendas have the power to reshape local patterns of masculinity and femininity (Connell 2005; Morrell and Swart 2005). There is every reason to think that interactions involving global masculinities will become of more importance in gender politics, and this is a key arena for future research on hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 850).

My data on Russian masculinities collected in Russia and the UK supports this theoretical insight. The shifts in masculinities of the young, educated, middle-class Russian men is highly visible and is often straightforwardly influenced by a very specific ideology of gender equality which stems from Western contexts grounded in feminist political movements, which have seriously challenged gender inequality in these contexts and made masculine privilege visible. However, when privilege becomes visible, it does not necessarily cease to exist. Sometimes what changes are the structures of the privilege as well as the 'legitimizing stories' which work to justify the long existing and newly established systems of power and inequality (Johnson, 2005). As I show in this chapter, militarism is not disappearing; indeed, it is still crucially important for the construction of Russian masculinities. However, in the globalising neoliberal world, it takes new forms. Similarly, hybrid performances of masculinity among men who want to appear progressive and gender sensitive but at the same time build very specific class, gender and racial

¹²⁷ The rise of a traditionalist agenda at the state level, like the continuous appeal to the concept of 'traditional values', was itself a form of gender politics.

hierarchies, on the one hand shows how powerful Western feminist messages have changed the world, but on the other, testify to the flexibility of patriarchy.

In the following chapter, which exclusively focuses on masculinity construction among Russian immigrants in the UK and looks at how gender works in transnational and cross-cultural contexts, I push my argument about the reconfiguration of masculine privilege even further by showing how emerging gender reflexivity and a growing awareness of one's national identity can intensify a search for new 'legitimation stories.'

Chapter 6. Men and Masculinities on the Move: Russian Masculinities on Foreign Ground

Despite the drastic transformation of the political system and economy in Russia after the Soviet Union collapsed, changes in the gender order and gender relations were not experienced by people as a radical turn. In the USSR, the formal policy of gender equality and high rates of women's employment co-existed with naturalised traditional gender roles stereotypes (Ashwin, 2000; Gal and Kligman, 1997; Kay, 2000). As discussed in Chapter Four, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its relatively egalitarian gender relations model was condemned along with the other aspects of the Soviet life. The 'new' bourgeois ideal of gender relations, with the man becoming the main breadwinner and the woman returning to the private, domestic sphere, has emerged (Gapova, 2002). However, since the essentialist gender roles approach had never been seriously challenged by the Soviet regime, it was the transition to capitalism that triggered a re-consideration of gender identities among Russians. Changes in the gender order were an outcome of this shift and thus gender inequality was never a reason for initiating change. Gender identities were re-considered only in relation to the shift from socialism to capitalism. In essence, traditional gender systems were considered ideal in both Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. A resurgence in gender conservatism in post-Soviet years has multiple continuities with the Soviet past. The context is changing, but however drastic the changes may seem on a large scale, individual people may not perceive them as such; they continue to live in the same context. This is clearly not the case for Russians who have migrated to other countries.

Moving to the UK, Russian immigrants encounter another version of the globalizing world and another version of gender relations: a unique combination of, on the one hand, gender and sexual freedoms and tolerance for social and cultural differences, and on the other, conservatism and the powerful historical legacy of a rigid class system defined by occupation, wealth and education, which separates the population into distinctive social groups. That said, in the grand scheme of things, contemporary Britain is a liberal environment, in which gender equality and sexual freedoms are guaranteed and protected by a number of laws and special state institutions.¹²⁸ Also, in contrast to many

¹²⁸ Gender equality in the UK is protected by the Equal Pay Act (1970), the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), Part Time Workers Regulations (2000), Maternity Leave and Pay Regulations (2003), Paternity Leave and Pay Regulations (2003) and the Flexible Working Regulations (2003). The UK has a number of state institutions specifically dealing with gender and sexuality issues. In Parliament, there is the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Another key institution involved in the promotion and practical implementation of gender equality issues is The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). The Women and Equality Unit (WEU) is headed by the Minister for Equality and responsible for promoting and realising the benefits of diversity in the economy and elsewhere. Apart from governmental bodies, the non-governmental sector is actively

other regions of the world, including Russia, the UK has a long history of feminist movements and a vast, developed and well-functioning body of social actors who argue for anti-discriminatory policy making.

The colonial past and a developed economy in the UK have made this country home for a large number of migrants and multiple international diaspora groups. The super-diversity of the UK (Vertovec, 2007; 2015) has resulted in a number of unique social processes and dynamics. This is another reason why the gender system in the UK is full of contrasts; it is shaped by ethnic, cultural and religious differences. All the same, religious and non-religious people in the UK increasingly favour egalitarian gender relations and, as is the case in Russia, accept women's education and employment as a norm. In contrast to Russia, where men are generally not involved and are not expected to be involved in childcare (Utrata, 2015), younger men in the UK are increasingly involved in pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare and take parenthood very seriously.

A review of the contemporary gender order and super-diversity in the UK is beyond the scope of this thesis (see, e.g., Charles, 2002; Vertovec, 2007; 2015). This chapter also does not aim to provide a complete analysis of the Russian speaking community in the UK but rather focuses on exploring several key reference points for masculinity construction among twenty research participants in the UK. I argue that the emergence of these reference points is a direct consequence of the participants moving out of Russia, and their lived experience in the contemporary United Kingdom.

As the Introduction and Chapter One of this thesis discuss, this research understands Russian masculinity as a historical construct that changes along with the socio-political regime in Russia. Chapters Three, Four and Five show how the evolving macro-parameters of the late Soviet period, the 1990s and the 2000s created a demand and a structure of opportunities for different practices and discourses that symbolise what masculinity is and, as a consequence, corresponding strategies for negotiating individual masculinities. The current chapter explores how immigration to the UK, a country with a different past and present construction of gender relations, frames the masculinity construction strategies among individual Russian men and the new reference points the immigration experience gives rise to.

working to promote equality and eliminate racial, sexual, gender and other types of discrimination. This sector includes numerous NGOs, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Trade Unions, Job Centres and Community Centres.

Emerging Reflexivity

M: What did you think when you first read my research project description, the title of my work?

Philipp (37 years old): I thought that you were going to write along the lines of - all Russian men are bastards, but they have a chance of a positive change through immigration.

I thought of how painful it is when you are used to having everything to now have only 80%. What a loss! Poor us! Equality sucks when you've been on top -- and men have been on top for so long that we think it's a level playing field.

Kimmel, 2012

Philipp's sceptical comment about my research topic (and implicitly, me) is a very telling example of how many of my interviewees in the UK experience their masculinity. During the interview, Philipp wanted to appear as a knowledgeable person, who knows what people like me, i.e. people who are doing gender studies in Western academia, are all about ('under the influence of a strict feminist censorship', 'intolerant to other perspectives'). He wanted to demonstrate that he knew all of my research aims and assumptions in advance; however, his remark says more about his personal immigrant and gender frustration than about his knowledge of the field.

Apart from a myriad of cultural, social and legal differences which Russian immigrants encounter in the UK, this movement implies a transition from a context where traditional gender attitudes and self-representations are generally celebrated and encouraged via state policies to an environment where such attitudes and self-representations are far less socially acceptable and in some instances might be illegal. For example, certain manifestations of masculinity which are commonly accepted as a social norm or a common practice in Russia will in the UK be unambiguously interpreted as crimes, e.g. workplace bullying and street harassment. Another structural constraint that exists in the UK and is absent in contemporary Russia is political correctness, a belief that certain language and actions, especially those relating to gender, sexuality, race and religion, can be offensive to others and should be avoided.

The masculinity construction strategies that Russian immigrants brought from the post-Soviet space work differently in another socio-political context. Contemporary Britain has a rather different social topography, which orients a man to certain places and practices he has to occupy and engage with in order to realise his masculinity and get social

legitimation for other parts of his identity (class, nationality). Since becoming a man is a never-ending process, in order to be recognised as men individuals have to creatively and selectively engage with the performances of masculinity predetermined by a particular gender order. If, following Judith Butler (1990; 1993), we acknowledge that gender is essentially a performance, a citation of all previous performances of gender, then the 'success' of that performance depends on knowledge of the previous and existing generally recognised discursive forms and cultural scripts and the skills to enact these scripts.

Immigration problematizes and partially destroys relationships between the signifier (masculinity) and the signified (practices and discourses which constitute the meaning of the sign) (de Saussure, 2013 [1916]). Russian masculinities on foreign ground do not achieve the desired semantic effect, may not result in social recognition and appreciation, and may contribute to social exclusion and misunderstanding in a country with one of the highest levels of gender equality in the world.

The Russian immigrants' encounter with different gendered scripts in the UK inevitably gives rise to a self-reflection and re-evaluation of the self and the practices of self-representation. Most of my research participants straightforwardly acknowledge that. While the results of this emerging gendered self-awareness can be radically different, the immigrants' narratives show that the foundation of their reflexivity, the place from which their judgments and masculine performances derive, is the lived reality and cultural tropes of Soviet and post-Soviet life. My data shows that a movement to a more gender-equal country might be particularly troubling for those men who are invested in the traditionalised and militarised masculinity performances (i.e. provider, defender, head of the family).

In Russian society, the expectations are that a man is someone who takes the initiative. If you take the initiative, you're holding responsibility. Don't promise what you can't do. If you promised something, try to fulfil your promise. If you don't do it, it'll have a very negative impact on your masculine status. In the West, it seems to me, there are no expectations at all. Everyone is equal, and God help you if you say that you're going to do something because you're a man. They'll go up the wall [with frustration]. If they don't tell you off directly, they report you later. This is a very specific society. They report each other here, in case you didn't know that.

Boris, 51 years, England

Almost all respondents describe immigration as a very difficult life experience. Even though most respondents moved to the UK for better economic, career and

educational opportunities and are in general very privileged people, the perceived difference between Russian people and British people causes them a lot of frustration. The respondents exoticise British people and feel that British people exoticise them in return. My data contains all possible stereotypes about British people (they are polite, helpful, follow a strictly ordered way of life but also cold, superficially friendly, hard to get to, hollow-hearted, insincere, two-faced and very private people who, in contrast to Russians, don't know the joys of spontaneity and true friendship).

In relation to masculinity, there are two important things going on within the data. Firstly, while exoticising Britain, some respondents infantilise and emasculate British men. Some research participants specifically emphasise that local men do not always keep to their word or point to the fact that the relationship between words and actions is different in this cultural context.¹²⁹ In the eyes of Russian men, British men pay too much attention to their appearance (artificial tan, body hair removal, clothing, haircut) and want to appear physically strong. However they cannot actually show their strength and fight other men, since they would be subject to prosecution in the UK. In Russia, you have to fight. This is a function of a defender. As Philipp and Vladimir both pointed out, in the UK, this function is performed by the state. Finally, British people report any type of misconduct to the police or other authorities and thus, in the interpretation of Russian people, commit an act of 'reporting someone' is one of the worst things a man can do in Russia. While describing this type of behaviour, Miron suggested that in contrast to the Russian or Soviet state, the state in the UK is not perceived as an enemy.

Second, most respondents state that they cannot integrate into the local culture for various reasons but those who feel integrated explicitly and abundantly brag about it. Men who refute or ridicule the stereotypes about British people do so to emphasise that they have integrated better than others into British society. They claim to have a more nuanced understanding of the local culture and social processes (which they definitely do), but, as a rule, immediately start to use this understanding as a foundation for hierarchy building, making fun of or generally elevating themselves above less experienced, less integrated, less comfortable Russians and other East Europeans in the UK, as well as 'ultimately narrow-minded' people in post-Soviet spaces. Directly or indirectly, some respondents portray their immigration and integration experience as a hard task they set for themselves, as a rite of passage that only smart and strong people can complete, simultaneously

¹²⁹ As I show in Chapter Four, in Russia, this is totally unacceptable in general and specifically harmful for one's masculinity. A man who does not follow through on his words with action is publicly ridiculed and socially ostracised.

portraying people who suffer too much or try too hard as less intellectually capable, ridiculous and/or weak.

Gender Equality: Backlash and Hierarchy Building

Immigrant men in my study were much better versed in the feminist critique of gender and other types of inequality and discrimination than my interviewees in Russia. For example, in contrast to the latter, they acknowledge that women face multiple types of discrimination in both private and public life, and they are well aware of what these discriminations are (e.g. workplace discrimination, pressure to meet unrealistic beauty standards, work/family balance, which turns into a double/triple burden for women). They also quite often acknowledge that it is easier to be a woman in the UK than in Russia, arguing that Western women benefit from more equal opportunities, while Russian women are bound by patriarchal structures and social expectations. The immigrant men are increasingly aware of different types of privileges men enjoy by virtue of simply being men. However the fact that they admit that there are a number of gender related injustices does not necessarily shift their basic position. Learning how to navigate a new social terrain, they learn the new cultural language of equality and fairness. Thus even though they know how to sound ‘politically correct’ and censor what they say, they are often not in a hurry to relinquish the privileges and benefits of being a man in the contemporary world. Quite often gender sensitivity and expressed egalitarian sentiments co-exist with a serious gender equality backlash.

This gender equality backlash was encountered in both research contexts but they were different types of backlash. In contrast to interviewees in Russia, the research participants in the UK talk about *ugly*¹³⁰ lesbian women who hate men; they also report the experience of being hated by feminist women, of being oppressed by the gender equality regime. Some respondents stated that gender equality in the UK has gone too far and now men are starting to be discriminated against. These respondents usually imagine that, in the Western world, men are portrayed as tyrants and women as victims. In order to compensate for this, women are being given a ‘green light’ to do anything they want, and men are being oppressed by these assumptions. Russian men in Russia never express such ideas; their speculations revolve around abstract stereotypes and the perils of deviating

¹³⁰ Throughout this work I usually translate ‘strashnaia zhenshchina’ as ‘an ugly woman,’ and this is a correct translation because that is what the respondents mean. Appearance is the first and foremost criteria and a framework within which the respondents talk about and evaluate women. However the word ‘strashnyi’ in Russian also means ‘dreadful.’ Thus the translation of ‘strashnaia zhenshchina’ is also ‘a woman that I’m afraid of,’ ‘a woman who terrifies me’.

from the complementary roles of men and women. At the same time, while talking about the feminist stranglehold, immigrant respondents state that ‘this type of woman’ only exists in Western countries. The accounts of Russian immigrants in the UK are directly comparable with the gender equality backlash in Western contexts (e.g. Kimmel, 2013). This is an explicitly Western discourse; it does not exist in Russia.

Notwithstanding the gender equality backlash, immigration to the UK and the experience of involved fatherhood, which I discuss later in this chapter, gives rise to egalitarian sentiments. Even judging by the language of these sentiments within the data or the logic of argumentation, it is clear that they are explicitly Western. I have never encountered this language and logic or similar examples in Russia (neither through the research experience, nor through my personal life). For example, Alexander partially adopted a widely held egalitarian model of family relations.¹³¹ He argued that an ideal family model is when a man and a woman are two equal partners minimally dependent on each other. Alexander seemed to wholeheartedly support women’s achievements and empowerment. Curiously, he used his standpoint to denounce those men who do not support women’s achievements and empowerment as weak, insecure and degraded.

Let’s take some average example, a kind of ideal. A good-looking woman who has a job, she’s able to do this job, take care of herself, look after and provide for her family. I don’t understand how one can find anything negative in this situation. I personally can’t ... But some men can. And this is a problem of degradation of men as men. As I said, there are very few real men. A real man, who is self-confident, would never think that a self-sufficient woman becomes aggressive and stops being a woman. Such a woman would only evoke admiration and liking. A self-confident man couldn’t but like such a woman in any other way than with approval. I think the men [who see such a woman as aggressive or less of a woman] either feel insecure or have some real problems. I don’t think that a person who thinks like that is a man.

Alexander, 36 years old, England

Another very interesting case of adopting a gender equal attitude is that of Miron. When he came to the UK local women did not consider him to be a potential romantic and/or sexual partner. As he acknowledges, this was a strong incentive to reconsider his gender attitudes and masculine self-representations. Miron has conducted a fair amount of research on gender and sexuality in modern Britain and started to work hard on his English language skills and the elimination of his Slavic accent.

¹³¹ I say ‘partially’ because in some parts of the interview he contradicts himself and this model.

Miron (33 years old): For me, a woman is an equal partner, who it's interesting, pleasing and great to be with. She's got an opinion and her own interests, which may or may not concern me. We are together because we like it, nothing more. A woman is a friend, a partner with a slightly different anatomy. Different [gender] stereotypes no longer exist. They're gone, because the difference between the sexes on the social level is gone.

Marina: In British society or for you personally?

Miron: Little by little I'm catching up with this view ... It's just the story of my life here. Very quickly it became clear that if I began courting a [local] girl according to the Russian model, she'd call the police.

Marina: You'll have to explain to me what 'courting a girl according to the Russian model' means.

Miron: If you lived in my courtyard [in Russia], you would know that if you liked a girl, you'd have to run after her, pull her hair, give her flowers, passionately declare your love for her like on TV and, in the end, maybe in a month something will work out between you two. If I start running after somebody, give flowers and passionately declare my love here [in the UK], this behaviour has a simple name - stalking.¹³² She just calls the police. The police tell me: 'Do not come closer than 200 metres, do not call, do not write.' This is a restraining order. So if I start courting someone according to the Arab or Russian model, this will just scare her a lot. It took a lot of time to understand what a British model of courtship actually is.

Marina: So you understood how it works here and can use the local model of courtship now?

Miron: I can and I do.

Marina: Do you really believe that all the gender differences are gone?

Miron: I believe that in the highest levels of society they are gone. If we take the working class, there, of course, all these prejudices remain in place completely. But, in my opinion, the top echelons of English and European society gradually eradicated all these prejudices. Since I belong to these top echelons of English society, under no circumstances will I now engage in any stereotypical manifestations of masculinity, because, most likely, this will just scare my potential partners. They'll just run away from me.

Alexander and Miron both openly acknowledge that their views on gender relations, ideas about masculinity and masculine self-representations have undergone a significant transformation since they moved to the UK. They directly attribute this

¹³² Stalking is a criminal offence in the UK, with offenders facing jail for up to five years and unlimited fines.

transformation to the lived experience in a more gender equal environment. There is no doubt that both of them became more open-minded people; became aware of gender double standards and discrimination as well as of their own masculine privilege. All the same, their narratives clearly illustrate that, firstly, they are not in a hurry to give up their masculine privileges and, secondly, their understanding of how this privilege can successfully reconfigure and reinvent itself. Both respondents used the acquired gender sensitivities and the Western gender equality discourse to build hierarchies and elevate themselves above other men and to draw class and national boundaries. As I argue later on in this chapter, appropriation of the Western conceptualisation of gender and performances of masculinity becomes an important resource for manifestation of belonging to the British society.

Russian Women and Gender Equality in the Eyes of Immigrant Men

The theme of gender equality backlash and the construction of gender hierarchies closely intersects with another theme that emerged strongly from the interviews conducted in Britain; stereotypes about Russian and British women. The majority of respondents expressed stereotypes depicting Russian women as extremely beautiful, feminine, friendly, the most caring mothers and trustworthy wives, and British or Western women as the complete opposite. In what follows, I highlight this particular research finding and argue that for Russian men living in the UK, comparison between Russian and British women becomes an important resource or reference point for negotiating their gender and national identities. I demonstrate that these stereotypes serve a specific cultural need as Russian immigrants grapple with the reality of life in a more gender equal country and provide a window into both their immigrant anxieties and masculine conceits.

As the theoretical and methodological chapters both highlight, ‘*women*’ is the most obvious and most prominent reference point men use to define their masculinity. Typically they are referring not to specific, corporeal women but to the ‘idea’ of women and femininity. This is the main negative pole against which men define themselves (Kimmel 1996:7). This works universally across my data and is supported by the international masculinity and gender research which has been carried out to date. However the immigrant men in my sample do not just define themselves against women or the idea of femininity; they draw a direct comparison between Russian and British women in order to interpret the world around them and negotiate their sense of manhood.

Ten out of twenty respondents interviewed in the UK made comparisons between Russian/Slavic and British/Western women when telling me about their experience of living in Britain or while explaining what it means to be a man or a woman. Fourteen people took up the theme of feminism and/or gender equality. Within the data all these topics are closely interconnected. Most of the respondents who brought them up said very similar things. Usually they started by heaping praise on Russian women. As mentioned above, they said that Russian women look gorgeous, are very feminine, never get fat, are caring and loyal, are good hosts, have good hearts, and are renowned for being excellent housewives, great cooks and loving mothers. The ‘natural’ desire to take care of themselves and look their best is a trait that sets Russian women apart from all others. Many of these traits, which were so positive in the eyes of my respondents, came out through comparison with British women.

Usually the conversation took this direction after I asked questions along the following lines: ‘Is there anything about living in Britain that you particularly like or dislike?’, or ‘Could you tell me about your experience of living in the UK?’ If a research participant brought up a comparison of Russian and Western women in his response, I then asked him to develop this topic or provide some examples from personal experience. In general the respondents were very enthusiastic about this subject, talking at length about the virtues of Russian women and all of the problems that they connect with British women.

The most frequently used point of comparison was appearance and female practices of looking after/taking care of themselves. One not quite so widespread but still prominent point was Russian women’s commitment to domesticity and motherhood, and the lack thereof among British/Western women. This is how Stepan, a 37 year-old financial adviser who has been living in the UK for 22 years, described British women:

Here in Britain sometimes it’s hard to tell if that’s a man or a woman walking down the street. Well, English women to be honest are not particularly beautiful in comparison with Russian girls. Of course, there are a lot of cute ones, but most of them don’t look after themselves... Well, a woman is a delicate, sensitive, beautiful and capricious creature. She should be a good homemaker, of course, should keep a house homely. British women cannot boast much about this; they have neither the ability nor desire to do housework. Not all of them of course, but very many... They are much more concerned about their careers. Well actually English women, I think, do whatever is easier for them. For example, if they have a child, they’ll take him to a fast-food place, like McDonald’s or something like that, because it is easier than going to a grocery store, buying food and cooking. It’s easier than

spending a weekend cooking something and cultivating healthy eating habits in their children.

Looking at the data as a whole, it is clear that one of the things that Stepan shares with the majority of other respondents is an assumption that it is the woman who holds the household together and takes care of the children and elderly family members. In general terms, this forms a framework for my informants' interpretation of gender identities and gender relationships. On the surface Stepan's views on British women do not appear to be linked to his masculinity construction. However, if we look at these quotes within the context of the following interview extract, we can see why he holds such negative attitudes towards women in the UK.

M: Could you tell me what in your opinion is the most difficult thing about being a man in today's world?

Stepan: The most difficult thing? It's to retain your position, not giving in to strong women who are trying to replace men. Now in many companies they have taken over the business, and we [men] will soon turn into I don't know what. Well, what's the main thing [for a man]? To remain a breadwinner, I think, to remain the backbone of the family.

In Stepan's eyes, women's empowerment in the UK not only transformed their looks, led to neglect of the household and mothering responsibilities and thus became deeply offensive to his gender sensibilities, but he also perceives this empowerment as a threat to his masculinity and, most importantly, his masculine privilege. As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, this kind of gender equality backlash is characteristic for Western countries with a history of strong feminist movements (e.g. the UK and the USA, see Kimmel, 2013) and is completely absent in my data collected in Russia. Russian immigrants seem to be specifically prone to appropriation of this discourse, which portrays gender relations as a zero-sum game.

Quite often reflections on gender equality led my informants to the conclusion that the difference between men and women in the UK has been eradicated. The men who reached this conclusion usually went on to say that they considered themselves incompatible with British/Western women in terms of mentality, interests and cultural codes, regardless of the length of their residence in the UK, fluency in English or interest in the local culture. Although only five of the twenty respondents said that their social networks mainly consisted of other Russian-speaking people, most of the respondents said

that they could not get on with Western women. Some had attempted to do so, while others had never even tried, explaining that ‘we’re just on completely different wavelengths’ or simply ‘I feel more comfortable with Russian girls.’

The cultural gap in gender norms and expectations between immigrants and members of the host society emerged as a salient factor in shaping the very possibility of romantic relations between them. The following extracts from the conversation with Gera, a 27 year old graduate student, show how an inability to communicate with Western women can shape Russian men’s experience of immigration and their performance of masculinity.

There are two things left in Russia that I really like, the Russian language and gorgeous Russian women. I’d probably even put it more broadly - Slavic women. They are breathtaking. These are two things that I miss. Here I do not find this connection with women from many different countries. It is not interesting to communicate with them, especially with the local ones. In the UK, women for the most part are an uneducated, shapeless mass. I beg your pardon, but it’s uncomfortable and absolutely uninteresting from any perspective, and even unpleasant to be around them, because most of them look awful. I’m sorry but it means a great deal to me. My perception of a Western woman¹³³ is that she is often just sexless. I see her as [just] a part of society, exactly in the same way I see any local guy... Russian girls are always aware of their worth, they are very well-groomed, much more understanding and a lot more quick-witted. [They] feel many situations, when, what and how to do things, so they are better able to control men. It’s interesting and enjoyable to be next to a Russian woman. She would smell nice and look charming. And she would never shout about the equality of men and women, as, it seems to me, a lot of European and American women do, as if they’ve gone mad. Why shout about this? There is an interesting thing about Russian women. We do not have such a patriarchal system as exists in many Eastern countries. I think we [Russian people] are quite liberal. Nonetheless [Russian] women decided to make this little step back to slightly destabilise the power balance in the relationship. Because by giving away a little bit of power to a man, one can enjoy all the benefits of the weaker sex. That is to say: ‘OK, be a man, but then do whatever you have to do as a man.’ But at the same time, those women who I respect, Russian girls, they do not

¹³³ To my question what he means when he says ‘Western women,’ Gera replied that these are women from the English speaking countries (including Australia). It is curious that he has differentiated the attractiveness of women from different countries. ‘I had a girlfriend from Spain. I had another girlfriend from Italy. They’ve got something in them, but they’re just not as good as Slavic women.’ He also spoke about women from Nordic countries and from Central Europe. A strikingly evident thing in this account is that, in Gera’s eyes, the more gender equal a certain country is, the uglier its women.

allow [men] to dominate them. They just allow a man to feel that he can have the dominant position, but nothing more. But the stupidity of many Western women means that they going to fight for equality as far as it can go and as a result both sexes will suffer. You open the door for her – [and] she may kick up a real fuss. Russian girls are able to manage this situation ... she has made this little step back in order to make me feel like an alpha male, but we are absolutely equal.

Gera, 27 years old, England

As can be seen from these excerpts, these Russian men are attracted to the traditional feminine aspects of Russian women's behaviour and attitudes that they find lacking in British women, who are 'spoiled' by feminism and ideas about gender equality. When Gera explained what he found attractive about Russian women, like the majority of participants, first of all he mentioned their appearance. As he perceived it, in contrast to Western women, Russian women have good manners, gentle and easy-going tempers, and a 'natural' tendency to get along with a man rather than confront him and make demands. It is clear that Gera is happy to reproduce a range of stereotypes about British and Russian women. It is equally clear that at the root of his dissatisfaction with British women lies something more significant than personal preference. His underlying concerns are feminism, gender equality and the way different women make him feel about himself.

Moving towards a conclusion, within my data, Russian immigrants in the UK spend a considerable amount of time talking about Russian and British women's appearance and behaviour and comparing the former with the latter. Of course they are able to make this comparison because, unlike the Russian men in Russia, they are surrounded by British women. Perhaps it could be argued that they are just offering their observations of their new society. Although Gera's quote directly illustrates the masculinity construction process, the other respondents' accounts, as discussed in this subchapter, are far less performative. Most of the points they made about Russian and British women could be read as opinions or observations. However, my primary concern in this research is not my respondents' opinions, but their performances of masculinity. Hence my main question is whether these vividly expressed stereotypes about Russian and British women have anything to do with individual masculinity construction processes. I would argue that they do, because every respondent in one way or another led the conversation to power relations and the construction of hierarchies. The fundamental problem for them was Western women's allegiance to feminism, which my respondents saw as an oppressive and unnatural ideology and a tool for the subordination of men. Feminism and femininity could

not co-exist. They implicitly concluded that feminism and female beauty were inversely related: the stronger the ideology, the uglier the woman.

Russian women receive such high appreciation from Russian men in the UK in part because of their perceived compliance with gender role expectations (in terms of appearance, behaviour and the career/home divide). They are perceived as being understanding, non-confrontational, and showing more dependency and thus accommodating their partner's sense of manhood. Curiously, Remennick has observed that Russian men are not popular among Israeli women for precisely the same reason: i.e. they adhere to the traditional masculine role in communication and courtship (Remennick, 2005). Russian immigrants are confronted with the need to readjust to the gender norms of their new society. This process seems to pose a serious challenge to them.

The most prevalent discourse within my data characterised British or Western women as graceless, shapeless, feminist and therefore sexless. This intention to discredit Western women is actually an intention to discredit feminism and the implementation of gender equality in the West. In the eyes of Russian men, the ills of feminism, gender equality and the growth in women's independence are inscribed on the bodies and faces of Western women. Conversely, such images confirmed the superiority of beautiful and well-groomed Russian women and the traditional gender system that does not 'put the burden of men's responsibilities on women's fragile shoulders' and therefore allows them to remain feminine.

The expressed stereotypes about British women were supposed to serve as an indication of feminism's failures: bad-looking and competitive Western women symbolise the unnaturalness and danger of undermining the traditional gender order and expanding female professional opportunities into areas historically occupied by men. The respondents implicitly argued that the costs of the gender equality experiment were high for those women who elevated feminism over taking proper care of themselves. They became estranged from their homes, their children and their femininity.

To Russian men, British or Western women were symbolic of the failure of feminism. They embodied a misguided and dangerous culture that, among its many crimes, inverted the gender order. In this sense Western women's commitment to career and their perceived lack of investment in domesticity and childcare were culturally 'mannish' and problematic. Their looks and lack of femininity were symbols of a culture that routinely transgressed gender boundaries and disfigured the feminine form.

The experience of migration to another country often gives rise to a feeling of uncertainty and frustration. Stereotypes about Russian and British women can be seen as cultural work for those concerned with rethinking their national and gender identities. Russian men's conceptions of Western and Russian women became a way to assert the boundaries of proper womanhood and a platform to interpret the key masculinity issues at stake during the unstable transitional period of immigration. Expressing stereotypes about Russian and British women helps Russian men to come to terms with both their immigrant anxieties and masculine conceits.

Re-Inventing Russia or the Russia That Never Was: Individualism vs. Family Values

The interviews with Russian immigrants in the UK quite predictably involved a great deal of discussion about Russia. As I explained in the Methodology chapter, since my research focus is on contemporary Russian masculinities, I specifically wanted to interview people who have relatively fresh memories about Russia and could hence make fruitful comparisons between two cultural contexts. I found that most research participants miss Russia in one way or another. However there were also people who provided an exaggeratedly negative portrayal of the country of their origin or even said that they hate and despise it. Some people regretted migrating to the UK. Some of them wanted to go back to Russia but doubted that it would be possible at the current stage of their life; others were already planning their return. Some people, in contrast, reported being very happy that they no longer lived in Russia for a variety of personal and political reasons. The problems in Russia that were most commonly discussed in my interviews include corruption, lack of security, shrinking political liberties, anti-democratic reforms, an ailing economy, Russian people's narrow-mindedness, the way the state treats pensioners, senior and disabled citizens, homophobia, racism and other xenophobias.. However, despite all the negative things the respondents mentioned about contemporary Russia, most of them claimed a great love for it.

Patriotism is a theme that is strongly present in the interviews across the data. However with the immigrant half of the data, people's patriotic stance at times went against their general line of talking about Russia. My contention here is that since both Soviet and post-Soviet Russian masculinities are all about patriotism, it is not entirely acceptable for a Russian man to appear unpatriotic. At times I felt that some people adopted a patriotic stance in order not to look like a turncoat. In general, a conversation about Russia tended to be very emotional for the research participants. People expressed a

lot of regrets, hopes and second thoughts, and contemplated alternative life scenarios. Quite a few respondents shared an insight that came to them after they moved out of Russia – that the grass is always greener on the other side, and that Britain is not as good as people living in Russia imagine it to be.

Migration experience makes people reconsider their understandings and past experiences of living in their home countries. Over time, migrants start to see their own country differently. One of the most important findings of my research on Russian immigrants is that, after having first hand experience of living in the UK, they started to see Russia as a society resting on close interpersonal and familial ties. Families in Russia are imagined to be organised in a strictly patriarchal way: women take care of children and the household, while men perform the functions of the head of the household, make decisions and support their wives and children financially. British society, in contrast, is imagined as an individualistic or atomised society where individual people are much more concerned about their personal interests than those of other people, including the members of their own families (an ‘every man for himself’ attitude). British people are also said to be not in a hurry to start a family and to be reluctant to have children while in their 20s and 30s. In contrast to ‘real’ families in Russia where ‘husband and wife live the same life’, they are described as people who live together as independent partners. In the immigrant imagination, the bourgeois ideal of gender relations is the most common family form in Russia.

This is how Zakhar (63 years old) explained the difference between what is expected from men in Russia and the UK:

M: In your view, where is it easier to be a man, in Russia or England?

Zakhar: In England.

M: Why in England?

Z: [Gender] roles are completely different. In Russia, you are the head of the family; financial independence is up to you. Here in England it’s not the case. In England, the requirements imposed on a man are smaller. I think here you aren’t required to do a lot of things which are considered to be absolutely necessary in Russia. In Russia, you have to be the head of the family and the wife is an appendage. You’re required to earn a certain amount of money. I don’t know what the figure is in roubles and dollars now. If you earn less, then you’re seen as an idiot. In Russia, it’s expected that you should do your absolute best and stretch yourself as much as you can. Here it’s not the case. Here you can decide that you don’t necessarily have to stretch yourself as

much as you can, you don't need a Ferrari, you can get by with a small Ford car.

Using the interview with Philipp as my main example, in what follows I analyse the opposition individualism/family values that is widely present in the interviews with the immigrant men within my study.¹³⁴ On the surface level, the conversation is always about comparison between Britain and Russia, between individualism and the so-called family values. However, in essence what is being discussed and what men are concerned about is the actual or potential loss of masculine privilege.

Philipp moved to Britain 13 years ago. He has a wife (an immigrant from a non-post-Soviet country) and a seven year old daughter. Both Philipp and his wife are pursuing demanding professional career paths and have the ambition of raising their daughter to be trilingual. When she was born, Philipp's wife stayed at home with her for three years. After that they switched roles. She got back to her career track and Philipp sacrificed his own career development, becoming a stay-at-home dad and starting to work from home. This was still the case when I met him for an interview, and Philipp was not happy about it: 'When you work from home, you don't have any career prospects. You're less visible. Work is just being done somewhere, and that's it, no one sees you. All rewards go to someone else.' Philipp has experienced and lived through a very different gender script in the UK, a gender script which is practically non-existent in his home country. He explained that he has a problem with the current state of things in his family because this is a 'status issue'. If a wife works and brings money to the family and a husband does not work, his status is fundamentally undermined.

So what is your research topic? How my masculinity changed after I moved? I'll explain it to you now. I mentioned that after I moved I became tolerant. I stayed at home with the child; my wife was working and is working almost constantly. And you know what? This model didn't work for me in principle. It didn't work for me in the long-term perspective. I understood it eventually. At some point, I thought, well, basically, this is just one of the options. Why not? Thinking logically, this option worked for me. I thought it was fair, comfortable for both partners, great for the family and so on. But at the end of the day I was dissatisfied emotionally. I thought about it. What is the reason for this? It seems to me that the reason is my desire to preserve my Russian identity. This striving for patriarchy is a

¹³⁴ Interestingly, Soviet era opposition of individualism/collectivism is never employed here. The propaganda of Putin's regime has outdone Soviet era propaganda. It is all about the opposition between individualism (usually negative connotations) and family values (usually positive connotations). There are some exceptions here. For example, Zakhar and Miron both advocate gender equal relationships in families and deem Russia as an overwhelmingly patriarchal country.

desire to preserve the Russian identity. That's how I was raised. I understand that this model has its downsides, but I like it. I believe that this is how a family should be organised - in a patriarchal style.

Philipp, 37 years old, England

Philipp has evolved from aspiring to integrate into British society, aspiring to be seen as a Western, open-minded man, to experiencing a strong gender equality backlash and disappointment with the flexibility of the norms and scenarios that Western society offers to men and women. He is now idealising the logic and transparency of gender roles in Russia, where men's and women's functions, as he imagines them, are strictly differentiated and clear to everyone. In doing so, he is idealising a Russia that has never existed. He is grieving over the loss of traditional gender roles which have never actually shaped the prevalent forms of family in pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. He appeals to an imaginary bourgeois ideal, not the real family structures of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (extended family in pre-revolutionary Russia, and double career family in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, where practically all the childcare was done by mothers, grandmothers and state institutions). Interestingly, Philipp never mentioned that he would like his wife to abandon her career. What he wanted is for her to undertake 'her' second shift and remove the childcare weight from his shoulders.

Philipp has experienced involved parenting and the sacrifice it requires. Ironically this experience and the way he talks about it echoes the voices of the British feminists of the second half of the twentieth century. One of the concerns of the second wave feminism of the 1960s in the UK was women's double burden. Men could 'have it all', a career and a family. In order for a woman 'to have it all' and pursue financial independence and professional development, men had to get involved in childcare. Like the British women of the past and present centuries, Philipp is complaining about his double burden and the missed career opportunities. In doing so he is thinking about his lived experience in Russia where women silently carry their double burden and do not publicly voice any feminist concerns. Philipp was brought up in the socio-political context where women, instead of fighting to 'have it all', were silently doing it all. By appealing to his national identity, he is trying to return to his lost masculine paradise, to re-establish his masculine privilege.

M: Where do you think it is more difficult to be a woman: in Russia or in England?

Philip: It's hard to be a woman both here and there. That's your [women's] destiny.

Throughout the interview Philipp often used the word ‘patriarchy’ and used it as an explanation of many of the things we were talking about. After musing about his thoughts on the differences and challenges women face in Russia and the UK, he came to the following conclusion:

P: I wanted to say that it is, of course, possible that the majority of women in Russia are unhappy. But there are many happy women there. Don’t you think so? So how is it possible that in such an unfair country, where human rights and gender equality are neglected, there are happy women?

M: What do you mean by happiness?

P: Family happiness. A woman feels loved. A man satisfies her, loves her, gives himself to her; she’s got children and grandchildren. They perform unequal family roles. Nevertheless, they are happy. If this patriarchal structure were inherently wrong and unfair, there wouldn’t have been any possibility to be happy within it. Patriarchy can have a human face.

Patriarchy ‘with a human face’ is Philipp’s conclusion and solution: a patriarchy which is not as bad as the Western world imagines it to be, and which makes women happy to be caring for others and to sacrifice themselves for them. Other immigrant advocates of ‘family values’ within the data follow the same logical route. While Philipp is rather blunt in articulating his views, others are more careful about claiming their masculine privilege in such a direct way. All the same, in every given case, a conversation about family values, domesticity and childcare was also about masculine privilege, which enables men to not have to deal with domestic labour and day-to-day care work which is invisible, unpaid and not socially prestigious. Whenever they talked about family values and condemned individualistic Western society, my respondents’ reasoning always points to the fact that women should get back to family service and provide care for other family members.

My interview with Philipp was remarkable in many ways, but probably the most significant of these was that it clearly illuminated the difference in gender politics and, by extension, family structures in the two research contexts. Talking about his experience of involved fatherhood, Philipp told me the story of his sister’s family. His sister lives in Russia, is married and has three children. Her husband is working, while she left her job after the second child was born. Her husband is not particularly involved in childcare (both by British standards and Philipp’s judgement) and prefers to spend his off-duty time

pursuing his own hobbies and interests. Philipp states that in contrast to his own ‘non-patriarchal’ family, his sister’s family is a ‘classic example of a patriarchal family’, which has a stay at home mum and an uninvolved dad. However, he pointed to a paradox - that his sister is not over-loaded with childcare because their mother (the children’s grandmother) does practically everything. Philipp is passionately indignant about this situation and describes it as exploitation. ‘If they have chosen this lifestyle, they should live it, not pass it on to another person.’ He has repeatedly argued with his sister about it, and his relationship with her and her husband has significantly deteriorated as a result. Yet he acknowledges that his mother is a self-sacrificing person who wants to help others as much as she can.

My mum is a very self-sacrificing person. She constantly gives herself to others, does everything and is willing to help everyone. I always thought that my dad, sister and other relatives exploit her. And I always defended her. On the one hand, this helped me to understand the destiny of a woman in Russia, to feel what it’s like. But, on the other, I know that I can’t change anything simply because I feel like there is some kind of a harmony in it. My mum is happy despite everything. It seems like she’s physically tired and stuff, but she’s a happy human being.

Philipp’s stories about his own family and that of his sister illustrate the difference between family structures in contemporary Russia and the contemporary UK. The example of Philipp’s mother, who takes active care of her grandchildren, is an important illustration of the role of grandparents in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian families. My data shows a stark contrast between men who have children in Russia and those who have children in the UK. Even though I cannot know what they actually do and do not do in their families, the interviews with immigrants in the UK show that these men are much better informed of the hardships of parenting.¹³⁵ There are two reasons for this: the absence of grandparents and a normative pressure to be an involved father in the UK.

Half of the population in Russia is raised by same-sex couples: a mother and a grandmother.

Russian Anecdote

¹³⁵ All childless respondents (except for one) said that they would like to have children in the future but would prefer to leave the upbringing and childcare to their wives. Respondents interviewed in Russia, whether or not they already had children, did not feel any normative pressure to be involved fathers.

This joke appeared in Russia in 2013, after same-sex marriages were legalised in France. This took place against the background of the infamous Russian law banning the distribution of information promoting LGBT relationships to minors, which was passed at the federal level at the exact same time. The joke quickly spread and became an Internet meme mainly because it was so evidently true - millions of Russians recognised in the joke their own families and those of people they knew. Since both men and women worked full time outside of home during the Soviet and post-Soviet era, it was grandparents, most often grandmothers, who took on the vast majority of childcare. This family structure is still prevalent in Russia today. In Russian society, there is no place for the aging generation, and being grandparents is often the only positive social role available to older people. The absence of grandparents, who most commonly stay behind in Russia, is also a crucial reason why immigrant fathers in the UK are getting involved in childcare.

Resurging Russian Orthodoxy: Immigrant Masculinities and the National Identity

M: At what point in your life did religion become important to you?

Boris (51 years old): Well, I can't say that I'm a church-going and strictly observant person. It became important for my wife probably starting from the late 1990s. Now it's very important for her. For me this is important because, well, I became more serious about it when we moved here because the Orthodox religion is a part of our identity. And you can't get away from that. I don't go to confession, I don't go to church regularly. But I think this is very important and we must keep this in mind because of our identity. We're Russian, we're Orthodox.

M: So you're saying that today religion is not important for you?

Yurii (34 years old): It's only important to me in that mental and cultural sense, in terms of the fact that my religion is Orthodoxy. Russia is a defender of Orthodoxy. And I, as an Orthodox Christian, I feel like a part of that big [Orthodox] world. [But] religion as a belief in purification, getting into paradise, and everything else, I don't think so.

Orthodox Christianity for centuries was the dominant religion in Russia. However, after the 1917 revolution, the new Soviet authorities, following Karl Marx's insistence that 'Religion is the opium of the people,' suppressed and persecuted various forms of religion in the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities worked hard to eradicate religious beliefs and 'replace old notions about Russian nationhood with the internationalist identity deemed proper for Soviet citizens' (Pankhurst, 2012: 4). During this period, many priests were

imprisoned, many churches were destroyed or converted into other uses and people who declared their religious beliefs were denied career promotion and admission to universities. Atheism was officially propagated at all levels in all social institutions, and portrayed as a truth that society should accept (Froese, 2004; Haskins, 2009). On the one hand, it is likely that religious beliefs and practices persisted among a considerable portion of the Soviet population, although it is difficult to estimate how large this grouping was. However, on the other hand, as most scholars working on the subject argue, religious beliefs declined considerably during the history of the Soviet Union (1922-1991) (Anderson, 1994; Ellis, 1986; Husband, 2000; Roslof, 2002).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a significant upsurge in Orthodox affiliation among Russian people. According to Pew Research Center, between 1991 and 2008, the share of Russian adults identifying as Orthodox Christian rose from 31 per cent to 72 per cent, while the share of Russia's population that does not identify with any religion dropped from 61 per cent to 18 per cent (Pew Research Center, 2014). The Orthodox renaissance in post-Soviet Russia is a highly complex phenomenon, which presents a number of paradoxes. One reoccurring theme in research on Orthodoxy in post-Soviet Russia is the so-called 'nominal believers' – people 'who are culturally Orthodox but who appear content to merely baptise their children, bless Easter eggs, and give their relatives a Christian burial. For these Russians—the vast majority—religion is more a question of identity than of practice' (Kizenko, 2013:606). Both Boris and Yurii's quotes directly illustrate this point.

The emergence of the nominal believers phenomenon is rooted in the history of the Putin regime. When, under Putin, Russia began to implement a coordinated nation-building strategy, the re-appropriation of Orthodoxy within official patriotic discourse became an important source of legitimacy for the political regime. The Orthodox Church, along with Russian language and literature and the Great Patriotic War, became crucial elements of the nation-building project in Putin's Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church leadership, in its turn, was ready to make concerted efforts to regain its authority and present itself as an ally to the state in troubled times. Both Boris and Yurii seem to have internalised the messages of the contemporary Russian nation-building project and started to see Orthodoxy as an important part of their national identity.

Starting from 2005, the centrality of Orthodox Christianity to the Russian national identity was directly and continuously articulated by the two main state-aligned television channels in Russia (Channel 1 and Rossia). During the 2012 presidential election

campaign, the vision of Russia as an Orthodox nation and Europe's last bastion of traditional values came to the fore in television coverage (Hutchings and Tolz, 2015; Tolz and Harding, 2015). The elevation of the Church's status and the revival of religious traditionalism were used as discursive tools to help the regime refute the liberal values and voices of political opposition (Hutchings and Tolz, 2015). Among other things, the Orthodox Church leadership availed itself of this opportunity to promote its conservative gender agenda and demand a return to traditional national Orthodox values – to the 'normal' patriarchal family, with conventional and differentiated roles for men and women. This standpoint was also used by political propaganda to contradistinguish the 'true' Russian national identity from any displays of Westernization, specifically those concerning the ideology of gender equality.

Interestingly, the references to this topic and the accompanying debates about the revival of religious gender conservatism in Russia only appeared in the immigrant interviews. Even though I asked every single participant about their religious affiliation, Russian men interviewed in Russia expressed little concern about the changing role of the Church in the political life of the country. The immigrant men, in contrast, were especially keen to discuss this topic and articulate their opinions.

I think I have the same ideas [about gender relations] that I had when I moved away from Russia in the early 1990s. But I see that, in Russia, gender attitudes have changed dramatically. Before that we had normal progressive liberal Western views ... We had very good teachers, who explained to us that the view that 'a woman is a man's best friend'¹³⁶ [laughing] isn't suitable for the modern world' ... And now they have all become religious. My classmates and former colleagues suddenly all became believers and adopted the Orthodox Church's position, which is very conservative in this matter. 'Let the wife see that she fears her husband'¹³⁷ and so on... They say that a woman should be a woman, and in the West you've completely lost it; Western women began to dominate men and that's why they're unhappy... They say they feel for me that I live in the West, where feminism is rampant and we, men, are crushed and pinned down. I say: 'Listen, [laughing] I'm fine with the fact that women [take an active role in society].' [And they go:] 'No way! Get out of here!' When I go to Russia, I think that everything is different. I feel that my friends are seriously crawling back to the Middle Ages, or maybe it's me who has dragged myself out of the Middle Ages?

Zakhar, 63 years old, England

¹³⁶ Zakhar jokingly refers to the phrase 'A dog is a best man's friend'.

¹³⁷ A quote from Ephesians, 5:33.

Zakhar makes a valid observation – that Russian life today appears to be more sexist than it was before the fall of the Soviet Union. The Orthodox morality is being actively propagated alongside near ubiquitous images and narratives depicting women as dispensable sexualised objects or reducing them to the role of housewife and caregiver. These two seemingly opposite trends are in fact two sides of the same coin. The political project of remasculinisation of Russia implies that everything ‘masculine’ should be systemically valued over everything ‘feminine’, which inevitably involves regression in the role and status of women in society.

Political actors in Russia, including the leadership of the Orthodox Church, employ widely familiar cultural notions of masculinity and femininity as political tools in their performance of legitimacy. That being said, such tactics are only going to work when patriarchy, sexism and gender based discrimination themselves are near universal conditions. Political actors can only make strategic use of traditionalised gender and sexuality norms when there is a structure of opportunities to do so. For instance, had Russia had a strong feminist movement or a developed civil society, it would have been much harder to push such a conservative agenda, to make an appeal for the return to traditional values or a move in public discussion toward desecularisation and mobilisation against gender equality. In the contemporary Russian context, there is a perfect structure of opportunities and few obstacles to prevent the promotion of a conservative agenda (Sperling, 2015). The immigrant men within my study live in a different social context, where conservative advocates for traditional gender roles face strong opposition and do not enjoy the same structure of opportunities as they do in Russia. This equips Russian men in the UK with a new way of looking at the evolution and representations of gender relations in Russia.

Disappearing Homophobia: Is it Getting Better?

Across both groups of respondents homophobia is one of the main assets for masculinity construction; it constitutes the primary negative reference point. This type of data is abundant within my study; however, I do not specifically focus on it because it is always the same story and the same type of masculinity construction strategy. As Kimmel writes, the main reason for men’s homophobia is not the actual fear of homosexuals or homosexual experience but an anxiety about being seen as untough, uncool, and unmanly. This anxiety compels men and boys to express contempt for anyone who does not fit the culturally specific ideals of masculinity (Kimmel, 1994). As a number of researchers

demonstrate, the ‘fag’ label can have both sexual and nonsexual meanings that nevertheless always draw on notions of gender (Pascoe, 2007:22). For instance, Pascoe’s research on ‘fag discourse’ in a working class high school in California shows that ‘a fag has as much to do with failing at masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength or in any way revealing weakness or femininity as it does with a sexual identity’ (Pascoe, 2007:54).

My research data fully support these theoretical insights. Even gay men interviewed in Russia oriented most of their gender related narratives towards reflections on heterosexual life, gender roles stereotypes and fantasies about heterosexual family. On the one hand, three gay men interviewed in Russia wanted to make a progressive stand and appear to be people of the twenty first century by criticising sexism and homophobia in Russia. However, on the other hand, they struggled to imagine a different type of social environment in which homosexuality was included in the definition of the norm. Despite claiming progressivity, gay men I interviewed in Russia are most often invested into deeply traditional gender projects and express misogynistic and homophobic attitudes. In Russia, homosexuality is an unambiguously negative reference point for masculinity construction not only amongst heterosexual men but also amongst gay men.

In contrast to overtly straightforward homophobia within the data collected in Russia, Russian immigrants in the UK are homophobic with reservations. The men I interviewed in the UK usually said that they had nothing against gay or gender-non-conforming people unless these people made their sexuality too visible in public spaces or unless gay men tried to hit on them.

Technically I’ve got nothing to say against them. Except when they start going too far, behave too ostentatiously; then of course it’s a bit annoying, gives me the creeps. But I don’t have negative attitudes towards them. I have [homosexual] friends and people at work and my cousin [is gay] and it doesn’t affect our friendship. I don’t feel like they’re perverts or anything like that. It’s just when they begin to show off, go too far, I don’t agree with that.

Stepan, 37 years old, England

For me, sexual orientation doesn’t matter at all. If he doesn’t make any advances towards me, everything is fine. If he does, then I have a problem with that. In general I don’t get worked up about it at all, and if they control themselves, it’s ok. It’s completely unimportant.

Danil, 38 years old, England

According to English standards, I’m a homophobe. And in Russia, I’m the other way around. What’s it called? Homophile? I’m seen as a homophobe

here, because I don't think this is normal. I understand that it exists, but because of the way I was raised, I think that these things should be kept private. I understand that homosexuality exists now, existed in the past and will exist in the future. But I think it's wrong to present it as a norm for the whole of society. I agree that it's unfair, by the way. It would be fair to accept it as a norm, but I think it'd be harmful for society.

Philipp, 37 years old, England

From the standpoint of a person who is deeply involved in the post-Soviet, American and British queer communities both personally and professionally and has been studying gender and sexuality theories for over a decade, I tend to see practically all the research participants' masculine self-representations as homophobic and/or sexist. That said, I would suggest that the categories 'homophobic' and 'non-homophobic' do not provide a useful interpretative framework for understanding the changing role of homophobia among Russian immigrants in the UK. Homophobia in this case should be considered as a process, rather than a static attitude. As I outline in the Methodology chapter, I use Goffman's concepts 'front stage' and 'back stage' to illustrate the processual nature of this phenomenon (1956). If, for example, most Russian men I interviewed in Russia are homophobic in both their attitudes and their self-representations (homophobic front stage and back stage), then quite a few of the immigrant men, like Stepan and Danil, are at the stage of transition. Their self-representation is non-homophobic but their attitudes are (non-homophobic front stage and homophobic back stage). Among my respondents there are also people who have moved to the next step in rethinking their homophobic stance.

Egor moved to England 4 years ago. At that time he was a high school student.

M: In your opinion, do you think someone who is gay can be a man?

Egor (20 years old, England): Yes. It's actually an interesting question. In a country like Russia, gay people are treated very badly. To be honest, before I moved to England I also was very sceptical about all this. But somehow life turned out in such a way that my best friend, who's also my flatmate now, is gay. My attitude towards gay people has changed a lot. To be frank, all my friends in Estonia still hold extremely negative attitudes towards gay people.¹³⁸ I don't even try to explain anything to them. It seems to me that it should come to everyone by itself in its own time. I have a good example, my [gay] friend. I think he's a real man. He values friendship and exhibits gentlemanly qualities. Communication with him helped me to see that they're

¹³⁸ As I explain in the Methodology chapter, three respondents in the UK technically came from the Baltic States, but were either born in Russia or have Russian parents who left Russia in the 1990s. All three identified as ethnic Russians (russkie) and expressed loyalty to Russian culture.

not bad people. Of course, I still think that this is not entirely right, but I won't show my resentment in this regard, because they're good people, and I can't do anything about it. It's their choice.

Even though Egor claims that he has radically re-considered his attitudes to gay people, then, he still exercises a negative judgement ('this is not entirely right'). That said, if homophobia can be thought of as a progression line then he is the least homophobic interviewee by a significant margin among the forty. Egor's story in a certain sense is quite common. The most homophobic people I have interviewed in Russia and met in my life are people who do not personally know any homosexual people; they only know the media images of homosexual people, who in post-Soviet cultural and media representations are portrayed in a radically negative light. These cultural and media representations are very powerful in forming fears and negative attitudes. However, many people who get to meet and know gay people personally change their attitudes and stop seeing homosexuality as a defining feature of personality. In my experience, this refers especially to women. A transition from a homophobic stance to anti-homophobic attitudes could happen quite quickly and 'painlessly.' However, it is certainly different for men since, as a number of theorists of masculinity state, homophobia is one of the main defining features of masculinity (Kimmel, 1994; Connell, 1995; Pascoe, 2007).

The homophobic attitudes and self-representations of the immigrant interviewees are less pronounced because practically all of them know gay people personally as friends, friends of friends, colleagues, neighbours and people they regularly see on the streets and on British TV, which delivers either a far less negative or an overtly positive portrayal of queer people in comparison with Russian television. Another major reason is the culture of political correctness in the UK. Learning how to speak English and how to navigate the social terrains in the UK, the immigrants also learn how to talk 'properly' and 'carefully' about such sensitive topics as homosexuality, race, gender, age and disability. Thus, on the one hand, it can be argued that homophobic attitudes and self-representations among Russian men in the UK are diminishing, but on the other these types of 'improvements' (moderate homophobia, homophobia with reservations) only prove the flexibility and persistence of heterosexism, heteronormativity and patriarchy.

Putting a question mark after 'It Gets Better?' the title of this subchapter, I refer to the project of American gay activist, author, media pundit and journalist, Dan Savage, and the discussion this project sparked among the academic queer community. On September 21, 2010, Dan Savage and his partner Terry Miller recorded a video to discourage queer

teens committing suicide and ‘to inspire hope for young people facing harassment’ (2010). This started a massive It Gets Better campaign in the USA. 50,000 individuals have uploaded videos promising youth and young adults that their lives will get better when they become older. Such celebrities as politician Hillary Clinton, actress Anne Hathaway, singers Ke\$ha, Adam Lambert and Ciara, to name only a few, took part in this campaign and promised a better future to gay youth. More than 50 million people watched the campaign’s videos. This project, however, has been widely criticised by queer researchers and activists for engendering an overly optimistic narrative that ignores the reality of queerness and silences structural factors and structural discrimination by focusing on privileged, most often white, cisgender¹³⁹ men and women living in metropolitan areas (e.g., Goltz, 2013; Herrera y Lozano, 2011). In contrast to the lives of queer people of colour living in economically disadvantaged and conservative provincial areas, those of well-off cisgender white men in the USA have indeed got much better in recent decades. As Jack Halberstam puts it, this campaign is just ‘PR for status quo’: ‘In fact only a very small and privileged sector of the US population can say with any kind of confidence: “It gets better!” One can rarely say this to youth of color or to teenage moms or to victims of sexual abuse and, for the most part, unless one is talking to silver spoon in the mouth gays, one cannot promise to most queers that “things get better”’ (Halberstam, 2010).

Echoing the queer critique of the It Gets Better campaign in the USA, I argue that the immigrant Russian men’s seemingly ‘getting better’ homophobia, which almost always is accompanied by some reservations and/or negative judgements, is a conscious or unconscious effort to support their heterosexual masculine status quo while at the same time they are striving to fit in and to be on the front line of European ‘progressiveness’ and ‘open-mindedness’.

Homecoming Narratives

Although there is insufficient space to do justice to the question of (in)visibility politics in Soviet/post-Soviet and Western European contexts, it is important to note here that a huge part of the data collected in the UK is about the shock straight Russian men experience when they get to a country where queerness is visible. As I show in the previous section, they often claim to have a problem not with the fact that queer people exist but with how

¹³⁹ ‘Cisgender’ is a term that compliments the term ‘transgender’ and refers to individuals whose gender identities match the identities they were assigned at birth.

visible they are in the UK (gay villages, pride parades, etc). Miron's quote is a common example:

They can sleep with anyone they want. What I don't like is all this showing off. "Oh, why don't we take a walk down the central square and swing our bare arses?" I'm not interested in this naked hairy arse. Yes, I understand two men can love each other, but why show it off? Well, maybe they do all this theatrics to somehow win equal rights for themselves and they have to shock society to do this. But this excessive showing off annoys me.

Miron, 33 years old, England

From a context where homosexuality is practically invisible, Russian men immigrating to the UK move to a context where it is highly visible, a context in which queer people have been fighting for visibility and recognition of their rights for several decades. My data shows that this type of cross-cultural and cross-normative movement creates a different effect in straight and gay men. In contrast to the straight men's performance of 'softened' homophobia and increasing 'progressiveness' and 'open-mindedness' towards gay people, the narratives of the two gay men I interviewed in the UK contained a completely different and perhaps much more interesting dynamic. In contrast to the straight men's stories of the hardships of immigration and life in the UK, both Roman and Arkadii in a very similar fashion announced that coming to the UK was like coming home for them. In what follows, I show that their homecoming stories are a direct reproduction of the Western narrative of 'coming out' as 'coming home' (Kuntsman, 2003).

Both respondents originate from economically privileged families in Russia and deliberately planned to emigrate from Russia to a Western country. Arkadii has been pursuing a career in Western academia and lived in the USA before coming to the UK. Roman had been to Britain for holidays and English language courses many times before he got enrolled in a university MA programme.

If in the States I had some adaptation period, then when I came to the UK, it was like coming home for me. I didn't have any adaptation period. People in the UK, in my view, are very close to Russians, so I didn't have any problems.

Arkadii, 30 years old, Wales

When I realised that I was gay, I understood that I couldn't live in my hometown. This is why I initially decided to move to Moscow and then to Europe. I wanted to have freedom. And, perhaps, I was making some

deliberate steps to leave [Russia] and be myself. Living in Russia, I can't feel a full human being... Here [in Britain] I'm free, I can be who I want to be and I don't think about anything and I'm not ashamed of myself. Here I'm free as a person and as a gay man. I can kiss a person I love at the train station or we can walk down the street holding hands. In Russia, that is almost impossible.

Roman, 26 years old, England

These are only short quotes but interviews as a whole with Roman and Arkadii have the same spirit. They celebrate their immigration, present idealised narratives of gay men's homecoming and are either completely silent about any types of hardships, frustrations and experiences of being socially excluded which they went through in the UK, or exaggeratedly play down these hardships. 'There were some ups and downs here, but the most important thing is that here I am free' (Roman). Notably both respondents wanted to disassociate themselves from their Russianness and repeatedly bad-mouth it, construct Russia as a country of low culture, of a rude, aggressive and deeply conservative people. In their narratives, homophobia and Russia are tied together and contrasted with Britain, which is imagined as a place of personal and political freedoms and, most importantly, queer freedoms. Both Roman and Arkadii are eager to abandon their Russianness for the sake of British belonging. Following Adi Kuntsman's findings based on a study of immigrant post-Soviet lesbians in Israel, I argue that by adopting a homecoming gay identity, the Russian men I interviewed were striving to escape 'othering' in the UK (Kuntsman, 2003).

Arkadii describes Russia as a pathetic, low grade, uncultured, uneducated country with a high level of aggression, rudeness, boorishness on the roads, lack of respect among people towards one another ('in Russia respect must be earned, while in the Western world it is taken for granted').

I feel more comfortable living in a European society than in Russia. I think that this is because of the upbringing I received in my family. I felt like a black sheep in Russian society exactly because I was given a European upbringing and introduced to the European socialisation model.

Arkadii, 30 years old, Wales

When Arkadii says 'European upbringing', he means that, in contrast to 'general Russian upbringing,' which is 'uncouth' and represents 'a low level of culture,' he was brought up in a family which taught him how to behave properly, in a cultural way. Making this point, Arkadii strives to emphasise how bad things actually are in Russia and

simultaneously to stress that long before he moved out of Russia he had already been occupying the position of an educated, ambitious and purposeful ‘European’ man.

The immigration stories, as stories of liberation and a shifting meaning of home from ‘a place of origin’ to ‘a place of destination’, make us aware of the transformation of self, of finding one’s true self, of becoming a new person in a new place (Fortier, 2001; Prosser, 1995). Both respondents imagined sexuality to be ‘free of ethnic or class marking, a sort of neo-liberal all inclusive discourse of personal freedom’ (Sandoval, 2000 cited in Kuntsman, 2003: 305). Roman and Arkadii’s narratives are examples of how a national self can be constructed through the sexual self. By emphasising their queerness, both of them, wittingly or unwittingly, strive to escape their foreignness and the exotisation which immigrants face in British society in order to gain legitimation. By ‘normalising’ their homosexuality, they seek to enter the white middle class metropolitan queer community in the UK. Becoming queer is a way for them to become European men.

Conclusion: Displaced Masculinities

This chapter has looked at how immigration to the UK, a country with a different past and present construction of gender relations, frames the masculinity construction strategies among individual Russian men and the new reference points the immigration experience gives rise to. I have considered the seven most prominent themes that came out of the data: emerging reflexivity and rethinking of gender and national identity; gender equality backlash and hierarchy construction; stereotypes about Russian/Slavic and British/Western women; a changing perception of Russia and use of the individualism/family values binary; the growing role of Orthodox Christian identity for the Russian immigrants’ gender projects; the changing role of homophobia in the construction of Russian masculinities; and immigration as a homecoming narrative among gay men.

While the chapter is structured around these seven themes, underpinning all of them is the question of masculine privilege, power and hierarchies. My research on Russian masculinities on foreign ground shows that masculine privilege and hierarchies are highly context specific phenomena. Migration from a country with a historical emphasis on traditional gender roles to a country where gender equality and sexual freedoms are guaranteed and protected by a number of laws poses a serious challenge to the understanding of masculinity which the respondents were socialised into, and which they perceived as the natural order of things before they moved out of the post-Soviet context. The ways in which the research participants handle this challenge, the ways in which they

interpret their new social reality and adjust to it, reveal many personal truths about each of them. At the same time it reveals a powerful gendered pattern – the culture of male entitlement: to privilege in private and public life, to high social status, to women's bodies, and to building hierarchies and determining the fates of other people.

The experience of migration almost inevitably includes living through alienation, through a split of identity, through cultural difference, and through the experience of rethinking, reconstructing and reinventing oneself. All of these experiences can be very painful. As I have shown throughout this chapter, one of the outcomes of these experiences is the emergence of gendered self-awareness. The results of this gendered self-awareness, however, can be radically different. Some people begin to idealise the traditional gender order in Russia and demand their masculine privilege in a more or less direct way. Others seem to have adopted a Western approach to gender relations, keeping their expectations open and celebrating a more gender equal life in the UK. Not uncommonly, however, these people explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that they have adopted a more gender equal or less homophobic stance in order to fit into their new social environment. In other words, it was a conformist move rather than an informed choice.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Every chapter of this work explicitly or implicitly poses the question ‘What is masculinity?’ I asked this question of each of the forty men I interviewed for this study. In most cases, we - my informants and I - agreed that masculinity has a slippery quality. It is extremely hard to understand, to define, to explain or, as some informants acknowledged, to consistently live ‘masculinity’. As a gender and sexuality researcher, when I started this study, I knew that the term could refer to behaviours, practices, roles, processes, attitudes, sexualities, emotions, positions, bodies, institutions, organisations and more. As a scholar working from the perspective of social constructivism, I was prepared to approach masculinity and its many forms and manifestations as *descriptions*, not *prescriptions*. This is where my respondents and I parted company, and, at the same time, this is what made this research project possible, because the people I interviewed almost invariably communicated *prescriptive* accounts of masculinity, i.e. they focused primarily on what men *should* be and do. Sometimes they directly communicated a clear set of instructions on how to be a man; more often, however, they left ‘masculinity formulas’ out of our conversations and engaged in a personalised performance of these prescriptions.

This study looks at the personalised performances of ‘being a man’ among Russian men in Russia and the UK, and argues that these performances of masculinity can only be understood within an historical and country specific context. I found that despite generational, educational, occupational, class and many other differences between the research participants, their discursive performances of masculinity are not only highly patterned but also clearly historicised and spatialised. The central organising argument of this work is that while individual men play an active role in defining and constructing their own masculinities, they do so within the macro-parameters laid down by the state along with broader socio-cultural and political factors. Changes in the macro-parameters (such as the collapse of the Soviet Union) or migration to another socio-cultural context change the individual’s environment and bring to life new strategies and resources for negotiating masculinity. Thus I argue that any understanding of the performativity of Russian masculinities must be located within the political, cultural and socio-economic environment of contemporary Russia. I strived to show that a culturally-specific situating of Butler’s theory of performativity is needed to recognise the transformative possibilities inherent in the reiterative process of gender construction.

As I outline in the theoretical chapter, this study is primarily concerned with the symbolic dimension of gender relations. I examine how Russian masculinities are

constructed and performed through the use of language, ideologies, binary oppositions, truth claims, meaning-making and hierarchies building. In other words, I analyse discursive patterns that emerge from the data. I do not know if the research participants were always telling me the truth about their childhoods, relationships with their close kin, career paths or life in immigration. The truth and fair representations of their lives were far less important, however, than their self-representations. My aim was to grasp the individual gender project of each respondent, reflected in his life story, and trace the making and unmaking of masculinity during the interview interaction.

My primary tools for the analysis of individual performances of masculinity are the concepts ‘reference point’ - something the respondents refer to when they explain what it means to be a man or a woman or when they talk about themselves and others in gendered terms; and ‘resource for making masculinity’ – a strategy of appropriating certain experiences, practices, abilities, skills, beliefs, physical attributes etc. as an asset or a building block for the individual construction and assertion of masculinity. I show that the reference points and resources for the construction of masculinity among men in both research contexts significantly change from generation to generation and reflect the history of the recent social, political and economic transformations in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. At the same time, I argue that the shifting meanings of Russian masculinities and the commonly used masculine hierarchies have important implications for understanding Russian history and the evolution of the socio-political regime, because masculinity is one of the primary ways political and normative power signifies itself.

By situating Russian masculinities within the historical evolution of state-society relations, my research does not take the differences in individual masculinity projects for granted, but instead investigates why Russian masculinities are in flux and why they are shaped the way they are, how they change and how these changes fit into the broader developments within the Russian historical context and individual life trajectories. In Chapters Three, Four and Five, I show that the changes in Russian masculinities are a part and an effect of the reorganisation of social relations, political power and economic realities that have taken place since the late Soviet period to the early 2010s. Chapter Six, which looks at the masculinity construction strategies among Russian immigrants in the UK, pushes this argument even further by showing that migration to another country cannot but change the way Russian men negotiate their gender identities.

If we take a step back from the theoretical framework developed for understanding Russian masculinities in this work and all the empirical findings discussed throughout the

chapters, we can see that ultimately this work is about change. This dissertation has been particularly concerned with understanding how this updated and somewhat systemised knowledge of how Russian masculinities change can help us understand gender and power relations in Russia and beyond. It shows that the huge entry of women into the industrial labour force towards the end of the first five year-plan,¹⁴⁰ the transition from state socialism and a centrally planned economy to capitalism and the free market, and even migration to a country which has a long history of feminist political movements and state-sponsored gender equality programmes, do not change one important pattern –men continue to draw a patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995). Some men are practicing the hegemonic configurations of masculinity - ‘the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy’ (Connell, 1995: 77). Others obtain their patriarchal dividend without joining the frontline troops of patriarchy. They may be caring fathers, supporters of women’s empowerment and not be involved in any type of masculine competition; however, they overtly or covertly support men who embody hegemonic masculinities or are invested in the construction of gender hierarchies and thus are complicit in this sense.

This study of change in Russian masculinities demonstrates the flexibility of patriarchy, understood as an inherently stable social arrangement, which is in constant need of assertion and the working strategy of legitimation. It also points to the crucial importance of symbolic aspects of gender relations. Social, economic or political change may transform the material, institutional and legal structures of patriarchy, but its symbolical power is specifically resistant to change. It has a proven ability to creatively reinvent itself and successfully adapt to the changing world. Accordingly, the most topical issue in my study is that of hybrid masculinities (examined in Chapter Five). Hybrid masculinities, which in my study were usually enacted by young, educated men of the middle or creative classes, are built around selective incorporation of the Western value and rhetoric of gender equality into individual gendered self-representation. The respondents who were involved in the construction of fair-minded, progressive and gender sensitive masculinities, the ‘men of the twenty first century,’ as some of them called themselves, acknowledge and support change and a more gender equal future. Without doubt there are some liberating and transgressive aspects to these progressive formulations of masculinity and the subjectivities they give rise to. However, as my analysis of their

¹⁴⁰ After the Stalin era the number remained fairly consistent – in the Brezhnev era, women made up 53% of the population and 51% of the work force.

interviews shows, these progressive performances of masculinity are built on a number of serious contradictions and not only reproduce various systems of gendered, racial and sexual inequalities but also work to conceal this process as it is happening in historically new ways. In many respects the progressive men within my study continue to uphold familiar and conventional masculine roles.

Russian masculinities are in a state of constant change, but Russian men have never been the source of this change themselves. Russian masculinities, understood as a configuration of practice, changed in response to massive political upheavals (like the creation or collapse of the Soviet Union) and the transformation of the economic system (from state socialism to 'wild' capitalism and then from 'wild' capitalism to one of the world's largest economies oriented towards the global market). Russian masculinities can also change in response to cultural globalisation, which advertises a range of class- and culture-specific lifestyles and ideologies, including the ideology of gender equality, rooted in the history of the development of the Western world. Russian masculinities almost invariably change when their bearers move out of Russia and try to integrate into social life in the UK, a country with a different past and present construction of gender relations and one of the highest levels of gender equality in the world.

Russian masculinities in Russia might have also changed had there been a feminist movement there. As the histories of the Western world show, changes in masculinities most often followed as a reaction to changes in femininities. In this sense, the history of gender relations in Russia presents a range of compelling empirical and theoretical puzzles. As this work shows, addressing these puzzles, which emerge from the dislocations of economic, social and political transition and the challenges of integration and re-integration into a shifting global landscape, demand a thorough knowledge of Russian history, contemporary gender and sexualities theories and sensitivity to methods that cut across geographic, cultural and disciplinary boundaries.

By looking at the interplay between individual masculinity construction strategies, the change in social organisation, and migration to another country, this study fills an important gap in research on gender relations in post-Soviet space. It provides insights and poses challenges to Western theorising of gender relations and masculinities, and shows that the transnational migration experience is a particularly fruitful area for studying how people create and perpetuate social differences; how they negotiate relationships, conflicting interests and hierarchies of power and privilege; and how the existing social inequalities and hierarchies, in turn, frame these people's lived experience and

understanding of the world. More importantly, my research not only contributes to Russian studies, masculinities studies and transnational migration research but also puts these fields of study into conversation with each other.

I take a serious intellectual risk by conceptualising Russian masculinities in a dynamic historical perspective and drawing a number of far-reaching conclusions within such a small-scale qualitative research project. It could be argued that a study which is based on forty life story interviews cannot possibly make claims of such scope. I acknowledge that my work cannot be considered a comprehensive history of Russian masculinities but rather provides an introduction to this history, which developed alongside the history of socio-political transformations in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. My empirical findings and theoretical framework are yet to be corroborated by further sociological research; nor have they been amplified by analysis of key cultural texts (e.g. films and literary works), nor corroborated by research into contemporary popular culture in Russia. I believe that sometimes we need to take serious intellectual risks in order to stimulate or shift the conversation taking place in a specific field. In the meantime, my work, which owes a big debt to the myriad scholars who have studied the political, economic and social history of Russia and the world-renowned gender and sexualities theorists, offers a serviceable – albeit imperfect - framework for contextualising existing and future research on Russian men and masculinities.

I acknowledge that I have paid insufficient attention to the alignment between men and masculinities. In future research, the relationship between men and masculinities will be spelt out in order to avoid giving the impression that Russian masculinities are seen as a natural part of being a Russian man. Assuming that masculinity is only about men and femininity is only about women weakens inquiry into gender dynamics. Such reasoning implicitly positions men and women as people of two different species. Displacing masculinity from a biological location is another productive way to highlight the social constructedness of gender. This is not to say that biological location is unimportant. Bodies are important assets through which we express our gendered selves and through which social norms work. What should be questioned is the assumption that bodies are locations of gender. My research, which looks at masculinity as discourses and practices, implicitly challenges this assumption. However, it does not discuss the possibility that masculinities can be successfully mobilised by female bodies as well (Califia, 1994; Halberstam, 1998; Paetcher, 2006; Pascoe, 2007).

I am concerned that I might have given an overly negative portrayal of the Russian men I interviewed in Russia and the UK. In this regard, I would like the reader to note that my study is focused on only one aspect of the identities of otherwise highly complex and multifaceted human beings. I do not study these human beings as human beings per se, but only examine their performances of masculinities and the implications these performances entail. Within the overall pool of my interviewees there were several men whom I think of as gender-non-conforming in that they did not take their or other people's masculinities too seriously. While telling their life stories, they consistently chose to be a 'decent person' rather than a 'real man'. Coincidentally, their narratives represent the most progressive and gender sensitive accounts. If this research taught me one lesson, it is that the bravest thing a man can do in today's world is to start unbecoming a man; that is, to start abandoning his masculinity in the name of humanity.

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Shifting Masculine Terrains: Russian Men in Russia and the UK

Participant Information Sheet (translated from the Russian)

My name is Marina Yusupova. I am a postgraduate researcher working at the University of Manchester. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which is part of my PhD project. My research aims to explore the identities, practices and behaviours of Russian men living in Russia and the United Kingdom. Before you decide upon your participation, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for taking the time to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this project.

This research, entitled *Shifting Masculine Terrains: Russian Men in Russia and the UK*, will be conducted by me and is approved by The University of Manchester. The aim of this research is to explore how Russian men living in Russia and the United Kingdom understand and experience their manhood and if changes in the contemporary world have influenced this understanding and the ways in which they practice their manhood.

During the interviews, you will be asked to talk about your personal life story as well as ideas, practices and beliefs concerning masculinity and femininity, male and female roles both in personal life and in the public arena. **There are no right or wrong answers in this study.**

There will be some predetermined topics for our conversation (e.g. codes of masculinity, fatherhood, sports, men's health). However, you will be allowed to start from and discuss any aspect of these topics as well as your ideas or life experience, which you consider relevant to your understanding of manhood and womanhood. I might ask you different questions, which may arise from your individual answers and comments. You are invited to identify any areas that you consider important to speak about and those which you prefer not to discuss at any time during the interview.

I am expecting to conduct from two to three 90 minutes sessions with each participant in this project.

Our interview will be audio recorded. After that the information will be transcribed and used in anonymised format that will not allow you to be identified individually. In other words, your name or any identifying characteristics will not be available to anyone, other than me and my Supervisor Dr. Lynne Attwood, at any point. All the information you give me **will be confidential** and used solely for the purposes of this study. The data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Your participation is totally voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part in this study. You are free to withdraw from the research at any point prior to the publication of the research findings.

Thank you very much for your help.

Marina Yusupova

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If you would like to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Меняющиеся Ландшафты Маскулинности: Российские Мужчины в России и Великобритании

Информация для респондентов

Уважаемый потенциальный участник проекта, меня зовут Марина Юсупова, и я хотела бы обратиться к Вам с просьбой принять участие в моем исследовании. Я докторант кафедры русских и восточноевропейских исследований Манчестерского университета в Великобритании. Мой проект направлен на изучение поведения, практик и идентичностей русских мужчин живущих в России и Великобритании. Прежде чем Вы примете решение о своем участии, я хотела бы объяснить Вам цели проекта и темы, которые он затрагивает. Я прошу Вас внимательно прочитать последующую информацию. Если хотите, Вы можете обсудить ее с Вашими близкими. Пожалуйста свяжитесь со мной, если у Вас возникнут какие-либо вопросы. Спасибо за Ваше время и интерес к моему проекту.

Исследование *Меняющиеся Ландшафты Маскулинности: Российские Мужчины в России и Великобритании* одобрено Манчестерским университетом и будет проводиться лично мною. Цель данного проекта – изучить как русские мужчины в России и русские иммигранты в Великобритании понимают мужественность и проживают ее в своем личном опыте; влияют ли изменения в современном мире на их понимание и практики в целом.

В ходе наших интервью я попрошу Вас рассказать историю Вашей жизни, а также поделиться Вашими идеями и убеждениями о мужественности и женственности, мужских и женских ролях в публичной сфере и частной жизни. **Помните, что здесь нет правильных и неправильных ответов – есть только Ваше мнение!**

Я приготовила несколько тем для наших интервью (например, негласные законы мужественности, отцовство, спорт, здоровый образ жизни), однако Вы сможете начать разговор и говорить на любую из них так, как посчитает нужным. Вы сможете обсудить со мной Ваш жизненный опыт и любые идеи, которые затрагивают Ваше понимание мужественности и женственности, а также жизни мужчин и женщин. В ответ на Ваши высказывания и комментарии, я могу задавать дополнительные вопросы с целью уточнить Ваше мнение и видение той или иной темы нашего разговора. Вы вправе обозначить любую тему, которую считаете важной для обсуждения, а также отказаться обсуждать тот или иной вопрос в любой момент нашего интервью.

Участие в данном исследовании подразумевает два или три 90-минутных интервью с каждым участником.

Наше интервью будет записано с помощью диктофона. Аудио запись нашего разговора будет расшифрована и переведена в письменный текст. Вся полученная информация будет использоваться в анонимном формате, не допускающем личной идентификации участников. Другими словами, Ваше имя и любые другие идентифицирующие Вас характеристики никогда не будут доступны никому кроме меня и моего научного руководителя Лин Этвуд (Dr. Lynne Attwood). Любая информация полученная от Вас **конфиденциальна** и будет использоваться только в целях данного исследования. Материалы исследования будут собираться и храниться в соответствии с законом о защите информации Великобритании (Data Protection Act 1998).

Ваше участие в данном проекте является абсолютно добровольным. Вы можете отказаться от него или прекратить свое участие в любое время до публикации результатов исследования.

Большое спасибо за Вашу помощь.

Марина Юсупова

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Если Вы желаете обратиться с официальной жалобой по поводу проведения данного исследования, Вам необходимо связаться с директором исследовательского департамента (Head of the Research Office) Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Shifting Masculine Terrains: Russian Men in Russia and the UK

CONSENT FORM (translated from the Russian)

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

Меняющиеся Ландшафты Маскулинности: Российские Мужчины в России и Великобритании

СОГЛАСИЕ РЕСПОНДЕНТА

Если Вы готовы стать участником данного исследования, пожалуйста заполните и подпишите данную форму.

Инициалы участника

1. Я прочел информацию о данном исследовании в прилагаемом информационном листе. У меня была возможность задать исследователю любые вопросы до начала интервью. На все мои вопросы об этом исследовании и моем участии в нем мне ответили.

2. Я понимаю, что мое участие в исследовании является абсолютно добровольным и, что я вправе прекратить свое участие в любое время без объяснения причины.

3. Я понимаю, что интервью будут записаны с помощью диктофона

4. Я даю свое согласие на использование анонимных цитат

Я согласен принять участие в данном проекте.

ФИО участника

Дата

Подпись

ФИО исследователя

Дата

Подпись

List of Research Participants

Russia

All but one interview in Russia took place in Samara. One interview was collected in Ul'ianovsk.

	Name	Age	Occupation	Number of Meetings	Total Time of Interview
1	Shamil	23	Programmer	3	4 hours 19 min
2	Victor	45	University Professor	2	2 hours 29 min
3	Pavel	66	Deputy Director for Production at Construction Materials Plant (resigned colonel)	2	3 hours 2 min
4	Alexei	28	Unemployed	2	3 hours 29 min
5	Dmitrii	26	Sales Promoter in Advertising	1	1 hour 58 min
6	Igor	18	Student	2	2 hours 28 min
7	Georgii	52	Business Owner	2	2 hours 56 min
8	Slava	55	Site Manager at a Construction Company	1	1 hour 32 min
9	Artem	22	University Graduate	2	3 hours 45 min
10	Vasilii	65	Pensioner (Army Medical Officer in the past), Gardener at his son's family owned hotel	2	2 hours 30 min
11	Anton	42	Security Guard	2	2 hours 25 min
12	Sergei	32	Driver	2	3 hours
13	Evgenii	29	Fitness and Yoga Instructor	2	2 hours 41 min
14	Anatolii	32	Auditor	2	2 hours 41 min
15	Vitalii	29	Freelance Photographer and Musician	2	2 hours 24 min
16	Arsenii	32	Psychologist at a Drug Rehab Centre	1	2 hours 5min
17	Oleg	36	Tattooist	2	4 hours 52 min
18	Mikhail	22	Student	2	2 hours 23 min
19	Il'ia	40	Graphic Designer	1	2 hours 51 min
20	Stanislav	54	Manager at a Construction Materials Manufacture	2	3 hours 51 min

United Kingdom

The interviews took place in 10 urban locations in the UK stretching from the south west to the north east of England.

	Name	Age	Occupation	Moved to the UK from	Time spent in the UK	Number of Meetings	Total Time of Interview
1	Alexander	36	Volunteer in Community Centres	Trans Baikal, Germany, Estonia	10 years	2	2 hours 54 min
2	Valerii	38	University lecturer	Krasnodarskii Krai	12 years	1	3 hours 39 min
3	Danil	38	Researcher, Unemployed at time of interview	Krasnodar	10 years	1	4 hours 19 min
4	Philipp	37	IT Specialist	Moscow Region	13 years	1	4 hours 20 min
5	Boris	51	Biologist, Museum Curator	Volgograd, various cities in Ukraine, Taymyr Peninsula, Batumi (Georgia), St Petersburg, Novosibirsk	12 years	2	2 hours 57 min
6	Kiril	26	Office worker with a gas and electricity supply co.	Tver	11 years	1	1 hour 35 min
7	Roman	26	Sales Office Executive	Volgodonsk, Moscow	3 years	1	2 hours 48 min
8	Gera	27	Graduate Student	Dar es Salaan (Tanzania), Moscow	1 year	1	2 hours 47 min
9	Egor	20	Student	Tallin (Estonia) ¹⁴¹	4 years	1	2 hours 6 min
10	Yurii	34	Financier, Software Developer	Ekaterinburg, Visaginas, Vilnius (Lithuania), Mauritius	Approximately 3 years	2	3 hours 1 min

¹⁴¹ Technically, this respondent was born in Estonia and has never lived in Russia. However his parents are both from Russia, his grandparents and other relatives are in Russia and he identifies as Russian. I recruited him because unlike the majority of the UK based respondents who occupy highly privileged social positions or come from wealthy, secure families, Egor originates from a poor single parent family with many children.

11	Fedor	20	Student	Kolomna	6 years	1	2 hours 3 min
12	Vladimir	23	Graduate Student	Moscow, Odintsovo	3 years in total 2008-2010 – private school in the UK 2013-2014 – MA program	1	2 hours 31 min
13	Stepan	37	Works in Financial Advice Industry	Novosibirsk	22 years	2	3 hours 30 min
14	Timur	36	Factory Worker	Bishkek, Sakha Republic (Yakutia)	7 years	1	4 hours 38 min
15	Timofei	30	PhD Student	St Petersburg	7 years	2	5 hours 2 min
16	Arkadii	30	PhD Student	Zlatoust (Chelyabinsk Region)	2 years	1	4 hours 12 min
17	Mark	18	FE College Student	Mirny (Sakha Republic)	7 years	1	2 hours 14 min
18	Miron	33	University Professor	Novosibirsk	12 years	1	3 hours 14 min
19	Zakhar	63	Physicist	Chelyabinsk Region, Moscow	23 years	1	3 hours 20 min
20	Matvei	38	Programmer	Rostov-on-Don	13 years	1	3 hours 3 min