

“If you agree to have a sugar daddy, isn’t it  
logical that you’ll get yourself chopped into  
pieces?”

A socio-anthropological study of anti-feminist rhetoric on  
Russian-speaking Internet platforms in cases related to  
gender-based violence.

# Abstract

The following paper is a socio-anthropological study of the anti-feminist and victim-blaming rhetoric that characterizes debates about cases related to gender-based violence on Russian-speaking Internet platforms. The study approaches the topic with two main questions in mind, namely: what are the common arguments of victim-blaming on Russian-speaking Internet platforms? How does the anti-feminist rhetoric on Russian-speaking Internet platforms relate to the cultural and socio-historic context of post-Soviet reality? The study used the renowned cases of the Khachaturian sisters and the Anastasia Yeshchenko murder as points of departure for data-collection as they created intense online discussions on Russian-speaking platforms. The analysis of the discussions spurred by these events demonstrates how comments to online articles and Twitter posts about gender-based violence on Russian-speaking platforms were characterized by a victim-blaming and anti-feminist rhetoric. The most common victim-blaming arguments were the following: the victim deserved it, something about the victim makes their victimhood questionable, and that violence is healthy, natural and/or sometimes required of heterosexual men. The study suggests that the victim-blaming tendencies and the anti-feminist sentiments expressed on the online platforms should be understood in their cultural and socio-historic context, as linked to post-Soviet ideas surrounding gender, sex, ideal victims and masculinity.

**Keywords:** *Social anthropology, gender-based violence, Russian-speaking Internet, post-Soviet, digital ethnography.*

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# 1 Introduction

Content and trigger warning: the following text, including but not limited to this page, contains potentially triggering mentions of domestic and sexual violence, physical and emotional abuse, and more. The mentions will not be graphic, however, frequent, and sometimes heavy. Reader discretion is advised.

“Well, who didn’t want to kill their woman at least once?” states a comment in support of the Russian professor who killed and dismembered one of his students (Tut.by 1). It is only one of many eye-catching comments I encountered on Russian-speaking Internet platforms during my research. Initially just a curious passion-project became a whole thesis when I noticed that such comments were not isolated instances.

One of the biggest Belarusian news outlets Tut.by has a comment section attached to their posts (Tut.by 2). The readers can discuss the news and express their judgement of the situation, whether it is a news post or an opinion piece. Unlike many other news-pages I have seen, the Tut.by comment section tends to be active and usually has at least a dozen comments under each post. When looking at the comments surrounding news about/events of gender-based violence, one can observe a variety of opinions. Some of the commenters express feeling sorry for the victim: “There’s no excuse for rape. Even if a girl was drunk, or wore a short skirt, or went somewhere with a stranger, it doesn’t equate to consent” (Tut.by 3). Others – blame her for everything that happened to her: “It means either consent to rape, or absence of grey matter, plain and simple” (Tut.by 4). Twitter showed a similar picture, where some tweets have been supportive of the victims who were not believed: “Typical! ‘Call when you’re being murdered, if it’s just rape – be quiet and don’t resist’. Ugh” (Twitter 1). Many other tweets, on the other hand, have been judgmental or inflammatory: “Show your boobs instead [of talking about domestic violence]!” (Twitter 2).

After a while of reading the news, opinion pieces and comments one cannot help but wonder: why is it this way? Why are victims not unanimously, or at least, mostly supported? It can be

especially disconcerting considering the work that has been done recently by numerous educators and advocates. For instance, organizations and social movements such as #самаНевиновата “not her own fault” (News 1), Останови Насилие “stop violence” (Twitter 3), #МыСестрыХачатурян “We are Khachaturian sisters” (Twitter 4), and #янехотелаумирать “I did not want to die” (Twitter 5), just to name a few, have been working to bring more visibility to questions of gender-based violence in 2019-2020<sup>1</sup>.

## 1.1 Purpose & research questions

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the commonly occurring cases in the Russian-speaking Internet, in which the victims rather than the perpetrators are condemned. The paper looks at such cases critically and analytically through a feminist lens to explain how cultural and socio-historic factors have influenced the anti-feminist discourse, specifically on the post-Soviet Internet spaces. Hereinafter, the terms “Russian-speaking” and “post-Soviet” will be used somewhat interchangeably because it is simply impossible to tell where a commenter comes from. The post-Soviet still has a significant number of Russian speakers, be it as a first language or not. At the same time, it can also be a good reminder of the shared culture and history of post-Soviet countries.

The research questions guiding this study are the following:

- a) What are the common arguments of victim-blaming on Russian-speaking Internet platforms?
- b) How does the anti-feminist rhetoric on Russian-speaking Internet platforms relate to the cultural and socio-historic context of post-Soviet reality?

## 1.2 Disposition

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<sup>1</sup> An additional note is that at the moment of my writing Belarus is having a revolution led by women, and it can potentially have a female president soon. This is a very unexpected turn of events that made me rewrite certain parts concerning feminism.

From here the paper will continue with a method section, where it will be showed how the data was selected and analyzed, together with what ramifications were encountered. Further, the reader will be provided with a brief cultural and socio-historic background of the post-Soviet countries to better understand the context of this work. The background section will incorporate the relevant previously done research on post-Soviet culture, history, and feminism in relation to violence. The section will be followed by the presentation of the theoretical framework. The analysis of the empirically collected data through the lens of the chosen theoretical material will come next. The paper will be concluded with a final discussion on the implications of the findings, and the possibilities of further studies.

## 1.3 Method

### 1.3.1 Collected data & analysis

The study uses an ethnographic approach and identifies several websites as a field-site. With that said, in practice it is hard to have one specific and defined field-site on the Internet (Hine, 2015). Instead, the study seeks to explore the virtual world holistically without necessarily separating the virtual world from the real-life people behind the screens. As Hine suggests, on the Internet the field can become defined by fieldwork as a whole instead (Hine, 2015, p 60).

The usage of language lays in the center of the discourse analysis, and thus the paper will pay close attention to the usage of language (Chouliaraki, 1999). A practical discourse analysis suggests that the social structure of a given society and underlying power-dynamics are inbuilt in social practices and the act of speech (ibid). The way a thought is formulated and expressed symbolically reproduces the social and power dynamics of the speaker's surroundings (ibid). Further, sometimes the mere fact of an utterance in a specific situation can convey the distribution of power and the social status of the speaker in relation to the rest of people involved in a situation (ibid).

The empirical data used in this paper comes from Twitter and the Belarusian news website Tut.by. Two cases largely discussed in the media happened in 2018-2019, namely the Khachaturian sisters' case (News 2) and Anastasia Yeshchenko's murder case (Tut.by 5). Both cases are still ongoing at the time of this writing, the second half of 2020.

Tut.by has been posting news and updates on both cases, and the general public has been sharing their opinions in the comment section (Tut.by 3, Tut.by 4, Tut.by 5). Tut.by also publishes discussion pieces, some of which were discussing the issues of gender-based violence, often directly referencing to the cases of Khachaturian and Yeshchenko as their motivator (Tut.by 1, Tut.by 6, Tut.by 7). The discussion pieces also have a comment section attached to them. Thus, about a half of the empirical data comes from the articles relevant to the Khachaturian and Yeshchenko cases on Tut.by, together with the numerous comments to those articles.

The other half of the data comes from Twitter: from the word search for “Yeshchenko” or “Sokolov” (the other person involved in the case), and the aforementioned hashtags: #МыСестрыХачатурян “We are Khachaturian sisters” (Twitter 4) and #янехотелаумирать “I did not want to die” (Twitter 5). I chose the “top tweets” function, when searching for the hashtags, meaning the tweets with the most engagement showed first. Thus, the most popular tweets about the Yeshchenko and Khachaturian cases, and the comments to them make up the second half of empirical evidence. The searches were conducted continuously throughout the 2020 in order to keep checking what people were discussing. Both hashtags #МыСестрыХачатурян and #янехотелаумирать often redirected me to the tweets about gender-based violence, gender, rape, victim-blaming, feminism, and anti-feminism in general. These general tweets are also included in the Twitter-based evidence together with the discussions of rapes committed by the Soviet troops and the Second World War.

A more general observation period started already with the Yeshchenko murder case in November 2019. Slowly, I found myself with a whole folder of relevant news, articles, and tweets. The structured work on this thesis began in the summer of 2020. I went through all the bookmarks and fresh updates in the timespan between July and August 2020. During that time, I looked through roughly two pages of comments under each article. When it comes to Twitter, I read through about a page of most popular tweets and

threads after each word- or hashtag search, combined with all the comments to them. All the feminist arguments and those in favor of the victim were left behind as they were not the focus of this study. The relevant material was, on the other hand, sorted thematically into three categories:

- a) Arguments that claimed the victim deserved whatever happened to them
- b) Arguments that questioned the victimhood because of victim's traits of some kind
- c) Arguments that deemed violence to be healthy, natural and/or sometimes even necessary, when perpetrated by heterosexual men.

After being thematically grouped, the material was then put into the cultural and socio-historic context of post-Soviet to qualitatively analyze the three types of trends.

The quotes of the news and comments that appear in the text were translated into English by me. The source references to the original Russian text with the entirety of its context, however, is also available.

### 1.3.2 Ethical considerations

There is a rather noticeable issue of informed consent. Arguably it is an important part of any ethnography, including the digital one (Hine, 2015). There was no very specific and limited place that included a specific and limited group of people during my observations, which is why getting informed consent would have been tricky. However, seeing that all the comments and posts were published voluntarily in public spaces, I decided against taking any additional steps to ensure anonymity, or reaching out to obtain informed consent. Most of the usernames and pictures did not include any birth names, or photos, or any other personal information, which would make them easily identifiable. If there is ever a future similar study by researchers who have more time at their disposal, it is recommended to try and get informed consent from people who are quoted in the study (Hine, 2015).

This paper has many emotionally difficult and potentially triggering parts, therefore trigger and content warnings can be of use. The reader can find a short content and trigger warning in the beginning of the introduction section.

### 1.3.3 Limitations & researcher's bias

I am a young woman who spent 20 years of her life in Belarus, one of the former Soviet countries, and therefore possess first-hand experience with the culture, language, and people's general reactions. I have, however, been living in Sweden for the past 6 years, which is why in some instances I find myself feeling like a Swedish foreigner rather than a Belarusian local. I am fully aware of my bias, or at least as much as one can be. I expected some awkwardness to arise during the process of analyzing and interpreting the data, due to the clash between emotionality and objectivity, being an insider and outsider, trying to be an objective scientist while having a personal connection with the topic. I have attempted to balance these challenges to the best of my ability and to remain as factual as possible. Gender-based violence is, however, a very sensitive and emotional topic, it is also highly important for women's rights and well-being, which is why I think a certain amount of empathy and genuine engagement with the material is, if maybe not a hundred per cent necessary, then at least not discouraged.

There is also a question of why some posts on Twitter and in the Tut.by comment section appeared to be more prominent. For instance, in his book *Bit by bit: social research in the digital age* Matthew J. Salganik provides several possible explanations as to why some opinions might appear more visible than some others (Salganik, 2018). One might, for example, want to remain anonymous or, for whatever reason, is not ready for a potential backlash or a lengthy discussion (ibid). One might evaluate the situation and decide that any potential discussion would not be happening in good faith (ibid). Some political movements and their members might be more/less active on certain platforms at certain times, and therefore affect the comment section (ibid). On certain platforms an up/down-voting system for comments is available, but even then, one might worry about anonymity and choose against interacting with a comment (ibid). Initially I was considering comparing what kinds of opinions are more popular and on which platform, but I abandoned that idea. My inability to know for sure how the websites' algorithms and human choices affect the visibility of comments is the reason why I have chosen to focus on the analysis of only one rhetoric.

My biggest problem was identifying the "trolls". I define "troll" as purposefully inflammatory comments that are not made in good faith. As of today, I have not been able to create any sort of recipe for weeding out the "trolls". Instead, my solution was to

embrace them. In cases of uncertainty I decided to give up on the writer's intention behind a comment or a post, and instead focus on the fact that the comment/post was made to begin with. By that I mean that whoever wrote the comment/post had decided that it was okay to do so in that situation. Even the exact content of a questionable and potentially hurtful and disrespectful comment/post is not always as relevant for my analysis as the bare fact that they thought it was appropriate to make such a point there and then.

## 1.4 Background & previous research

When it comes to norms and culture, a political ideology, especially as actively broadcasted as Soviet's was, could undeniably shape a person, or entire generations of persons. For those of you less familiar with the Soviet and post-Soviet nations, here comes a brief introduction. This part also sets the background for my further analysis of the anti-feminist and victim-blaming sentiments of post-Soviet people on the Internet.

### 1.4.1 Gender, sex & Soviet

The society's opinion on women fell along the lines of women are equal but different, they are irrational, emotional, and governed by their "female psyche" but an important part of the team nonetheless (Gapova, 2016). Women were welcome to do science and sports and be as much of a "comrade" as men were, as far as the state was concerned there was no gender (ibid). At the same time, the social stratification was deeply patriarchal, and women's secondary role as quiet, subservient, and motherly was self-evident (ibid).

An important note is that the relationship between sex, family and the post-Soviet-people was also affected by the fact that, during Soviet-time, people were largely forced by the circumstances to share their living spaces with several families (Zaitseva, 2020; Monastireva-Ansdell, 2017). Such living arrangements were called "communal apartments" and could include several generations of the same family plus their spouses and children. Communal apartments could also house different individual people or unrelated families who lived in separate rooms, but all shared the common kitchen (ibid). Hardly any privacy at all was possible under such circumstances of social control. This

affected not only one's sex life and the need to hide it, but also the general freedom of expressing oneself or doing something differently. One never knew if their neighbor was going to report them to the authorities for being an enemy of the communist party (ibid).

#### 1.4.2 Gender, sex & the Church

The USSR was aggressively secular and even anti-religious (Chernyak, 2016). Churches were repurposed into places for clubbing and other mundane activities. The government openly criticized religion and forbade religious celebrations and rituals (ibid). According to Chernyak, the Church, however, adapted rather quickly and stood by the government's side by some accounts from as early as 1927. After the collapse of the Soviet Union a rapid religious revival happened, and never quite left the government (ibid). As the Belorussian president Lukashenko's famous but, alas untraceable quote states: "I'm an atheist, but I'm an Orthodox atheist".

These days the Church's view is that men and women are equal but naturally different, they are meant to complete and balance one another (Cherhyak, 2016; Gapova, 2010). A woman's God given role is that of a wife and a mother, and a man's that of a husband, protector, and server of God. Christian morality and ideology of family values is being reinstated and driven hard, especially in countries like Russia and Belarus (ibid). Moreover, the Church's view on sex is that it is inherently dirty and shameful (Cherhyak, 2016). One can also emphasize that the ideal role of a man as the head of the household and its defender, provider and decision-maker can be unrealistically demanding and unhealthy, especially in times of global financial crises and pandemics.

#### 1.4.3 Gender, sex & post-Soviet

After the fall of the Soviet Union, its former republics found themselves at crossfire between establishing their own identities and sovereignties, and Russia's unwillingness to let them go. As the scale of the USSR was enormous, the never-ending tensions over territories, languages, religions and policies cover massive areas of the world map, such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Chernyak, 2016; Migacheva & Frederick, 2018). Soviet's former countries became suddenly exposed to the outside

world in ways they had not been before. The shock therapy spread across all spheres of life, from abolishing planned economy to the Western style sexual revolution (Gapova, 2010). Women used to be seen primarily as workers and “comrades”, and sex only existed for procreation of the nation. As the Soviet bubble exploded, however, women got pushed out of most social and economic fields, and attitudes to gender and sex took a swing (ibid). The strict and prudish government-imposed ideology that proclaimed sex to be dirty and shameful, and only to be used as means of reproduction, was no more. The Post-Soviet countries got flooded with imagery of sexualized and objectified women through everything from mass media to porn (ibid). At the same time, women continued getting the message about the family values and femininity. To this day it is a confusing time with two mixed messages surrounding normative Slavic femininity: it is both sexual and reserved, women are encouraged to be sexual and punished for it (ibid).

#### 1.4.4 The wild 90’s

Lastly, it is also good to remember about the 90’s in Russia. After the fall of The Soviet Union for a while there was chaos (Oushakine, 2009). Massive privatization (both peaceful and violent) of resources and assets soon created a new oligarchy. General confusion and financial and ideological crisis followed (ibid). What can be thought of as peculiar about that time is the romanticization of violence and mafia (ibid). Tough, hyper-masculine and violent guys in black, like in enormously popular films and tv-shows such as *Brigada* (2002) and *Brother* (1997), became glorified (ibid). It became an aesthetic of misrepresented anarchy, and I personally grew up with it, and can to this day see the anti-hero archetype trends that originated then.

#### 1.4.5 Gender-bias & victim-blaming

A study, conducted among the readers of the Romanian national online newspaper in 2018, found a clear gender-bias. It showed that 30.4% of the women they asked victim-blame more harshly than men that they asked - only 5.6% (Culda et al, 2018, p 105). They attribute the result to possible lack of identification with the victim - maybe the case they chose did not get the women to connect with and identify with the victim as much as it possibly could have (Culda et al, 2018). Another reason could be the desire for the ability

to control one's own environment (ibid). It is possible that women choose to believe that victims, and by extension they themselves, are in control of the circumstances and thus would not fall victims of such crimes (ibid). The authors also believe that the tendency of negative representation of rape-victims in the media and in popular culture played a role. For instance, when the news covers such cases, they would often mention what the victim was wearing, and if they were intoxicated and so on, perpetuating the victim-blaming-culture myths (ibid). The study had its limitations, but it highlights some of the commonly occurring trends in expressed opinions quite well:

- a) The world is just, and therefore the victim is to blame
- b) The world is unjust, but I would have known better, and therefore the victim is to blame (ibid).

## 2 Theoretical framework

The following section introduces the theoretical concepts that were used for the analysis of the collected data.

### 2.1 Poriadochnost'

Soviet people were strongly invested in upholding the image of *poriadochnost'* (Yusupova, 2016). This word directly translates as “decent” or “well-mannered”, but its implications are a bit more nuanced for Russian speakers (ibid). It has to do with one’s common sense and reputation of a good and well-behaved citizen, and part of society. A *poriadochnyi* (adjective form of *poriadochnost'*) person has the reputation of being reliable, they will always make the right judgement call, as that is in their nature. Thus, *poriadochnost'* is somehow a combination of being a good person and have an image/reputation of a good person (ibid). Obviously, the concept of a *poriadochnyi* person has to do with an idolized idea of morality and rule-following, but the government and the communist party were strict about their image, and the image of each citizen. If you wanted to have a decent life in Soviet, you had to have the image of a decent person (ibid).

The concept of *poriadochnost'* also affected the rather rigid gender-roles and the kind of social contract different genders had with each other (Gapova, 2008). Said contract usually meant that the relationships between men and women must go with the government’s ideology of family building, and innocence, and intimacy being kept private (ibid). This is how Soviet could ignore gender as a social concept, because *poriadochnost'* does not allow crime, or going outside one’s box in any way, so essentially there can be no problems there. And if a problem arises, it is someone’s individual fault and a consequence for failing the *poriadochnost'* moral code (Gapova, 2008; Yusupova, 2016).

## 2.2 Heteronormativity & compulsory heterosexuality

Heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality are terms that describe the social preference for binary genders and heterosexuality (Ambjörnsson, 2004). A heteronormal society favors individuals that belong to a monogamous relationship (or a potential relationship) with a person of the opposite sex, of similar age, with a plan for reproduction and so on (ibid). This type of organizing one's life is seen as a standard by the heteronormal society, and those who deviate from this model get punished in different ways, like being at the bottom of the social hierarchy (ibid). Such society will also have a variety of inbuilt mechanisms to promote its preference. Apart from the punishment and reward system, it also includes literal propaganda and/or common representation (or lack thereof) in popular culture and media and other sources (ibid).

## 2.3 Normative femininity

To this day women are subjected to expectations built upon normative femininity, which includes social rules and expectations on how women should behave, what they should wear, how they should talk and move in social spaces, how much space they are then allowed to take up and more (Ambjörnsson, 2004). Even things like word-choice can be gendered and affect one's social status (ibid). The enculturation/socialization process into normative gender-roles starts early, and young women are already bombarded by the mass- and social-media with the messages about themselves and how their femininity should be expressed (ibid).

## 2.4 Ideal victim

Simply put, an ideal victim is “a person or category of individuals, who - when hit by crime - most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim” (Duggan, 2018, p 1). Usually it is a set of traits such as, for example, being seen as weak, not being somewhere one is not supposed to be, and not doing something one is not

supposed to do (Duggan, 2018). The kind of person or category that is, depends on a given society, point in time, context, and culture (ibid). Usually an ideal victim is explicitly and conventionally female, heterosexual, white, and “pure” (ibid). In that regard, for instance as much as being a victim of rape is stigmatized, if one can convince the society of the legitimacy of own victimhood, they will be likely given the status of a victim (ibid). The victim status, of course, comes under a lengthy list of terms and conditions. For example, sex-workers are not usually granted the status of an ideal victim, instead they tend to be seen as deviant victims or guilty victims (ibid). It means that society might acknowledge that what happened to them was not good, but at the same time it was “probably deserved” (ibid). This victim-blaming mentality turns out to be very common in discussions of gender-based violence, at least during my data-collection and observation period, as we shall see later in this paper.

## 2.5 The Western conspiracy & moral threats

Feminism does exist in the post-Soviet countries, but it has been encountering a rather large push-back (Gapova, 2010). Alongside such words as human rights and democracy, feminism fell victim of being often classified as an anti-government and pro-Western dog-whistle (ibid). The post-Soviet governments have been known to frame feminism as a Western conspiracy to destabilize already unstable countries, and as an attack on existing values (ibid). Either the general prejudice against feminism, and/or simply the fear of being seen as a political threat quickly alienated both regular men and women alike (ibid). Some might argue this wary and/or outright antagonistic attitude towards feminism is still firmly present in people’s today’s general mood.

The discourse against domestic violence has been arguably facing a similar fate (Johnson, 2007). In the late 90’s and early 2000’s, by some estimates, there were around 120 crisis centers operating in Russia alone (ibid). They also often included hot-lines and spoke up about violence against women. Johnson believes that at the time the issue was very well-met, and the Russian public agreed that domestic violence existed (ibid). Ukraine, Moldova, and Armenia were not, however, as straight forward in her opinion but also somewhat caught up. For instance, some activists used the ideology of family values to

their advantage and tried to subvert the discourse towards protecting everyone in a family (ibid). She then mentions that any sort of foreign involvement has been always met with suspicion, and thus movements that occur independently from the globalized pressure and values have higher chances of succeeding (ibid).

Gapova, however, specifically stresses the large extent to which liberal Western activism seemed alien to post-Soviet people (Gapova, 2010). She even argues that the aforementioned crisis centers and hotlines were not at all well accepted and understood (ibid). The discrepancy between two scholars' opinions could be a result of regional differences, as perhaps Russia was indeed more open. It could also be due to the fact that, as far as I am aware, Gapova was born and had lived in Belarus until she moved abroad, while Johnson is a foreigner herself.

Sexual education also found itself among the Western moral threats to the traditional family values ideology (Höjdestrand, 2020). As sex started flooding post-Soviet media and general discourse in the 90's, a strong opposition to the abundance of sex and sexual imagery also appeared (ibid). The people who followed the newly found Western style liberalism sought freedom and removal of rigid boundaries not only from Russia's economy, but in social life as well (ibid). The population experienced a wave of prostitution and suddenly easily accessible cheap pornography, and somewhat failed to know how to handle that (ibid). The proponents of sexual education argued that sex-ed should in fact be done properly for everyone's safety, seeing that the situation had been getting out of control. Opponents, however, saw sex-ed as sort of pornography, or at the very least encouragement to be sexual and immoral, just like they argued the West was (ibid).

## 3 Analysis

### 3.1 Anastasia Yeshchenko case

When violence that makes it to the news occurs, there seems to be a lot of different questions going around. We wonder how it happened and why, we want to make sense out of it and/or punish the guilty, probably so that we can feel safe again ourselves. Many comments illustrated the different shapes and forms of the reactions: from denying a bigger structural problem to simply saying it is what those people deserve to happen to them. It is usually argued as either a crazy and private accident that stands on its own - and therefore no one is to blame, or the victim is to blame because they knew the person was unstable. Or, it is fully, or at least mostly, on the victim, because they deserved it with their actions or as a person as a whole. It is, of course, not unique to Russian-speaking Internet, but it is also very common in it.

As mentioned in the introduction, I have observed some gender-based violence cases as they unfolded in real time. For example, a currently still ongoing case of Anastasia Yeshchenko's murder. Oleg Sokolov, a 63-year-old history Docent from Saint-Petersburg, was detained in November 2019 after the dismembered remains of his 24-year-old student were found first in his apartment, and then on his person – in a backpack as he was attempting to dispose of them in a river. At the time, the media speculated that he and Anastasia were in a relationship and had a fight, which got out of control and led to Yeshchenko's death (Tut.by 5). First reports only had this brief information plus a list of his academic achievements and involvement in numerous reenactments where he played the role of Napoleon Bonaparte (ibid). The discussion and opinion pieces in the media followed shortly as well. One of them quoted something they overheard on a popular talk-show: "If you agree to have a sugar daddy, isn't it logical that you'll get yourself chopped into pieces?" (Tut.by 6). The author argues that one cannot in fact

deserve violence (ibid). She then offers her explanation as to why “she drove him to it” is still such a popular trope in everyday discussions of violence against women (ibid). The comment section (Tut.by 8) of this piece is where a whole rollercoaster of opinions got expressed. From discussions of when violence is acceptable and against what kind of people, to trolling comments, that for some reason were deemed acceptable in that situation. A notable comment is quote-replying to a passage from the original article: “And so then we are walking in the street, and there’s a pair walking in front of us. The woman is explaining something to the guy, in a very nagging, and long, and grumpy manner. And so, my female relative says: ‘oof this kind of woman can be only shut up with a fist’” (ibid) The comment itself then reads: “Homespun truth, plain and clear. All the columnists and such need to understand the fact that there are different kinds of situations and people, and sometimes no words can get through. The only way to get your point across is with a belt across their ass, or with a fist into their jaw” (ibid).

After reading explicitly or implicitly anti-feminist, victim-blaming and/or inflammatory comments under an article about violence and rape one can start wondering how we, as a society, ended up here? Maybe some arguments reoccur, and if so: how do they relate to the cultural and socio-historic environment of the commentator?

### 3.2 Blaming the victim: the individual vs. the system

Victim-blaming is not a specifically sexual assault-related term, but it is very useful in the context of gender-based violence. It rather self-evidently means the act of blaming the victim for what had happened to them (Ghidina, 2019). It is arguably not a new phenomenon as a whole: to blame a person or a group of persons for a bigger systemic problem, especially in post-modern times. As sociologist Marcia Ghidina notes, we get socialized to find individual blames and individual solutions. She also notes that the trend of blaming primarily the members of/ or whole marginalized groups is on the rise these days (ibid). Immigrants become categorized as problems, or drug dealers, or criminals rather than people (ibid). Similarly, rape victims become dehumanized and objectified as well. They are deemed to have bad values, or poor judgement, or whatever else that turns them from a person into an *other*, a not-like-us (ibid).

When it comes to victims of domestic violence, based on my own observations, it appears that domestic violence is not seen as a large scale and systematically occurring problem. People perceive its instances as a one-off occurrence, and/or something that has logical reasons and consequences, and can therefore be deserved:

There are different types of situations, but if a woman dressed like a cheap whore (some even consider that style to be the business style), thereby demonstrating their availability and sexual freedom, and then chooses to go to all sorts of places, known for the clientele of drunk men who can't control themselves, one then cannot blame whatever happens on the absence of 'rape is bad' talks". Personally, I've never heard about anyone getting raped at a library or a planetarium (Tut.by 9).

It can be observed that even Russian justice system largely puts the responsibility onto the victim (Semukhina, 2020). The domestic abuse victims are known to often change their minds after reporting the abuse (ibid) It has, therefore, become a common rhetoric used against the victims: if something was seriously wrong she would not have changed her mind (ibid). One can argue that such rhetoric is a variation of victim blaming, where the justice system and the public sees it to be the woman's responsibility to justify her being with that person to begin with, and then to get the case to be taken seriously and followed through (ibid).

An incredibly frustrating addition, according to Semukhina, is that many police officers, whom she interviewed for her study, compared the battery of women with the "spanking" of one's children (Semukhina, 2020, p 30). "Disciplining" one's children by physically hurting them is not considered child abuse in many post-Soviet countries, and if the family generally has a good history with the law, the case will not go anywhere (ibid).

The public and the mass media then solidifies the judgement and stigma. One can encounter comments like: "What a tragedy! Sokolov is a marvelous historian! One of the pioneers of the historic reenactment movement in Russia. I remember his video lectures about Napoleon!" (Tut.by 10) That at the very end will remember to add: "Poor girl!" (ibid). The victims can see people call them a "second class citizen" and a "kept woman" (Tut.by 8). Others might write that "you should've just left if you don't like your spouse",

and that “man actually can also be victims of domestic violence” (ibid)<sup>2</sup>. And worse, some might even say that the victims somehow deserved what happened to them, even if they might not be alive to hear it (ibid).

The just-world fallacy is an often-applied term that describes one’s beliefs that one’s good actions will be eventually rewarded, and one’s bad actions - punished. It is a very common cultural and social trend to see in the comments and people’s expressed opinions that at least some of the victims get what they deserved. In a way, it can be seen as a variation of the aforementioned Soviet idea of *poriadochnost*. If one is a *poriadochnyi* individual bad things, the things that only happen to bad and *non-poriadochnyi* people, will not happen to them (Yusupova, 2016). This cultural idea can manifest in not believing, or at the very least questioning the victims of sexual violence and assaults.

### 3.3 The case of the Khachaturian sisters

And another big case is the case of the Khachaturian sisters. It made big news all over the internet, especially Russian-speaking internet. Sisters Krestina (19 years old), Angelina (18 years old) and Maria (17 years old) Khachaturian were arrested in July of 2018. The current charge against them is “premeditated murder committed by a group of persons or as a result of conspiracy” (News 2). The sisters are facing up to twenty years in prison each, although the youngest one might get assigned to serve her sentence in a psychiatric facility. The trial is still ongoing at the moment of my writing. The sisters killed their father Mikhail Khachaturian after he allegedly emotionally, physically, and sexually abused them for years. He had been also reported to the police for domestic abuse several times before, by his ex-wife and the girls’ mother. She says that all of those reports were just returned back to him, as he had many friends in the police who covered for him (News 3). This case resulted in many conversations about domestic abuse laws and abuse culture, but also about what constitutes a good victim and fair usage of force. Mikhail Khachaturian’s body had an estimated amount of 36 to 45 stab wounds, and people started

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<sup>2</sup> Which they obviously can. The question is: was that piece of information relevant to the current case of a woman who lost her life and worse?

wondering if the sisters were exceeding the limits of self-defense. Here are some examples: “I somehow doubt that a man would suddenly start ‘beating’ someone out of nowhere. There must be another side to this story, and all of these ‘poor girls’ are just made into victims by the press” (Tut.by 7). “I would’ve just run away, instead of this, grabbed my children and ran barefoot over the snow” (ibid). “But he was just raping them, while they - killed him!” (ibid).

Despite being minors and biological children of the abuser and rapist, the Khachaturian girls did not get unanimous support of the public. They do not fit in the category of consenting adults exercising their own will and sexual agency, and then seemingly getting what they deserved. Then why is it still controversial? While demonstrations and social movements in support of the sisters were happening, all those things were happening against them as well. People literally took it to the streets and especially to the public discussions forums to actively express the opinion that the sisters should be charged as adults (ibid).



“Protests against the sisters” (Serenko, 2019).

The main reasoning seemed to have been about the premeditated nature and the number of wounds. They argued that if the girls understandably snapped, it would have happened in the moment and without an “excessive amount” of wounds (Tut.by 7). The feminist critics started wondering what specific number of wounds is then considered “just right”, with no answer (ibid). Why is it this way?

One could argue that the judgement of the sisters is connected to the fact that female victims are not supposed to break the social contracts such as gender norms, cultural and religious traditions, and expectations (Gapova, 2008). Women are mothers and sisters left behind when the men went to war. Rape by foreign soldiers happened to them, and they were sad and broken about it. Women represent the purity of the motherland and take care of its needs (ibid). The motherland does not go around expressing its own, possibly sexual, desires. The motherland is passive, always there, keeping the ground stable and beautiful for those who stand on it and fight for it (ibid). Here is an example of such attitudes lingering still, it is an extract from Russia’s president Vladimir Putin’s official congratulations on the 8th of March 2020 (President of Russia, 2020). The International Women’s Day in post-Soviet is not at all about working women’s rights, but rather a hybrid of Mother’s Day and welcoming of spring. The message is a bit lengthy, so here is a short summary:

In some mysterious way, you manage to do so many things: to keep home comfort, be highly successful at work and in your studies, and stay adorable, beautiful and feminine [...] It is very important that these values are passed on from generation to generation, with daughters learning this attitude to life, family and their future children from their mothers (President of Russia, 2020).

### 3.4 The ideal victim

During my observations, articles that mention relatively random acts of gender-based violence, like general or sexual assault, rape and murder, where victims and perpetrator did not have a sexual relation with each other, gained a lot more comments that sympathized with the victim and condemned the criminal. If the victims, on the other hand, were in any sort of romantic, and implied sexual, relationship the responses

drastically changed towards blaming the woman, or at the very least saying that she should have expected the outcome, as it is what she deserves. Some of this rhetoric could be accounted for by the influence of the Orthodox Church in Russia, Belarus, and other post-Soviet countries (Chernyak, 2016). When it comes to the Church, anything to do with sex as a whole is perceived as extremely private, but also dirty and sinful at the same time (ibid). Moreover, in some branches and interpretations of the Russian Orthodox Church not even husband and wife should have sex, especially if they already have enough children (ibid). Sometimes sex or any kind of physical intimacy would not be allowed during specific times, such as fasting, or pregnancy, breastfeeding, or menstruation. In this culture, even children know to be ashamed and afraid of sex and desire (ibid).

Another potential cultural explanation to anti-feminist and victim-blaming discourse can be the concept of an ideal victim. As Marian Duggan states, basically every society has its ideas of what constitutes an ideal victim, it is just a question of finding out what applies to the given one (Duggan, 2018). Judging from the comments and articles I have collected, the ideal victim for Russian speakers appears to be the following:

- a) “Pure”, preferably not being involved in anything sexual altogether, or at least having a good reputation as a wife, mother etc. Not having make-up and not being dressed in a way that can be deemed provocative or suggestive.
- b) Sad, “broken” and remorseful. That includes looking like they have been too sad to take care of themselves, looking sad rather than angry, fighting back enough for it to be believable but not too much.
- c) Passive and weak. Again, not fighting back too much, or else it would be unclear who the victim is. Not exercise their own consent at any point in time. Things need to have 100% happened to them by someone stronger who should have instead exercised their strength and masculinity to protect, not to harm.

The Khachaturian sisters do not confirm to the standards of an ideal victim as they took the matter in their own hands, they killed their abuser and rapist, and that somehow undid their purity. They were now seen as murderers, whom people asked to charge as adults, and so they became seen as such. As supposed adults they were no longer pure, as sexual acts were involved in the case. They were deemed not sad enough about what they did, and they fought back. Here is another short example from a different case. It is a news

headline that reads: “The Ufa rape-victim came to the court hearing with freshly done hair” (Twitter 6). The headline seems to suggest this was somehow important to the victim’s believability. The article cites the other-side’s lawyer who wondered why the victim and her lawyer came to court “overly dressed-up”: “we don’t mean to imply anything, but...” (ibid).

### 3.5 Normative femininity

The social contract between individuals of a group has a set of rules. For instance, normative femininity includes ideas of what is appropriate in regard to clothes, behavior, joy, shame, etc. If a woman were to incorporate her own sexual agency and liberty, she is likely to be punished for it (Gapova, 2008). Thus, if something happens to her, that is her own fault, or is due to what she was wearing, what she was doing, where she was at, the list goes on. And if her abuser is her husband? Then maybe she is overreacting “as women do” (Tut.by 11), or wasn’t a “good enough wife” (Tut.by 1) and “deserved it” (Tut.by 6). A widespread belief is that women do have all the same rights and liberties as men. From the days of being equal but different comrades, to especially these days when everyone is free after the fall of the Soviet. “So why didn’t she just leave?” (ibid).

At the same time, normative femininity expectations for Slavic women clearly include her being sexually and otherwise attractive. Here, is another wild ride of comments to a post about a very young girl’s appearance (Twitter 7). In this post her mother shows on the photo how much hair they cut, because the girl wanted shorter hair. It does not say the girl’s age, but judging from the photo, one could guess she is about five or six. The comment section is filled with random people, including random adult men, who express their disapproval. They call her mother a “vandal”, say that the hair “will not grow back the same” and “nooooooo” (ibid). This is a young girl, and she already gets reminded that it is the “feminine” long hair that is expected of her to be attractive and accepted.

As the recent documentary “School of Seduction”, perhaps somewhat controversially, shows there even are “schools” in Russia to teach women to attract men (School of Seduction, 2019). Abroad, we have the stereotype of a sexy blonde Russian woman, like

in a James Bond movie. Inside the post-Soviet the stereotype seems to consist of two parts: an ideal woman is pure but also so beautiful she drives men mad. A Russian woman will be seen in heels, dressed up and full-on make-up in any weather and in any situation (Tochilina, 2014). One would think this would affect the image of an ideal victim and allow her to be more sexual, but for some reason it does not seem to be the case.

### 3.6 Glorification of male violence

One, of course, shall not forget that post-Soviet countries still deeply identify with winning the Second World War. Personally, I did not know that the USSR did not in fact almost single-handedly crush the Nazi Germany until I moved away from Belarus. The WWII history is taught in schools in a particular way. It is added to the curriculum every year, taking it from the start to the end of war, apparently, also largely exaggerating the role of the Soviet. Similarly, each 9th of May (Victory Day) is celebrated in a compulsory manner, combined with the romanization and glorification of the Soviet troops. It is therefore not hard to imagine that boys grow up identifying with the soldiers, and girls - with the nurses. Moreover, the constant reminder of the need to protect our motherland from any other, just like former heroes did, really does make your world a little black and white.

There have been very few studies about the threshold for violence among post-Soviet populations. Those that I came across were largely from psychological or socio-psychological perspective, but they will be still briefly mentioned to encourage more cross subject studies on this topic. It would make sense that if teens already have high tolerance for violence, and if their opinions on gender-based violence sway a certain way, they will grow-up into adults who perpetuate the cycle. The psychological studies show what the negative effects and biases are, but they do not address the reasons for how those beliefs came to be in the first place. Arguably, however, socialization and enculturation play a major role. Studies like “The attitudes of Russian teenagers toward sexual aggression” show that teens already express all of the common rhetoric points found in the comments (Sobkin & Adamchuk, 2015). One could argue that the teens adopt the problematic opinions due to chronic absence of sexual education and internalization of

the surrounding culture, the culture that tends to glorify and tolerate large amounts of violence.

One of the most common discussions in the comments seemed to revolve around the question of what violence is deemed to be acceptable. For instance, when discussing aforementioned professor Sokolov, people were also debating if his violence was real violence. When another of his former students came out and said that he had tied her to a chair, turned on an iron and started threatening her (News 4), the public was still not on the same page. As someone wrote: “Well, he didn’t actually use the iron, just threatened her that he would, that is allowed and is not violence” (Twitter 8). The big problem with such type of questioning is that the public seemed to have, or at least express, a rather high tolerance for violence. It was also mentioned in Semukhina’s interviews with the law enforcement agents that the judges and the juridical system had a very high toleration threshold for violence. Which is why, a lot of domestic violence cases, or at least those involving assault without injury cases, were not treated seriously (Semukhina, 2020). In this last part of the paper, I would like to provide a quick overview of possible reasons to why Russian-speaking culture ended up this way.

### 3.6.1 Muzhestvennost’ & ideal masculinity

Russian word *muzhestvennost’* (masculinity) does not really translate well into English. Its female equivalent *zhenstvennost’* does in fact mean “femininity” and encompasses whatever a given society thinks typically female traits should be. It is a different story with *muzhestvennost’* as it has a set meaning, it specifically means “brave” (Ushakin, 2002). At the same time, the building of national identity has been tightly tied with definitions of femininity and masculinity. Gapova suggests that for post-Soviet as a whole, the idea of the woman-motherland and the man-warrior-protector of the woman, especially from other men who will come and rape them, is somewhat of a staple for defining the male and the female (Gapova, 2016). Masculinity and femininity, thereby, do not simply reflect a gender but create a strong division between us and them. For instance, the attempts to conserve their own traditional meaning of femininity and masculinity could be seen as opposition to Western values or European colonization (ibid). Russian presidents are *the man*, and Russia is always seen as a woman. Being in

control of “own” women becomes one of the defining qualities of masculinity (ibid). This is why women’s behavior is seen as a reflection of men’s abilities as men, as commanders. If a woman goes out of line from rigid traditional definition of her role, men can take that personally, if not out of their own beliefs then out of cultural pressure (Gapova, 2016).

Since Putin came to power, the hyper-masculine and nationalistic ideology has been on the rise in Russia and its surrounding countries (Yusupova, 2016). Similar to Trump’s “Make America Great again” Russian Federation has been longing for its former glory as the Russian Empire. Putin’s campaigns talk about Russia getting off of its knees, spiced with Putin’s patriotic machismo, and they seem to be resonating quite well with the general public (Gapova, 2016; Yusupova, 2016).

The ideal masculinity in the Russian-speaking world seems to rely on the following components:

- a) The army and patriotism
- b) Entrepreneurship, which does not condemn corruption or threats of violence, bodily harm or worse
- c) Anti-Western conservative and patriarchal toughness
- d) Family values i.e. aggressive heterosexuality (Gapova, 2016; Oushakine, 2002; Yusupova, 2016).

All of these components have something to do with violence. When internalized, it would be of no surprise that the relative threshold for acceptable violence might not be particularly low.

### 3.6.2 The cult of the military

A man’s value as such is often linked to his service in the army, or better yet - war. Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Georgia are just some of the former USSR countries that have mandatory military service for men. Even though these days it is often avoided via legal hoops, it is still seen as a source of pride and patriotism. The soldier-hero ideal can be found in almost every popular piece of Russian-speaking literature, music, or film. Being the victors of the Great Patriotic War (GPW) identity is unavoidable

propaganda from early childhood. School children are not only taught the history of GPW-part of WWII over and over every year of school and universities, often as separate mandatory subjects, but are also often forced by their schools to attend the Victory Parades every 9th of May. Then there is the Afghan, Chechen, Dagestan, Syrian, and other wars, involvement in which is often glorified. For those not involved in any active wars, there are always GPW spies, 90's bandits, and modern day siloviki, Spetsnaz, OMON, SWAT and other military-men to look up to (Gapova, 2016; Oushakine, 2002; Yusupova, 2016).

The army in post-Soviet also has extreme issues with emotional and physical abuse (Yusupova, 2016). *Dedovshchina* is the culture in military facilities, such as locations for the training of troops and regularly drafted for mandatory service soldiers. In simple terms it is bullying of those newer and lower-ranking soldiers by their superiors (ibid). However, bullying is often an understatement, as sometimes people die as the result of negligence or by suicide. The worst part is that it is often portrayed as a positive character-building and bonding experience for men (ibid).

When reading a Twitter discussion on the number of rape-cases perpetrated by the Soviet Army, and whether or not the 9th of May propaganda should be put to rest (Twitter 9-11), I found a huge number of concerning comments. Namely an overwhelming majority of people in the comments were posting a variation of this one question: "oh so it would've been better if the Nazi German army raped our women more?" (ibid) or alternatively: "oh as if the Germans didn't rape anyone" (ibid). When pointed out that things can be more than just one thing, for example: "the Soviet Army withstood the attack, but also committed rape" - it still did not go anywhere (ibid). The comments still continued to argue that it was wartime and one cannot expect for people to function as normal, "especially because the Germans were worse" (ibid).

Some more exact quotes follow: "Germans also raped and abused our women, it's a two-edged sword" (Twitter 10). "Well, American soldiers also raped German women, why are we only talking about Soviet troops?" (Twitter 11) "One shouldn't judge anyone, today [9th of May] we are simply happy to have peace" (Twitter 9).

I will be honest, there is no space here to dive into this any deeper, but the ideology that proclaims that things are fine, or at least more fine than, as long as they are done by our-side needs to have its own study.

### 3.6.3 Afraid to catch the Western gay



“Today you support the law against domestic violence, tomorrow you are LGBT!” (Vidanova, 2019) says one of the posters during a demonstration for traditional family values in Moscow in November of 2019 (News 5). This type of sentiment is rather common in Post-Soviet countries. Former USSR countries, especially those that appear in our news as often as Russia does, are notorious for their anti-LGBTQ+ policies. The traditional values hyper-masculine ideal does not seem to be able to compute with anything deemed Western and/or feminine. And what is a more Western and feminine man if not a stereotypical gay man? At least according to the articles and comments, which the Russian journalist Ilya Varlamov summarized in his blog titled “You don’t beat your wife? What a gay traitor!” (Varlamov, 2019). The main idea of the anti-feminist and homophobic rhetoric in this case appears to be that if you, as a man, don not beat your wife – you have been affected by the western propaganda and become gay and feminine. Where do we even go from here?

Let us begin with the common theme in political imagery as found online. As mentioned before, the motherland is often symbolically seen as a woman, and its leadership and power — not just as a man, but the man. When mocking the West, one of the most common pieces of imagery is what I can only describe as “anal-rape-caricature” and “who is the bigger man”. Here is an example that was also used in Gapova’s 2016 book, except this one is in color:



These images are memes at this point, so it is pretty much impossible to find their exact origins, but they are everywhere:



(“The US vs. Russia”)



In cases of political memes, it is not anyone's motherland per se that is being attacked or infantilized, it is a show of dominance of the man over some other man. A political and possibly military power over someone else's political and/or military power, which is why it is two men.

Further, there is of course the Church. The Russian Orthodox Church builds a picture of an ideal nation and its values, all of which reside on masculine heterosexuality. It is interesting that in the Orthodox tradition, expressions like "sodomy" and "sin against nature" were used to describe a number of heterosexual sexual acts (Zorgdrager, 2013). They largely described acts where males had more passive roles. Meanwhile lesbian

intercourse is not traditionally seen as a big deal, as long as the women are not “too man-like” (ibid).

Homosexuality was a crime in the USSR, and people were sent to prisons and gulag camps for it. Gulag was a by no means peaceful, fair and rape-free place, and unfortunately “[t]he prisons’ homosexual subculture and its violence shaped the prevailing imagery of same-sex relations in Soviet and post-Soviet culture” (Zorgdrager, 2013, p 220). Many of the young essentially gay sex-slaves were not even gay themselves, but were forced into it due to being defenseless and lower on the hyper-masculine and aggressive hierarchy, similar to the one of the aforementioned *dedovshchina* (Zorgdrager, 2013). A very similar image of prison-life can be often found in popular media, and possibly even has a real-life base for it. It may be not exclusive to post-Soviet, but the intensity and normality of this culture is something to consider when talking about anti-feminist discourse and tolerance for violence.

### 3.6.4 90’s Gangsters & popular culture

And finally, we come to the overwhelming imagery of glorification of male violence in popular culture. “Since the 1990s, in particular the *boevik* (action story in book or film) has fostered an ideology of compensatory masculinity. The genre focuses on aggressive, self-confident heteronormative masculinity and glorifies the Russian action hero” (Zorgdrager, 2013, p 222. Author’s own cursive). *Boevik* essentially means action genre, but a specific type of such films is most popular in the Russian-speaking world. This type of movie is usually set in some sort of militarized situation, like a war-zone or a prison-zone, or alternatively — 90’s businesses. It often focuses on the male protagonist and his character-building, the more aggressive and hyper-masculine the better (Zorgdrager, 2013).

A notable sub-genre of *boevik* is the films and series specifically about romanticized criminals and the aesthetic of anti-hero. They are Quentin Tarantino-like films about the time right after the fall of the Soviet state. The tv-series *Brigada* (2002) and film-series *Brother* (1997) are a perfect example of the “Russian gangster saga (Oushakine, 2007, p 360). They became popular due to depicting a darker side of where the country, its

economy and society was at in the 90's. Their another charming point, however, is that their protagonists make it very far if not all the way till the end, despite an absurd number of violent obstacles. Not only that, this genre also creates an oddly fascinating and aesthetic world of opposites. Things that are normally considered dysfunctional, delinquent, criminal, unhealthy, violent, and immoral become the opposite in this popular genre. The anti-heroes are governed by their own strict moral code and sense of brotherhood and honor, that became extremely appealing to the public (Oushakine, 2007).

The problem with its appeal and popularity is how glorified and aestheticized violence and violent men have become. The 90's mafia phase in Russian-speaking art and culture can almost be compared to a young adult moving away from their parents. Since the strict and extremely peculiar government was no more, suddenly anything was possible. Except it was more possible for some people than others. People with more guns, money, authority, and any sort of violent power had a head start, as it usually happens. 90's Russia was basically a dictionary definition for Marx' *primitive accumulation of capital*, which brought a few people to the very top who then became oligarchs. The films and series reflected the chaos that was happening, except somehow also managed to glorify it along the way. Thus, the ideal image of a successful hyper-masculine man, who can get violent if necessary, lives on, together with the attitude that violence can in fact being warranted and necessary sometimes. It can be argued that such a mindset in the background of one's head can lead to doubts on whether or not any type of violence is acceptable. Meaning, perhaps, somebody deserved to be sexually assaulted or killed because the situation dictated so.

## 4 Concluding discussion

What are the common arguments of victim-blaming on Russian-speaking Internet platforms? The comments tended to have many victim-blaming undertones if not an explicit negative bias. They often perpetuated stereotypes about ideal victims and what was or was not acceptable for victims. The commenters often glorified certain types of violence, while condemning others. They often implied gender-normative ideas about masculinity and femininity. As presented throughout the text, the most common arguments fell into the following categories:

- a) The victim deserved it.
- b) The victim should have left and/or known better
- c) The victim is over-reacting.
- d) The victim does not seem sad enough.
- e) The victim used too much force to protect herself.
- f) The victim should have reported it.
- g) Some amount of violence, such as beating one's wife, is healthy and/or necessary for a heterosexual man.

How does the anti-feminist rhetoric on Russian-speaking Internet platforms relate to the cultural and socio-historic context of post-Soviet reality? The anti-feminist rhetoric was understandable by looking at the past and present of post-Soviet countries. The older generation who are still alive lived through Soviet and its collapse, and possibly internalized some of the state ideologies and public opinions along the way. The USSR had a very peculiar view on gender-roles and sex. Then the wild 90's brought about confusion and chaos, which eventually re-instated the conservative ideology of family values. The Russian Orthodox Church gained more popularity after the fall of the Soviet state and became almost inbuilt into the political system. The continuous absence of sex-education contributes to the general feeling of shame and confusion when it comes to discussions of sex-related issues. The Russian-speakers also tend to glorify military and 90's gangs' culture, which is obviously violent. Moreover, the heteronormative social

structure, rigid gender-roles, and the ideology of family values lead to a lot of homophobic and misogynistic discourses.

All in all, it can be said that more modern and focused research can be done to answer the original questions more in depth and in more detail. There appears to be a complete absence of any sort of studies combining the post-Soviet anti-feminist and victim-blaming sentiments and the Internet, which could be a great topic for further studies. A longer amount of time would be, however, desirable for such a research. Moreover, a collective academic discussion could be required to create a standardized guide as to how to identify and treat “troll” material in the analysis.

## 5 List of references

### 5.1 Academic publications

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## 5.2 News & social media

### 5.2.1 Tut.by

Tut.by 1

Title: Who didn't want to kill their woman at least once?

Accessed: 2020-07-05.

Link: <https://lady.tut.by/news/columnist/660893.html>.

Tut.by 2

Title: Belarusian news portal

Accessed: 2020-07-05.

Link: <https://www.tut.by/>

Tut.by 3

Title: No excuse for rape

Accessed: 2020-07-05.

Link: <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=14414748>

Tut.by 4

Title: Consent to rape

Accessed: 2020-07-05.

Link: <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=14414748>

Tut.by 5

Title: Anastasia Yeshchenko's murder case

Accessed: 2020-08-08.

Link: <https://news.tut.by/accidents/660570.html>

Tut.by 6

Title: If you agree to have a sugar daddy, isn't it logical that you'll get yourself chopped into pieces?

Accessed: 2020-08-08.

Link: <https://lady.tut.by/news/life/657093.html>

Tut.by 7

Title: She has two options: to die or go to jail.

Accessed: 2020-08-08.

Link: <https://lady.tut.by/news/life/646177.html>

Tut.by 8

Title: If you agree to have a sugar daddy, isn't it logical that you'll get yourself chopped into pieces? - The comment section.

Accessed: 2020-08-08.

Link: <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=14428241>

Tut.by 9

Title: "We are the Khachaturian sisters". An opinion piece about why the victims are called the criminals instead. - The comment section.

Accessed: 2020-08-08.

Link: <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=14414748>

Tut.by 10

Title: Anastasia Yeshchenko's murder case. – The comment section.

Accessed: 2020-08-08.

Link: <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=14431323>

Tut.by 11

Title: She has two options: to die or go to jail. – The comment section.

Accessed: 2020-08-08.

Link: <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=14418262>

## 5.2.2 Twitter

Twitter 1

Title: Typical! Ugh!

Accessed: 2020-08-30

Link: <https://twitter.com/kLLO2YEYcCEBRxw/status/1283045992581992450>

Twitter 2

Title: Show your boobs instead!

Accessed: 2020-08-30

Link: <https://twitter.com/BaruhBrown/status/1274406630608822274>

Twitter 3

Title: Stop Violence

Accessed: 2020-07-05

Link: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/остановинасилие>

Twitter 4

Title: We are Khachaturian sisters

Accessed: 2020-07-05

Link: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/weareKhachaturiansisters>

Twitter 5

Title: I did not want to die

Accessed: 2020-08-09

Link: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/янехотелаумирать>

Twitter 6

Title: Ufa rape-victim

Accessed: 2020-08-10

Link: [https://twitter.com/Alexey\\_Kovalev/status/1210231800074788865](https://twitter.com/Alexey_Kovalev/status/1210231800074788865)

Twitter 7

Title: Cut hair

Accessed: 2020-08-10

Link: [https://twitter.com/mama\\_lilya/status/1247177000739012608](https://twitter.com/mama_lilya/status/1247177000739012608)

Twitter 8

Title: What is real violence?

Accessed: 2020-08-08

Link: <https://twitter.com/alphyna/status/1193548644328325121?s=20>

Twitter 9

Title: Army rapes 1

Accessed: 2020-08-05

Link: <https://twitter.com/burytheminash/status/1259073915747516416?s=20>

Twitter 10

Title: Army rapes 2

Accessed: 2020-08-15

Link: [https://twitter.com/0\\_0kmoPOPirka/status/1293884215256285184?s=20](https://twitter.com/0_0kmoPOPirka/status/1293884215256285184?s=20)

Twitter 11

Title: Army rapes 3

Accessed: 2020-08-05

Link: <https://twitter.com/Djisachan/status/1259263519725412352?s=20>

### 5.2.3 Other news

#### News 1

Title: Not her own fault

Accessed: 2020-07-06

Link: <https://www.wonderzine.com/wonderzine/life/life/243975-it-s-not-her-fault>

#### News 2

Title: the Khachaturian sisters' case

Accessed: 2020-08-08

Link: <https://ria.ru/20200803/1575296389.html>

#### News 3

Title: the Khachaturian sisters' case, mother's interview.

Accessed: 2020-08-08

Link: <https://cripo.com.ua/stories/bespredel-devyanostyh-seksualnoe-rabstvo-pytki-bespravie-i-ubijstvo-istoriya-odnoj-semi/>

#### News 4

Title: Another former student of Sokolov's reports his threats and beatings.

Accessed: 2020-08-10

Link: <https://spb.mk.ru/incident/2018/05/23/ugrozhal-cto-izuroduet-menya-studentka-rasskazala-cto-prepodavatel-spbgu-zhestoko-izbil-ee.html>

#### News 5

Title: Family Values

Accessed: 2020-07-12

Link: <https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2019/11/23/157141-v-moskve-proshel-miting-protiv-zakona-o-domashnem-nasilii>

### 5.3 Self-publications, blogs & other sources

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