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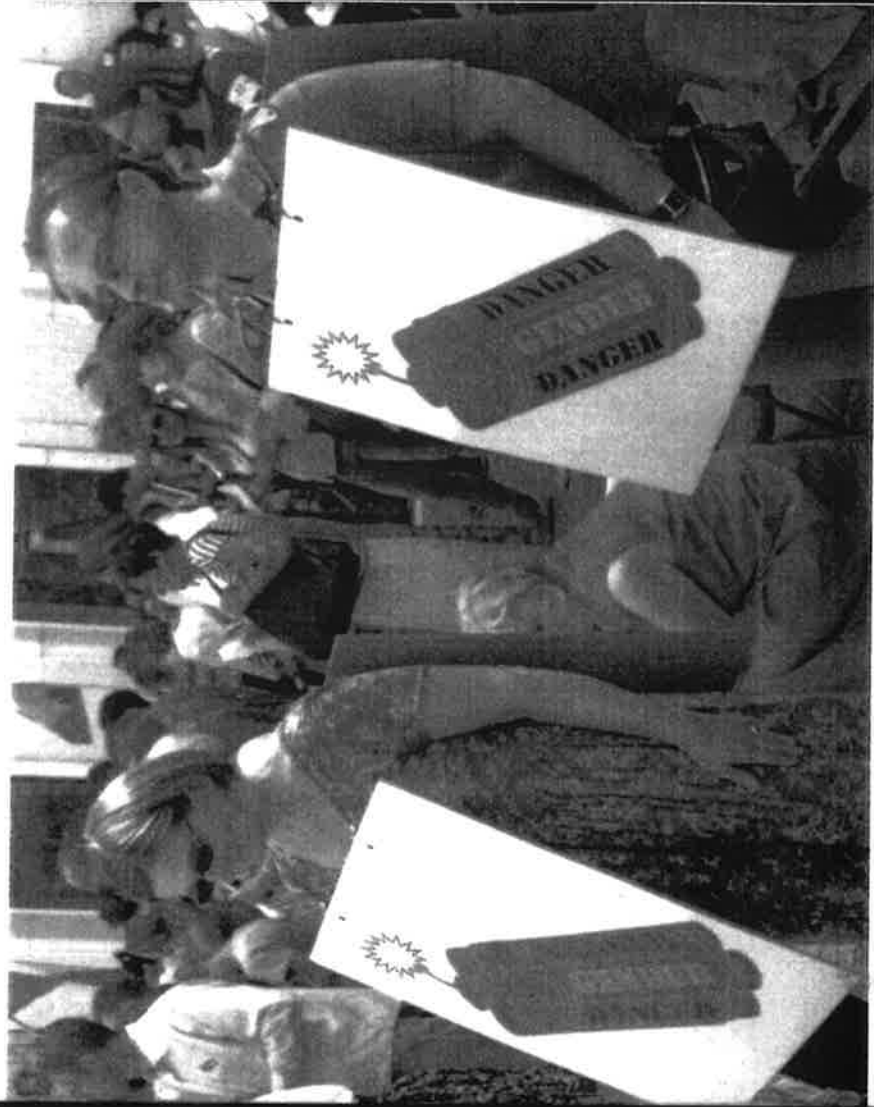
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# REBELLIOUS

*Parental Movements in Central-Eastern Europe and Russia*

# PARENTS



Edited by KATALIN FÁBIÁN and ELŻBIETA KOROLCZUK

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# Nationalism and Civicness in Russia: Grassroots Mobilization in Defense of "Family Values"

*Tova Höjdestrand*

## *Introduction*

On behalf of the parental community and the civil society of Russia, we appeal to the representatives of the state power of the Russian Federation, who, in accordance to the Constitution of our country, are obliged to defend family, motherhood, and childhood. We demand that further pressure from representatives of international political organizations on Russia should not be tolerated, or their involvement in domestic concerns of our country or in Russian legislation and lawmaking, since they result in the destruction of Russian families, of traditional culture, of family life and upbringing of children, and in the intensification of demographic problems that will result in the extinction of our people.<sup>1</sup>

Thus begins the Saint Petersburg Resolution, an open protest letter against a draft recommendation by the European Council on children's rights and parental responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> It was signed in October 2011 by eighty Russian nonstate organizations, most of them being relatively new grassroots groups, and was published on a broad range of nationalist and conservative religious Orthodox websites. The Parents' Movement (*roditel'skoe dvizhenie*), as these grassroots define themselves, is a nationwide mobilization in the defense of Russian traditional family values. The Resolution is but one in a long series of

petitions and open letters since 2010 in which the movement rejects foreign involvement in Russian affairs, and it (as stated later in the text) expresses deep anxieties about transnational treaties challenging parental authority or equating homosexual relationships with heterosexual marriage.

This chapter will explore the agenda and the emergence of the Parents' Movement, with a primary focus on the very first words of the Resolution, "on behalf of the parental community and the civil society." In documents and discussions in the "parental cyberspace," the word *grazhdanskiy* (civil/civic; derived from citizen, *grazhdan*) appears frequently and in various contexts, be it concerning action, resistance, community, or society. Such phrasings are not self-evident in conservative Russian discourse. Intrinsic to the idea of Western liberal democracy, the concept "civic" has previously been associated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) created in the 1990s, largely with Western funding, for the very purpose to promote democracy and civil society in the formerly authoritarian East. Nationalists relate to this NGO sector with outright hostility, which the Resolution makes very clear: "We are seriously concerned about the activities of some relatively small groups proclaiming their ideals in the name of the entire civil society, while in reality their objectives contradict the authentic interests of sovereign peoples." Human rights in general (which will be discussed later) and children's rights in particular, tolerance, anti-discrimination, and so forth are, according to parental activists, only decoys for Western imperialism in its attempts to eliminate Russia as a civilization.

Nonetheless, the notion of civicism appeals to the Parents' Movement because it aims to establish a dialogue between grassroots and the Russian state administration, which is considered to be not only corrupt and abusive, but also treacherous to Russian sovereignty and tradition by not being patriotic enough. Parental grassroots organizations articulate their own notion of what civicism implies, because neither the organizational forms nor the "moral coordinates," as they would phrase it, of the former liberal guardians of the "civic concepts" match their own ideas about what active and ethically acceptable citizenship implies.

Here, I make no pretensions to new theoretical insights of what "civil society," "civic action," etc. actually are—it is the normativity and Eurocentrism of these concepts that make them malleable and, thereby, rewarding subjects for negotiation and reshaping (Hann and Dunn 1996). Rather, my aim is to show how emic conceptions about civil society and civicism are

instrumental for a collective identity in Melucci's (1989) sense: a continuous and highly emotionally charged negotiation of shared aims, means, and fields of action, articulated through interaction by a common language and common sets of practices. This identity also involves antiliberalism, patriotism, and a religious worldview—ideological scaffolds that are relatively stable. Civicism, in contrast, the understanding of how to be and act as a subject in civil society, is perpetually negotiated as the Parents' Movement itself transforms and develops.

After a comment on the methods of this study, I will first contextualize the emergence of conservative profamily discourse and activism in relation to Soviet anti-Western discourse and to post-Soviet global ideological flows. Secondly, I will situate the Parents' Movement in the context of the general development of civic organizations and grassroots activism in Russia from the 1990s onward. After outlining the organizational principles of parental organizations and their cautious relationship (to say the least) to power, I will discuss the movement's agenda and its most prioritized item—the struggle against a legal implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child that led to the rapid proliferation of the movement in recent years. Success poses new challenges, however, so I will lastly discuss how recent options to influence power have challenged the previously prevalent ideas among parental activists about civicism and, thereby, also the movement's collective identity as a whole.

### Field and Method

"The Parents' Movement," *roditel'skoe dvizhenie*, is a term that activists use in a self-evident manner without further definitions. It refers to anything from a seemingly narrow selection of Orthodox extreme nationalist networks to any supporter of the movement's main objectives. (Since the term is quite general, it appeals also to other parental initiatives, but search machines and media archives reveal few, if any, competitors.) Many groups, including a number of the signatories of the Saint Petersburg Resolution, simply call themselves *roditel'skiy komitet*, "the Parents Committee," of a particular place (the term is usually applied to the parental committees of schools and kindergartens). Others mix different buzzwords in reference to their agendas: "Family, Love, Fatherland," or "In Defense of Family, Childhood, and Morality." So far, I have counted 300 such parental groups, although not all of them advertise

regular activities and some seem to be created for the sole purpose of signing resolutions and petitions. Also, it is not possible to determine the number of participants in these groups since, as I was told by a respondent, “it depends on what you count: me and the other guy who in practice are doing all the work, another 50 who turn up now and then, or the 300 who’ve joined us at *vkontakte*.”

*Vkontakte* (“In Touch”) is a Russian equivalent to Facebook that is my main source of information, together with a wide array of virtual communities, social networking sites, blogs, websites of “real life” organizations; Orthodox patriotic internet journals and news websites; and mainstream media archives (Integrum, in particular). From March 2012, I have followed two main websites that have served as points of departure to further trace significant issues, concepts, actors, and events.<sup>3</sup>

I have also conducted twelve interviews with activists and leaders of local parental groups in Moscow and Saint Petersburg in 2012, in addition to talking to several professionals experienced with the policies and projects of concern to the Parents’ Movement. All respondents are anonymized: the professionals because many of them spoke off the record, and parental leaders because their decision to meet me, (as two told me), might compromise them in the eyes of other activists. It was evident in 2012 that these respondents positioned me as a potential enemy, both as an academic and as a Westerner, and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has hardly ameliorated this animosity. Many of those whom I contacted never replied, so I have decided to not include the names of the ones who nonetheless did; I am just very grateful that they agreed to talk to me at all.

### *Maleficent Modernity and Western Warfare: The Emergence of a Moral Conservative Opposition*

The Russian Parents’ Movement dates back to the mid-2000s, but its critical stance toward Western ideologies and culture has considerably older roots. Messianic ideas about “the Third Rome” and “Holy Rus” have, for at least five centuries, pitted Russia against an allegedly degenerated Western adversary. In the Soviet period most social problems were glossed over as results of capitalist ideological contagion. A core trope in today’s anti-Western rhetoric is Russia’s demographic decline, which was already proclaimed a major social threat in the 1980s. Socioeconomic explanations were not ignored, but many politicians

and leading intellectuals preferred purportedly Western scapegoats such as feminism and licentious sexual behavior (Attwood 1990).

Birthrates and “cultural influence theories” remained central tropes to nationalist discourse throughout the drastic demographic decline of the 1990s. By the end of the decade, Russian nationalists picked up a moral crusade against sexualized mass media and Western-funded educational projects on reproductive health and sexuality (cf. Kon 1999). Initiated by ultranationalist Orthodox clerics and intellectuals, this debate was not a social movement inasmuch as a battle fought in mass media. Nonetheless, by the turn of the millennium a handful of grassroots groups of “concerned parents” appeared, from which the Parents’ Movement would emerge nearly ten years later.

This nascent conservative opposition stems from a historically rooted local anti-Western tradition while simultaneously tapping into a contemporary global social conservative ideoscape (Appadurai 1996), in which the Russian “anti-sex rhetoric” (Fine 1988) differs little from others of its kind. Russian sexologist Igor Kon (1999) has even suggested that US missionaries initiated the Russian campaign. Whether or not he is right (I lack other sources), discourses and ideological currents tend to travel in less intentional ways. Today, parental activists worldwide are immersed in a global cyberspace with endless options to pick from each other’s repertoires. US sources are particularly rewarding since they, being among the oldest, provide the largest amounts of text, moreover in English, which is today’s major lingua franca.

The cross-fertilization between domestic and foreign elements is particularly conspicuous in the narratives of moral warfare and conspiracy from which the Russian anti-sex rhetoric departs. Conspiracy theory as such has century-old roots in Russia, but it became, for obvious reasons, a commonplace facet of Cold War propaganda in both the East and the West. In Russia, an endless number of mutations have developed rapidly in the post-Soviet period (Ortmann and Heathershaw 2012), many of which are heavily inspired by a burgeoning US supply of similar narratives. In the Russian “sexualized” narrative, the formerly near-obligatory Jewish plot is replaced by a mafia of gays and/or liberals, and anti-Communist elements are re-wrought to fit the prevalent Soviet nostalgia of Russian nationalists. It borrows from US sources also by linking the UN and other supranational agencies to a demonized “new world order” and the coming of the Antichrist (Herman 2001).

Irina Medvedeva and Tatiana Shishova, child psychologists and to this day the most influential debaters of the Parents’ Movement, thus trace the

allegedly satanic origins of the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF) from Margaret Sanger's well-known interest in Rosicrucianism and her endorsement of eugenics in the 1930s (the then predominant scientific paradigm) to Nazi mysticism, Aleister Crowley, homosexual Knights' Templars, the cult of Baphomet, and ancient Egyptian sects. With the benign aid of "liberal" Russian NGOs and corrupt state administrators, IPPF and allies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) are allegedly conducting a demographic war against Russia by proliferating an immoral and promiscuous lifestyle that, ultimately, will aggravate the already alarming abortion rates and lead to mass infertility due to STDs (Medvedeva and Shishova 2001). The strongly polemical prose relies heavily on biased or falsified information, hyperboles, and what Irvine (2004) in the US context calls depravity stories (i.e., unconfirmed urban legends about the disastrous effects of sexual education). Truth is immaterial to this kind of rhetoric, since its purpose is not to provide facts inasmuch as to shock and accommodate an emotional climate (Irvine 2004, 58). Russian depravity stories are usually about events in the West, as a way to underline the foreign origins of evil—English children are, as an example, said to begin their sexual lives at the age of nine and suffer from impotence by the age of twelve (Medvedeva and Shishova 1996).

### *The Sociopolitical Environment: Power and the Civil Sector*

A significant part in "anti-sex" conspiracy narratives is played by a purported fifth column of corrupt Russian state administrators, liberal politicians, and NGOs, who are assumed to do the dirty job of the supranational agencies by promoting family planning and programs for sexual education and HIV prevention at the local level. The presumed evil intentions notwithstanding, these claims are correct insofar that Western aid agencies indeed were important for the emergence of a civil sector after the demise of the Soviet Union. The Yeltsin administration neither encouraged nor impeded civic activism, and in the chaotic 1990s people in general were too preoccupied with plain survival to have much time and energy left for collective mobilizations. Hence the "first generation" of NGOs largely comprised specialized advocacy organizations with permanent staff and facilities funded by Western grants. Predominant aims were human rights, gender equality, and other aspects of democracy building, as well as attempts to compensate the deficiencies of the crumbling sector of social welfare. The high Russian rates of abortions and

HIV infection made reproductive health a prioritized issue, and such projects were frequently carried out by Russian NGOs in cooperation with sectors of the state administration. They frequently turned out to be very productive, but the professionalization of the NGOs simultaneously estranged them from ordinary grassroots (cf. Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). In effect, the presumed new civil sector was perceived by many in terms of the old nomenklatura: a remote and privileged elite benefiting from resources unavailable to others (Hemment 2004). To the (thus far) relatively limited and marginalized flora of extreme nationalists and anti-sex activists, they were, in addition, the agents of hostile Western forces attempting to undermine Russian culture and sovereignty.

A few years after the beginning of the millennium, the political opportunities for civic action changed radically. In contrast to the Yeltsin administration, the Putin regime actively encourages the development of a civil society, on the condition that it serves a common national cause instead of advocating the interests of particular social groups (Henderson 2011). A federal Civic Chamber was created in 2004 to counsel the Duma on social issues and to distribute government funds to the civil sector, and the number of nonstate domestic funders has increased. Western funding has in the same period become politically inopportune and difficult to receive, due to nationalist policies and the fact that the relative economic stability has prompted foreign development agencies to leave Russia on their own accord.

Since the mid-2000s, mainstream official rhetoric has to an increasing extent revolved around patriotism, traditional morals (aka Orthodoxy), and family values—tropes that were formerly employed mainly in the distinctly Orthodox and/or ultranationalist sectors of the political spectrum. In spite of improved birthrates in the 2000s, the imminent "death of the nation" has remained pivotal, and so is the claim that the most effective remedy is nationalist policy and a return to "tradition" (Rivkin-Fish 2006). Hence no enterprise today fails to include a profound concern for family and children in the presentation of its aims, be it within the state sector, the business world, or the "third sector" of nonstate organizations. The latter category includes a number of well-funded profamily organizations engaged in charity, educational projects, pro-life agitation, and demographic research. In contrast to, for example, the US Christian Right, these elite organizations do not simultaneously try to organize local grassroots networks (Irvine 2004), but they are solidly connected within the Russian power elite and, in some cases, associated



with transnational profamily networks such as US-based World Congress of Families (cf. Morn 2013; Levintova 2014; Federman 2014).

The Parents' Movement, in contrast, represents an entirely different kind of social activism. It defines itself as grassroots and exhibits a deep skepticism to elites of all kinds, be it Kremlin or professionalized NGOs of any geographical origin or political orientation. As such, it is symptomatic for a general upsurge in grassroots mobilizations from the mid-2000s onward. According to Vorozheikina (2008), a similar boom of popular movements occurred in the Glasnost period, but it was thwarted by the "transitional" turbulence of the 1990s since, in short, it is difficult to pursue specific goals in an environment of general social collapse. Only with the relative economic stability of the 2000s could people once again address particular problems and believe that their influence may affect the powers that be. A contributing factor to the increase in grassroots engagement is the increased corruption and political repression of the Putin period. The new movements largely comprise a new proto-middle class, which is as dissatisfied with authority abuse as it is conscious of its own economic vulnerability. Educated and professionally experienced, the people in this category are capable and willing to organize themselves and to make claims about what they perceive as socially relevant (Chebankova 2013). At a more practical level, the proliferation of the internet is an important factor since it significantly enhances options to create and maintain networks in a country as vast as Russia (Zuev 2011; Gladarev and Lonkila 2012).

Social research has primarily focused on new grassroots movements less devoted to the present regime, for instance, trade unions, housing rights movements, environmental groups, or protests against rigged elections (Vorozheikina 2008; Gladarev and Lonkila 2012; Aron 2010). Less attention has been given to nationalist or conservative religious groups (for an exception, see Zuev 2011), who distrust the state apparatus as much as everybody else but blame its evils on transnational structures and global policy processes, while they endorse authoritarianism as such. Putin is usually revered as a strong and wise Tsar whose firm hand is perennially misled by his own corrupt administration and by his own backup party, United Russia. In the words of Anatoly Artiukh, leader of a Saint Petersburg parental organization:

[Our] resistance . . . is not opposition against power [Putin], but its aid in restoring order in our country. The [liberal] opposition does not want order. Rather, it wants a "new world order." Which is when they take children from

decent families and give them to pederasts. Or when they teach children masturbation instead of embroidery in school, with the help of German or Swedish cartoons. (Artiukh 2013, my translation)

Although such nationalist grassroots activists are loyal to the president's broad vision of a patriotic civil society, they may simultaneously be an impediment. They are difficult to control, and their ideological zeal often exceeds the more pragmatic objectives of Kremlin. In particular, this concerns overtly xenophobic groups, many of which have been outlawed as "extremists" for challenging official aims of interethnic harmony (Zuev 2011). One of them was in fact headed by a man who is now a prominent leader in the Parents' Movement, which indicates a potential ideological overlap.<sup>4</sup> Parental organizations are less controversial as they abide by the law and are engaged in less sensitive issues. As staunch opponents to official aims in the field of social policy, they are nonetheless (as I will explain further) frequently an annoyance to the authorities, who in reality are not as neatly divided into the opposing categories of "good Tsar" and "corrupt officials," as parental rhetoric would have it.

### *The Formation of Parental Grassroots Groups*

Igor is the leader of a parental organization in a small town near Saint Petersburg. Now in his mid-50s, he acquired thorough organizational experience as a Komsomol leader in his youth and later from a professional life in the city administration. When we met, he was working as an administrator at a small factory, a comparatively insignificant position that, as he explained, he took on since his boss approves of the parental cause and gives him optimal scope to engage in the Movement.

His career as a parental activist started in 2008 when he conducted a local survey about intra-religious relations for the city administration: "But the people we met, most of them Orthodox, just said that 'so what, we don't have any problems with that [other religions], tell them [the city authorities] to do something about these clinics instead; we've had enough of our kids coming home with condoms and instructions about how to use them.'" Igor helped the parents to organize a protest manifestation, after which he joined some of them in the search for partners in the Saint Petersburg region. "We managed to borrow a conference hall, so we sent an open invitation to everyone we knew and asked them to pass it further. Some fifty persons showed up, and it turned out that everybody had been thinking in the same way for a

long time, but without being sure if they were right. Since no strong organization was pursuing this question, we decided to organize ourselves instead.” One participant at this meeting was a representative from the Saint Petersburg Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which provided a free location for a second meeting. About half of the participants returned, and they developed a long-term strategy and set up working groups for different purposes.

They communicated with like-minded groups in other parts of Russia. Igor went to Yekaterinburg to see a local Parents’ Committee well known for supporting new groups, and in late 2009 he joined some Moscow organizations in the arrangement of a series of nationwide congresses. In 2010, the first large public manifestation took place in Saint Petersburg—a “standing” (*stoyanie*) that blends elements of a religious prayer meeting with a picket line. By then, activists nationwide referred to themselves as a “movement,” and the original clique of concerned Saint Petersburg parents had proliferated into a handful of different groups. A year later, they authored the Saint Petersburg Resolution together with seventy other organizations around the country.

Judging by other respondents and by existing sources on the internet, Igor’s story is not unusual among parental activists or, according to Vorozheikina (2008), the new grassroots mobilizations in general. Some catalyst spurs informal networks of people—neighbors, coparishioners, friends, and acquaintances—to organize public meetings or spontaneous protests, after which some of them decide to consolidate their efforts into a nonprofit organization. The driving forces are usually middle-class professionals—Igor was once a civil servant, while others I met were engineers, journalists, entrepreneurs, and so forth—with some sort of organizational experience, whether it is from work, from the near-compulsory Soviet youth organization Komсомол, or from free time engagements related to children’s schooling or hobbies. Until about 2010, such conservative mobilizations were usually targeting medical centers providing sexual education, while legal initiatives in the field of family policy became more common later. Dimitry, a journalist and an acquaintance of Igor’s in Saint Petersburg, thus set up his parental committee in response to a controversial drafting of a municipal family policy in 2010 (which, he told me, was quietly withdrawn after a certain amount of parental pressure).

Another respondent, Olga, is a consultant on religious charity for a large bank and the chairwoman of an internet-based coalition for organizations

defending the interests of multiple-child families. A mother of three, she created a web forum in 2006 when, in her opinion, a number of much-advertised pronatalist state policies regarding housing and monetary assistance turned out to sidestep the needs of this particular category of families. Not only is it a disadvantage legally, she said, but civil servants frequently look down upon parents with many children, considering them to be irresponsible and incapable of planning their lives (her opinion is supported by, for example, Lovtsova and Iarskaia-Smirnova 2005). The forum grew into a nationwide coalition embracing more than one thousand activists, and Olga has since then been one of the more prominent public figures in the parental opposition.

Her network is, just like Igor’s, frequently supported by ROC representatives with practicalities such as free premises for family vacations or meetings. Officially, all four “traditional” religions are invited to join the parental struggle, but in practice, Orthodoxy permeates written propaganda as well as public manifestations. The “prayer standing” mentioned by Igor is a common form of manifestation, and a number of conservative clerics, some of them occupying high positions in the Church hierarchy, participate at a regular basis at parental public events. Nonetheless, few parental organizations are formally associated with the ROC, nor are activists uncritically loyal to the Church. The ROC is more heterogeneous than its public image indicates (cf. Papkova 2011), and the Parents’ Movement should rather be seen as one of its most conservative lobbying groups.

Mutual assistance among parental organizations is far more important for the formation of new groups than is support by external actors. Igor mentions a trip to Yekaterinburg, where some of the first Parents’ Committees were set up in the mid-2000s to combat a local program for reproductive health (it took them half a year to close it down). Making effective use of information technology, for instance, by virtual consultancy forums or webinars, these groups have invested considerable efforts in supporting new Parents’ Committees all over the country. They also initiated the first attempts at nationwide cooperation, which in 2011 resulted in the most sustainable (although far from the only) coalition at the time, the Association of Parents Committees and Societies (ARKS).<sup>5</sup> Another such consolidating force is a Moscow-based coalition of ultranationalist Orthodox groups called “The People’s Council” (*Narodnyi sobor*), the agenda of which embraces not only family issues but also a return to monarchy, prevention of “unrestrained immigration,” and mobilization against “immoral art” and homosexuality.

Associating themselves with many of the most influential and productive public debaters, the People's Council has for long constituted the movement's ideological nexus. Together with, among others, Olga and Igor, they also arranged a series of congresses. These "Parental Forums" gathered from 1,300 participants in 2009 to 4,000 in 2011, but they were preceded by a large number of smaller events.<sup>6</sup>

### *"Do It Yourself": Autonomy and Moral Integrity*

Dimitry summarized the difference between the former cohorts of established NGOs and his own as follows: "Regardless of whether they have Western or Russian money, they're similar—professional and specialized in particular sectors, but they exist only as long as they have funding and they don't reflect real public opinion." Therefore, he explained, they are not the kind of tenacious organizations that everyone refers to as civil society. In this context, he used the word "professional" in contrast to *narodnyi*, "of the people," implying elitist isolation and a "sense of the game" (in Bourdieu's sense) with reference to power. The professionals are, in his view, more familiar with funders, state administrators, and politicians than they are with ordinary people and with "real" public opinion. The new grassroots movements, in contrast, consist of ordinary people who merely try to solve everyday problems in a communitarian and bottom-up (*snizu*) fashion, without being dependent on external actors.

Vorozheikina (2008) suggests that the proliferated distrust in the state and in formalized structures in general makes Russia comparatively fertile soil for grassroots activism since people have always relied on informal forms of cooperation. In the same vein, Dimitry and most of my other respondents emphasized what they considered to be a traditional Russian inclination to cooperate spontaneously, without paying respect (or even regard) to the absent or dysfunctional official structures of society. "[The movement] is just a spontaneous reaction of ordinary people who've had enough of the state neglecting its duties," Olga explained. "They've undermined the school system for a long time, so people set up reading clubs to give the children some education in literature and history. People organize themselves to fend off real threats from the state. . . . Like when the city handed over what used to be a good children's theater to a director whose latest ten shows have been nothing but untraditional orgies; people went mad, it became a huge scandal."

Most organizations thus combine public opinion work with activities aimed to compensate for what is already lost or what was never there. All of my respondents regularly engage in public manifestations, proliferation of information, petition writing, conferences, and so forth, but Olga also invests considerable efforts in organizing vacation homes for multiple-child families. Igor arranges Orthodox summer camps for children, and the main objective of Dimitry's group is family-friendly leisure activities. All of them are also engaged in "grassroots charity" such as assisting families in dire need by pooling resources (toys, clothes, money, help with renovations, legal advice, etc.) or finding others who can help out—"for instance," Olga said, "by asking a shop owner if he can donate a fridge to a destitute family—and if you ask in the name of an organization, it often works."

Due to the strong desire for autonomy, most parental groups intentionally disqualify themselves from receiving funding. Few of them are formally registered with the authorities, which is a prerequisite for engaging in any kind of financial operation.<sup>7</sup> "We see no point in registering," Igor explained, "it just ends up in more state control. And we don't have any sponsors or common property—everybody is just pooling their own resources, time, telephones, and so on." He added that some groups prefer to register, since they need donors to expand their charity work. Nobody holds this against them; however, one's moral credibility fares better without registration or funding. "Everybody knows that the one who pays also orders the music," Dimitry said. "But people know that we're not bought by anyone, not by the West, not by Russian sponsors, not by the state. So they trust us and listen to us—even the local authorities respect us because they know that we don't say what someone else has whispered to us beforehand."

Accusations against "being bought" are indeed frequently voiced at parental internet forums against activists who have allegedly stretched the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable. Political forms of patronage are as resented as financial ones, and Western-funded NGOs are thus despised not only due to their sponsors, but also for frequently having cooperated with state agencies in different projects. In the same way, the skepticism of the aforementioned elite profamily NGOs stems from their Kremlin connections inasmuch as from their oligarch financiers.

The antipathy extends to the very concept of "politics," which is completely rejected. Dimitry was, for example, very careful to underline that his work had nothing to do with politics, although he simultaneously elaborated

extensively on his efforts to lobby the city authorities. Political activism may indeed be dangerous in Russia, but the principal reason why he and others distance themselves from the concept is because to them, politics is more than just influencing governance; it is the opaque intrigues of a remote and self-interested elite caste of corrupt bureaucrats, and to be “political” is to communicate with them on their terms, to become one of them. Politics is thus the antithesis of everything that being “civic” is associated with—communitarianism, autonomy, and transparency.

However, activism by definition implies exerting influence on political actors, and some sort of dialogue is thus required. One strategy is to associate oneself with supposedly loyal politicians, such as United Russia deputy Vitaly Milonov (architect of Saint Petersburg’s local ban on homosexual propaganda in 2012) or certain representatives of the Communist party, who all appear exempt from the taboo against political connections. Opinions are divided about membership in political parties. After I met Olga, I learned that she and some well-known Yekaterinburg leaders are members of United Russia. I take it as a strategic means to make themselves heard. Their choice is sharply criticized by ideological purists, while many others apparently trust that they are more dedicated to the movement than to the party.

Another strategy is professionalism, but in a different sense than elitist isolation or political dexterity. In the same interview, Dmitry expressed his high regard of a fellow activist: “He doesn’t confront power, he just says ‘I’m professional, I’m a jurist . . .’ he can really evaluate things . . . and provides [neutral] information, and finally the deputies listen.” Here, “professionalism” instead implies disinterested expert knowledge, a prerequisite for receiving the attention of power without compromising one’s moral integrity. The emphasis on education and knowledge is hardly surprising since most prominent activists belong to the educated strata, and a large share of all the movement’s events consists of seminars, roundtables, conferences, and public hearings, while a regular staff of experts (mostly psychologists, jurists, and clerics) occupies a central position in the movement as public debaters.

Many organizations, including the ones to which my respondents belong, attempt to lobby the authorities (in particular at local levels) by participating in, or co-arranging, public hearings, workshops, or various citizen commissions and advisory groups. Their credibility in these contexts stems from grassroots integrity as well as disinterested expert authority. As I interpret it, however, a fair number of activists are not convinced that the latter

automatically gives moral immunity, but they are wary that lobbying might result in the aforementioned, less benign aspects of professionalism. In particular, the most ultranationalist and conservative Orthodox organizations consistently avoid direct interaction with authorities and restrict their activities to proliferation of information and public manifestations.

As I will return to, diverging positions in this respect have become increasingly common within the Parents’ Movement along with its expansion and increased recognition in the established political field from 2010 onward. Nonetheless, the commentary in numerous internet debates simultaneously reveals a strong ethos of unity and a widespread opinion that schism as such is worse than ideological deviations. Many conflicts appear to remain at the individual level, while local groups often navigate pragmatically between potential partners in both camps.

### *The Agenda: Global Conspiracy, Russian Tradition, and Juvenile Justice*

Such negotiations have intensified as the Movement has grown and as the focus of its attention has shifted from “immorality” in general to more specific legal initiatives and policy implementations. In 1997, the “anti-sex crusaders” stifled the development of a draft law about sex education in schools (Kon 1999), but the early rhetoric was nonetheless less focused on jurisprudence than on cultural values. In Melucci’s terms, the anti-sex campaign laid the foundations of a post-Soviet conservative collective identity. By positioning Russian “tradition” in a new globalized world order and defining its enemies, it enabled social actors to recognize each other, and to a large extent it did so by appealing to emotions (Melucci 1989, 35). The civic aspects of this identity were yet to be developed, since the nascent opposition had not yet identified itself as a social movement and, thereby, as a civic actor.

In the mid-2000s, a new issue was introduced to the conservative pro-family agenda: the UN Convention of the Rights of Children (CRC). Russia already ratified the CRC in 1990, but for fiscal reasons (from my understanding), no comprehensive attempt was made to implement it legally until the mid-2000s. Parental activists refer to the resulting legislative transformation as *yuvenal’naya yustitsiia*, Juvenile Justice, or just YuYu. Originally, the eponym was an umbrella term for a number of reform projects targeted primarily at the youth penitentiary system, but they also addressed the dilemmas of socially vulnerable families and children. From the late 1990s onward,

state administrators, social scientists, NGOs, and Western aid agencies have been cooperating in local pilot projects throughout Russia concerning, for example, youth courts, probation and rehabilitation systems, education on child rights, local Children's Ombudsmen, crisis hotlines, and so forth (Komarnitskiy 2010:441ff; CIDA 2009). Federal lawmakers followed suit from the mid-2000s onward with a number of reforms, frequently modeled on these pilots, aimed at protecting the rights of children and, in particular, improve the social protection of vulnerable children and families.<sup>8</sup>

The conservative opposition has never paid much attention to youth criminality, the main focus of the first Juvenile Justice projects. From the onset, the target was instead two very general aspects of the idea of Child Rights that have been the subject of reservations worldwide since the drafting of the CRC in the late 1980s. Firstly, the Convention is criticized for ignoring local conceptions of childhood and parent-child relationships in favor of a Eurocentric ideal of children as autonomous subjects (Schabas 1996). Secondly, legal implementations of the CRC by definition turn the state into the ultimate guarantor of the wellbeing of children. According to many critics, the right of parents to socialize their offspring as they see fit is thereby sidestepped, as are the civil rights to family autonomy and integrity of private life (Hafen and Hafen 1996).

In the Russian debate, emphasis has gradually shifted from Russia's position toward purported Western cultural imperialism to the supposedly conflicting interests of the state and the family respectively. I will therefore begin by strictly discussing ideological objections to Child Rights, and in the next section I will introduce protests of a more pragmatic nature against an escalating number of laws and policies that have been introduced since the mid-2000s.

In their seminal publication in 2006, "The Trojan Horse of Juvenile Justice," Medvedeva and Shishova insert the CRC and its agents (UNICEF and Russian NGOs promoting child rights) into the standard narrative about a Western liberal conspiracy against Russian sovereignty and tradition:

Juvenile Justice implies such a disruption of child-parent relations, of social ties and of the entire Russian way of life, that previous reforms are mere Christmas crackers in comparison. As is well known, an important part of the globalization process (the building of single world government with an occult and Satanist ideology) is the destruction of the family. [The] mass perception of children by mass media and, even, by school "innovations" aimed

at eliminating parental authority . . . is not arbitrary scattered episodes, but a consistent policy of the globalist reformers. But as they admit themselves, they are hampered by the imperfection of our legal framework, which they use all their efforts to "improve." (Medvedeva and Shishova 2006, my translation)

Neither this text nor the numerous ones to come are unanimously negative to the CRC as such. The issue is rather how the treaty should be interpreted and by whom. Appeals to the Convention are often used to justify reforms that the Movement approves, for instance, obligatory religious education in schools or bans on homosexual "propaganda." International agencies and the forthcoming Russian juvenile system are assumed to implement the CRC to the disadvantage of Russian tradition. The activists argue that if abortions, sex, and brutality in mass media are not defined as violence against children, then this clause without doubt will be applied to a "light smack on the bum." The argument is lavishly illustrated with disparate depravity stories about children in Western countries reporting their parents to the authorities for light corporal reprimands, or for being grounded and having privileges withdrawn. Encouraged to report such "psychological abuse" to what activists consider as the totalitarian network of crisis hotlines, Children's Ombudsmen, and social workers, children will, according to the opponents, be removed from their families in order to be exploited for their final purpose—adoption to homosexual (i.e., pedophilic) couples in the West (Riabichenko 2013).

Basic to these arguments is an Orthodox view of the family as a mirror of the Church as well as of society. In written discourse it surfaces merely as occasional references to "Orthodox tradition" or, at best, the Fifth Commandment, but some of my respondents were careful to outline the logic more in detail. They brought it up spontaneously, presumably to avert an image of themselves as ruthless child abusers. The family, the Church, and society are all organized hierarchically with leaders entrusted with the right to discipline, they argued. If children do not learn to respect authority and boundaries at home, they will become asocial and a threat to the community. Physical punishment is a last-choice measure that must be taken with utmost consideration, but nonetheless it is necessary as an ultimate insignia of authority.

Other arguments (frequent also at parental forums) concern more down-to-earth aspects of socialization. Children do not know what is in their own best interest and cannot foresee consequences, and parents need to set clear limits. Moreover, it is argued, few adults were harmed by occasional and well-deserved lashings (physical punishments) in their childhood. A

Moscow activist added that children become verbal only at a certain age, and until then, all forms of communication are physical, indications of approval as well as the contrary. To him, the idea of banning even light corporal reprimands was thus as absurd as prohibiting hugs. As he put it, Russians in general value authority and corporality more than Westerners. Perhaps he is right—for example, Shmidt (2012a) suggests that the core of the controversy about Juvenile Justice resides in a Russian tendency to view children as essentially dependent and malleable, in contrast to the autonomous ideal of the CRC.<sup>9</sup> Her point deserves further empirical investigation, but here I abstain from conclusions in this matter. Essentializations of purportedly homogenous national cultures are fundamental to all nationalist ideologies, but in my own opinion, one of Russia's most typical traits is its extreme heterogeneity.

The Parents' Movement is primarily defined by the opposition against Juvenile Justice and Child Rights, but a conservative stance with regard to sexuality and gender is nonetheless fundamental to its self-image. In the early "morality rhetoric," references to homosexuality and feminism were made frequently but very briefly, as contributing factors to the problems of sex education and decreased birthrates. Since the first attempts to arrange gay pride parades in the mid-2000s, however, feminists and, in particular, the "gay lobby" have gradually received an increasingly central role in the alleged conspiracy. As recipients of Western funding and knowhow, these alleged promoters of an anti-Russian "gender ideology" are supposed to employ juvenile laws and authorities in a scheme aimed at eliminating natural sex differences, including heterosexual desire. Women's emancipation is, in contrast, addressed very sparsely, which is somewhat intriguing since the role of women as homemakers and mothers is usually central to conservative profamily movements. (In this case, moreover, about half of the leaders are female.) A tentative suggestion is that such arguments are superfluous. Most ordinary Russians endorse fathers as the main breadwinners and mothers as being responsible for the home and children, and neither parental activists nor public opinion object to supplementary female wage work. Also, there have not been many legal initiatives to protest. However, in 2012, a draft law on gender equality caught the attention of one of the most productive parental debaters. Her criticism does not concern its actual content, however, but the fact that the bill employs the term "gender" which, in her view, makes it a vehicle of the notorious "gender ideology" (Riabichenko 2013).<sup>10</sup>

### *Further Controversies: The Threat of an Omnipotent State*

By 2010, the previous almost uniformly polemical and emotional rhetoric of parental debaters was supplemented with a more legalistic and dispassionate strand when a series of media reports appeared about child removals on unjustified grounds. Most of them concerned Russia, but more attention was given to a handful of cases involving Russian immigrants abroad (Finland in particular), who allegedly had suffered injustice by the child protecting authorities in their new countries. As a result, social services and child removals became high-profile news stories for a couple of years.

In the intensive media discussion, the Parents' Movement created a public platform for itself and managed to establish a discursive link between unjustified removals, Juvenile Justice, and the West. Parental debaters now spoke out as experts in mainstream mass media, contextualizing the seeming tide of child removals in Russia in relation to recent legal changes. A few years earlier, they had pointed out that the Eurocentric bias of the CRC would result in new normative grounds of the Russian system and, thereby, enable state intervention in any family deviating from Western standards, be it moral or material (cf. Terekhov 2007). Now, a number of legal amendments had broadened the definitions of "violence" and "neglect" in parent-child relations, introduced new and vague target categories (such as "dangerous life situation"), and permitted the removal of children from their families without a preceding court case. According to the Parents' Movement, these changes encouraged arbitrary interpretations by civil servants and, thereby, corruption. In some of the notorious cases, fabricated allegations of physical violence were said to have been used to blackmail parents, while other removals of children were allegedly justified on such loose grounds as an empty fridge or an untidy home. Olga was one of the first to point this out, since some of the incidents occurred within her network of multiple-child families. To her, she explained to me, this was the ultimate proof of the madness of the juvenile bureaucracy, since any common-sense human should understand that it is impossible for one with many children to have a constantly clean home and a permanently stocked fridge.

Whether or not the purported rise in unjust removals was actually true remains unclear—statistically, deprivations of parental rights have decreased since 2007, but figures obviously say nothing about fairness (cf. Shmidt 2012a). Facts notwithstanding, the image of a near-totalitarian system of



child protection chimed well with already existing popular conceptions of this much-feared state agency. Parental activists had already for a few years predicted this nightmare and now it was seemingly coming true. Looming in the near future was, moreover, a new draft law project initiated in early 2010, which they feared would result in a coordinated and streamlined welfare agency immune to other legal authorities.

"The law on social patronage" was the latest in a long series of attempts to reform the outdated Soviet subsidiary welfare system, which grants predefined social categories (pensioners, disabled people, single mothers, etc.) fixed privileges and/or sums of money. Means-tested benefits for unexpected needs are poorly developed, so the only form of emergency assistance to families in crisis is a purportedly temporary place at an orphanage for the children. Since few parents ask for this "favor" voluntarily, most removals are forced and justified by the imminent danger of the child's life and health, and few children return to their parents.<sup>11</sup> The idea of the reform was, ironically, to amend these flaws and reduce the orphanage population, but since the bill proposed only medico-psychological aid and not monetary assistance (which crisis families usually need most), even liberal child rights advocates criticized it (c.f. Tsvetkova 2013).

From 2010 onward, new Parental Committees mushroomed all over the country, and Juvenile Justice was adopted as a top priority by an assorted cluster of already existing nationalist organizations and movements. As I take it, it was easier for people in general to relate to tangible everyday realities than to abstract future scenarios. The increased focus on jurisprudence and a new cohort of regular debaters contributed to a partial change of rhetorical style, in which references to religion and tradition were replaced with appeals to civil rights granted by the Russian Constitution. Among the new recruitments were thus, for the first time, secular groups (Dimitry's is one of them) and nationalist organizations that are more pro-Soviet than Orthodox. The proneness on apocalyptic dystopias remained in the parental rhetoric, but mainly in discussions pertaining to the notorious cases of children being removed from Russian immigrants by Western social services.

These families, most of them living in Finland, were depicted by Russian media as victims of false allegations of physical violence, usually because the children had mentioned in school that a parent had given them "a smack on the bum" (unfortunately, professional secrecy prevents the Finnish version from ever being told). The Parents' Movement managed to attach to itself

some of the wronged parents and their advocates, who readily confirmed in public that their suffering was symptomatic for "the Western" Juvenile Justice system and an expression of downright Russophobia (cf. Höldestrand 2014). Parental and mainstream media made extensive use of the entire battery of depravity stories, hyperboles, and straight falsifications—for example, Finland is accused of stripping children of Russian decent of their language and culture by systematically incarcerating them in concentration camps in Lapland (cf. Bekman 2010; Novikova 2014).

Both styles of rhetoric served to outline the self-image of the Parents' Movement. In debates pertaining to Russia, it promoted itself as the authentic voice of "the people," understood as a civic-minded citizenry standing up against a corrupt and debased state administration. When the cases of child removal abroad were at stake, it constructed itself rather as the voice of "the Russian people," threatened by a voracious and diabolic Western enemy.<sup>12</sup>

### *Success: The Movement Becomes Politically Correct*

By 2010, however, hyperboles and falsifications were no longer rhetoric devices limited to a marginalized cohort of ultranationalists. A general tendency in the "patriotic turn" of the Russian regime since the mid-2000s is that it gradually appropriates symbols and discourses that formerly were deployed mainly by actors and groups more radical than the political mainstream (Zuev 2011; Laurelle 2009). Now, the Russian governing regime met ultranationalists halfway by adopting a rhetoric nearly as anti-Western and paranoid as the Parents' Movement's litanies about global conspiracy and moral warfare (cf. Ortmann and Heathershaw 2012). To the opportunistic popular press, the conservative narrative about child removals and Juvenile Justice was thus (from my understanding) a convenient way to prove one's political correctness, and occasional attempts at investigative journalism were drowned in the maelstrom of nationalist hyperbole and depravity stories.<sup>13</sup> Thus a causal link was established also in popular imaginaries between domestic authority abuse and a foreign system gradually being penetrated into Russia by a Western world already lost.

Finally, the anti-YuYu campaign found resonance among politically established actors. In 2010, the Communist Party, the ROC, Federal Child Commissioner Pavel Astakhov, and Elena Mizulina, head of the Duma Committee for Family, Women, and Children, officially distanced themselves

from what they vaguely referred to as “the Western” model of Juvenile Justice. In the following years, many others followed suit, as it seems, with quite different motivations since Russian power is not a monolith with unequivocal objectives, as external observers often would suggest. Rather, objectives and agendas differ greatly between regions, various levels of the state apparatus, or just individuals (cf. Henderson 2011). The apex of federal power prioritizes geopolitics and macroeconomic issues, while social policy is addressed by subordinate and regional administrative levels. An officially promoted value such as “the good of the family” can thus be interpreted as a call for improved systems of child protection as well as the contrary, or just as a non-obliging buzzword.

Some of those who rejected “the Western model” probably agreed entirely with the Parents’ Movement, while others merely used the YuYu controversy to demonstrate their own patriotism and dedication to “the people.” Yet others—in particular state officials engaged in social policy—apparently tried to pacify the opposition by playing down the foreign element of the reforms, so that the much-needed transformation of a scandalously outdated and inefficient social sector eventually could be realized in practice. To the latter cohort belongs Elena Mizulina, who is the main official in charge of the reforms and who only a few years earlier was an ardent advocate of Juvenile Justice. As most other state administrators and experts on social policy at the time, however, she interpreted the term as an improvement of the systems dealing with youth at risk. The Parents’ Movement, in contrast, has always applied the term to any legal reform that might challenge the authority of parents toward the state or toward children. Mass media, in turn, conveyed it roughly as “anything that authorizes the state to remove children,” which was also the subject of the official renunciations, given the omnipresent media representations of the West as chronically family-hostile.

To Mizulina, a dismissal of “the Western model” of Juvenile Justice did not contradict a promotion of abovementioned draft law on social patronage—in her view, the bill would prevent excess removals of children, not the contrary. Parental activists, in contrast, considered this to be the most dangerous attempt to introduce Juvenile Justice so far, and once launched in March 2012, it was met by protest manifestations all over the country. The largest ones in Moscow reportedly gathered over 4,000 participants, and in the summer, activists gathered 140,000 petition signatures and delivered them to the Duma.

Throughout 2012 the parental rhetoric became increasingly triumphant, and in early 2013, a victory of sorts was achieved. Putin made a guest appearance at a parental congress, solemnly pledging to respect public opinion in the consideration of this draft law and others that “do not take Russian family traditions fully into account.”<sup>14</sup> The loathed bill on social patronage somehow disappeared on its way through the readings in the Duma, even though there was no doubt that it would soon be replaced by new juvenile encroachments (which was also the case). More important was the fact that Putin’s personal attention had confirmed the Parents’ Movement as a worthy representative of an authentic and patriotic civil society. A commentator from the Congress notes, “[Speakers] proposed the idea of a new format of politics and of the birth of an authentic nationally oriented civic society” (Krivorotova 2013). “We won!” reads a statement by the coalition ARKS. “Our victory was possible only because the parental Orthodox community united with other patriotic forces who share the same civil positions.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Reflection: Where Do We Go Now?*

The above quotations conclude two vital criteria for the parental ideal about civicism. Firstly, patriotism excludes all purported liberals from the civil sphere, whether they are professionals or grassroots activists. Secondly, authenticity demarcates morally upright grassroots from any corrupt political establishment, be it domestic or foreign. Since 2012, however, the success of the Parents’ Movement has made the latter aspect increasingly problematic. The rapid influx of new groups and movements resulted in increased heterogeneity, partly with reference to religiosity, but even more as regards to opinions about how to approach power and the authorities. As the movement has become politically opportune, established prolife NGOs and state agencies have approached parental leaders with proposals for joint coalitions or participation in citizen’s advisory boards, for instance, under the Federal Child Commissioner or in cooperation with the Civic Chamber. Some have accepted, which has caused an intense debate. Another contentious issue is Sergei Kurginyan, leader of the largest new contribution to the movement, the pro-Soviet organization Essence of Time, which has become a nationwide movement on its own through the project “USSR 2.0.” Kurginyan has a past not only as a theater director, a TV personality, and an academic, but also as a political analyst and a Kremlin advisor. To some, he is therefore a respected



expert, while others find him deeply suspect. Still many of his critics agree that Putin would hardly have paid attention to the parental congress without Kurginyan's connections, and the novel opportunities to exert influence at higher political levels beg for a reconsideration of the moral implications of involvement with power.

Before Putin's speech, it was thus evident that profound schisms were underway. The issue is not the aims as such, since "traditional morals" and the core issues of the agenda imply little more than a rejection of the West, of homosexuality, and of state removals of children. Rather, the intensified discussions concern, in Melucci's (1989) terms, means and fields of actions, in other words, the ways in which these morals should be defended and on which arenas the struggle is to take place. As before, the main bone of contention is cooperation with elite structures and, by implication, also how "professionalism" should be managed in a benign way, without the negative consequences of elitism and isolation.

In effect, parental forums are increasingly preoccupied by the ethical implications of active citizenship. An increasing number of voices argue that it is not enough merely to represent the people's will and remain pure from corruption. When one is at war—which is how activists perceive the situation—more professionalism is needed, understood as expert competence and as a capacity to communicate and cooperate with the state administration.

The intensified debate does not imply a change in opinions inasmuch as a radically heightened awareness of the inherent difficulties in being and acting civically. Hence civicism as such has become crucial to the movement's collective identity. Until approximately 2012, parental activists were not invited to the more influential (and potentially polluting) political arenas, so neither purists nor pragmatists had to face, in practice, the long-term consequences of their own standpoints. The main issues now are thus not new, only more pertinent and painful than before.

Firstly, opinions vary about whether or not the Parents' Movement actually has acquired the required "civic capital" (to paraphrase Bourdieu) to enter new and foreign elite territories—to some, the new patriotic civil society is already a fact, while others lament what they see as an absence of skills, dedication, and faith. Secondly, and more important, the question remains whether or not one actually desires to risk the entire movement's existence by becoming immersed into the power structures, in spite of the apparent advantages. In this sense, activists are painfully aware of the same dilemma

as is reflected in social research on civic organizations in Russia. The regime indeed actively attempts to pacify non-state organizations by absorbing them into its own structures (Ljubownikow, Crotty, and Rogers 2013), but such cooperation may simultaneously be very productive (Chebankova 2013). So far, the negotiations continue, as summarized by an anonymous voice:

Parents are not . . . professional "warriors" in this uneven battle. They are just . . . learning to think strategically and work out tactics, to get familiar with and assimilate the methods of their adversaries. . . . Without doubt the non-professionals make many mistakes, but they have something essential—incorruptibility, they are uncompromising in their struggle against evil, they have a personal interest to protect their families, children, traditions, faith, folk and fatherland. . . . But there are also minuses, when the lack of professionalism, education, faith and so forth gives the enemy the opportunity to slipper through these cracks and lead the parental resistance astray.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of the Parents' Movement, different positions may or may not result in deepened schisms and, in the end, plural movements, but this is a case for future research.

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Tova Højdestrand's present research traverses the areas of nationalism, social movements, transnational governance, and gender and sexuality. Her current project investigates how issues related to the intimate social sphere and reproduction are deployed in Russian nationalist discourse, and the interplay between patriotic moral mobilizations and policy-making at the national and transnational level. A previous project, published in her book *Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia* (Cornell University Press, 2009), focused on processes of social exclusion, state surveillance, informal economy and survival strategies, social stigmatization, and identity formation.

## Notes

1. Accessed September 30, 2014. <http://blog.profamilia.ru/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/>. Also available at the site is a slightly revised version of the Resolution in English, which was distributed to the representatives of all the member states of the European Council.
2. "Draft Recommendation on the rights and legal status of children and parental responsibilities" of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CJ-FA-GT3, 2010, 2 rev. 5).

3. Accessed September 30, 2014. *Russkaia narodnaia linia* ("the Russian people's line," [ruskline.ru](http://ruskline.ru)) is a general patriotic, Orthodox, and monarchist news platform that covers parental issues very well (the main editor is a veteran in the movement), while *Yuvenal'naia yustitsiia—my protiv* ("Juvenile Justice—we're against," [www.yuvenaljustice.ru](http://www.yuvenaljustice.ru)) is a protest site with an adjacent *Vkontakte* group ([vk.com/stopjuvenaljustice](http://vk.com/stopjuvenaljustice)) dedicated to the main item on the movement's agenda, which I will discuss further.
4. The most well-known case is Oleg Kassim, founder and leader of *Narodnyi Sobor* (The People's Council), a leading coalition within the movement, who was once vice president of the quasi-fascist and xenophobic extreme nationalist organization Russian National Union (*Russk oenatsional'noe dinstvo*, RNE).
5. *Assotsiatsiia roditel'skikh komitetov i soobshchestv*, ARKS.
6. For a video clip from the Forum held in 2011, see (accessed September 30, 2014) <http://rutube.ru/video/70icd2d602072718ed75997d091c776/>.
7. For the mere status as a civil organization, a statute adopted at a foundational meeting is sufficient. The reluctance of parental groups to register is confirmed by the Ministry of Justice's register of nonstate, noncommercial organizations, where very few of the ones involved in the Parents' Movement are listed. One may add that many services offered to parental groups by private persons, the ROC, and others—be it free facilities, permissive work hours, printed materials, etc.—could most probably equal regular funding if the tax authorities ever cared to investigate them.
8. Some examples are the following: A federal system of youth courts (not yet taken), a strengthening of the legal authority of the child protective services (2008), new legal terms defining target categories (2009), the introduction of federal Child Commissioners (2010), harshened punishments for "cruelty against children" (2010), and new forms of social assistance (2012, 2013).
9. Shmidt (2012a) argues that the Russian tendency to perceive children as essentially dependent is reflected in the new legislation, which, in spite of its ostensible adherence to the CRC, transfers the overprotecting function from parents to the state. In some sense, her conclusion thus supports the claims of the conservative parental organizations; but as pointed out by Sherstneva (2013), she simultaneously appears to ignore paragraphs that explicitly state the right of children to have their opinions taken into account.
10. The battle against "gender ideology" is fought with considerably more passion by similar parental organizations in Ukraine, Poland, and other European countries with large Catholic populations. Discourse and arguments are strikingly similar everywhere, and in many countries the campaigns also appear to have begun at about the same time, from 2011 onward. They appear to be part of a globally coordinated project that began in the 1990s by various reactionary religious agencies (e.g., the Holy See or Evangelical Right organizations such as the aforementioned WCF) to return the world to "traditional values" (cf. Butler 2006), but it has intensified significantly in the past five years (cf. Korolczuk 2014; Case 2012).
11. Estimations vary of the number of children in state or foster care who are social orphans, in other words, those who are deprived of their parental rights but their parents are alive. According to the (relatively liberal) Orthodox news site *Pravoslavie i mir*, on March 15, 2014, there are 75% of social orphans in Moscow (Mendeleeva and Galperina 2014).
12. For an account in English of some of the Finnish cases, and for examples of the predominant style of rhetoric, see Kovalenko (2012) or Novikova (2014).
13. For an exception, see an unsigned article from the news agency IA Regnum, which among other things compares the number of children in state care in the respective countries. In 2010, 2.6% of Russia's children were in state or foster care, as compared to 1.3% of all Finnish

children (IA Regnum 2012). To this, one may add that in Western European countries, the percentage of children who remain permanently in state or foster care is considerably lower than in Russia (Shmidt 2012b).

14. Accessed September 30, 2014. <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/4973>.
15. Accessed September 30, 2014. [http://ruskline.ru/news\\_rl/2013/02/14/triumfal'naya\\_pobeda\\_roditel'skogo\\_sobwestva\\_nad\\_yuvenal'noy\\_yustitsiei/](http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2013/02/14/triumfal'naya_pobeda_roditel'skogo_sobwestva_nad_yuvenal'noy_yustitsiei/).
16. Accessed September 30, 2014 (my translation). [http://ruskline.ru/news\\_rl/2012/12/28/davajte\\_pogovorim\\_o\\_glavnom](http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2012/12/28/davajte_pogovorim_o_glavnom).

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## 2

## Conservative Parents' Mobilization in Ukraine

*Olena Strelnyk*

### *Introduction*

Since 2005, the Ukrainian state has been sounding an alarm over the country's low birthrate. Therefore, parents are considered to be a resource recruited to solve the country's demographic problem (Kabinet ministriv Ukrainy 2006). In this self-induced panic concerning demography and statehood, childhood has become politicized as well. For instance, the Ukrainian far-right party *Svoboda* (Freedom) promotes the prohibition of foreigners adopting Ukrainian orphans because "children are the treasure of the national gene pool" (quoted by Kotlyar 2013). Similarly, on the eve of the expected signing of the association with the EU on November 29, 2013,<sup>1</sup> both opponents and supporters of Ukrainian-European integration endlessly debated "the protection of children's futures." These political and social processes created very favorable conditions for the conservative parental mobilization that is centered on keeping what they consider to be national traditions as a basis of social wellbeing.

Parenthood emerged as a central topic in public discussions in independent Ukraine in the early 1990s because it links individuals, families, and their respective responsibilities to the new context of national state building. It appears that with time the debate on parenthood in the country has been infused with the element of "moral panic" (Cohen 2002) by frequently