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**Nationalism and Civicness in Contemporary Russia:
Grassroots mobilization in Defense of Traditional Family Values**

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Abstract

The so-called Parents' Movement is a Russian conservative grassroots mobilization against a presumed Western cultural attack on Russian tradition and sovereignty. The primary target is an ongoing legal implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which is conceived of as a Western feint contrived by hostile global agencies and a Russian fifth column of treacherous NGOs and state administrators.

This article elucidates how the Parents' Movement navigates between seemingly incompatible ideals to construct itself as an authentic “voice of the people. The notion of civil society is vital in this pursuit, although Western conceptions of liberal democracy are rejected in favor of President Putin’s vision of a patriotic civil society loyal to common national goals. The movement is harshly critical to many government policies, however, and rejects the state administration as well as other elites as corrupt and morally polluting. At the same time, it has to negotiate the fact that attempts to influence the despised political elite also imply the risk of becoming usurped by it.

Since the movement’s campaigns to a large extent take place on-line, this study is based on Internet sources as well as interviews with activists. Exploring how concepts such as civil society and civic activism are translated and operationalized into the contemporary Russian sociopolitical context, it contributes to the understanding of contemporary popular nationalisms and how these are shaped by a simultaneous negotiation of local tradition and global discursive flows.

Keywords: social anthropology, global governance, family policy, grassroots movements, nationalism, civil society

Moral Resurgence and Civic Action: The Russian Parent's Movement

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.¹

Thus begins the so-called Saint Petersburg Resolution, an open protest letter against a draft recommendation by the European Council on children's rights and parental responsibilities.² It was signed in October 2011 by some 80 Russian non-state organizations, mostly relatively new grassroots groups, and was published at a broad range of nationalist and conservative 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, open letters, and so forth in the past five years in which the Movement rejects foreign involvement in Russian affairs, and (as is stated further into 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 combinations, be it with action, resistance, community, or society. The phrasings are not self-evident. They are intrinsic to the idea of Western liberal democracy and have hitherto been associated with a sector of NGOs created in the 1990s, largely with Western funding, for the very purpose to promote democracy and civil society in the formerly totalitarian East. Nationalists relate to this sector with outright hostility, which the Resolution makes very

¹ <http://blog.profamilia.ru/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/> Available at the site is also a slightly revised version of the Resolution in English which was distributed to the representatives of all the member states of the European Council (accessed 2014-09-30).

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).

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 and (as I will return to) 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.

But notions of civicness are nonetheless attractive to the Parents' Movement since they assume a dialogue between power and its subjects, thus providing a hypothetical channel of communication to the second major antagonist, the state. Hence parental activists need to articulate a way to be civic of their own, for neither the organizational forms nor the “moral coordinates,” as they would phrase it, of the former 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 & Dunn 1996). Rather, my aim is to show how emic conceptions about civil society and civicness 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 involves also anti-liberalism, patriotism, and a religious worldview; ideological aspects that I will account for but less in detail. These ideological scaffolds are relatively stable, while civicness, 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 method, 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 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 structure, organizational principles, and working methods of parental organizations, I proceed to 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. This struggle has been determining for the movement’s emergence, growth, and apparent accomplishments in recent years, and after elucidating this development I will finally discuss

how success as such in fact has challenged hitherto prevalent ideas about civiness and, thereby, the movements collective identity as a whole.

Field and method

“The Parents' Movement,” *roditel'skoe dvizhenie*, is an emic term that activists use in a self-evident manner without further definitions, referring to anything from a seemingly narrow selection of Orthodox extreme nationalist networks to any supporter of their main objectives. (Since the term is quite general, it should appeal also to other parental initiatives, but search machines and media archives indeed reveal few if any competitors.) Many groups, including a number of the signers of the Saint Petersburg Resolution, simply call themselves *roditel'skiy komitet*, “the Parents Committee”, of this-and-that place (the term is usually applied to the parental committees of schools and kindergartens). Others mix different buzzwords from their agenda: “Family, Love, Fatherland,” or “In Defense of Family, Childhood, and Morality.” So far, I have listed some 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. Nor is it possible to tell the number of participants 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 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 (in particular Integrum) is my main source of information. Since March 2012, I have followed two main websites³ that have served as points of departure in the further tracing of significant issues, concepts, actors, and events at a

I have also conducted a dozen interviews with activists and leaders of local parental groups in Moscow and Saint Petersburg in the course of 2012, besides talking to a handful of professionals with experience of the policies and projects of concern to the Parents' Movement. All respondents are anonymized. Some have spoken “off the professional record,” while the parental activists may now suffer consequences for having spoken to me earlier. It was evident already in 2012 that this category of respondents positioned me as a potential

³ *Russkaia narodnaia linia* (“the Russian people's line,” ruskline.ru) is a general patriotic, Orthodox, and monarchist news platform which 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.juvenaljustice.ru) is a protest site with an adjacent *Vkontakte* group (vk.com/stopjuvenaljustice) dedicated to the main item at the movement's agenda, to which I will return. (All sites accessed 2014-09-30).

enemy, both as an academic and as a Westerner. Many of those whom I contacted never replied in the first place, and of the ones I met, a few mentioned being criticized by co-activists for seeing me. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine (I write this in September 2014) has hardly made their cooperation with me less controversial, so here I refrain from exposing their names to the search motors at the Internet. I am just very grateful that they agreed to talk to me at all.

Maleficent modernity and Western warfare: The emergence of a moralist opposition

As a mass movement, the Russian Parents' Movement is less than a decade old, but its critical stance towards 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, and in the Soviet period most social problems were glossed over as Capitalist ideological contagion. A core trope in today’s anti-Western rhetoric is demographic decline, which was proclaimed a major social threat already 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 to nationalist discourse throughout the demographic pitfall of the 1990s. By the end of the decade, the tropes were picked up by 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 campaign was not a social movement inasmuch as a battle fought in mass media. Nonetheless a number of grassroots groups appeared by the turn of the millennium, from which the Parents' Movement would emerge nearly a decade later.

This nascent conservative opposition stems not only from a historically rooted local anti-Western tradition, but also from a contemporary global social conservative ideoscape (Appadurai 1996) in which Russian anti-sex rhetoric differs little from other moralist crusades. Russian sexologist Igor Kon (1999) has even suggested that the Russian campaign was initiated by US missionaries, but provides no details. Whether or not he is right (I lack other sources), discourses and ideological currents tend to travel in less intentional ways. Today’s parental activists are included in a global cyberspace with endless options to pick and choose from each other’s repertoires. US sources are nonetheless likely to dominate since they, being the oldest, simply provide the largest amounts of text, moreover in English, 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 became, for obvious reasons, a commonplace facet of Cold War propaganda in the East as well as in the West. In Russia, an endless number of mutations have developed rapidly in the post-Soviet period (Ortmann & Heathershaw 2012), many of which are heavily inspired by a burgeoning US supply of similar narratives. Anti-Communist elements are re-wrought to fit the prevalent Soviet nostalgia of Russian nationalism and its suspicion towards Capitalist neoliberalism. Generally, however, the Cold War division is becoming increasingly immaterial as both sides tend to replace old adversaries with homosexuals and/or Islam (Irvine 2004:74). The “sexualized” narrative of the Russian anti-sex campaign replaces the formerly near-obligatory Jewish plot with a mafia of gays and/or liberals, and borrows from US sources by linking the UN and other supranational agencies to a demonized “new world order” and the coming of Anti-Christ (Herman 2001).

Irina Medvedeva and Tatiana Shishova, child psychologists and to this day the most influential conservative debaters, apparently use similar sources to trace the allegedly Satanic origins of the International Planned Parenthood Foundation from Margaret Sanger’s well-known endorsement of eugenics in the 1930s (the then predominant scientific paradigm) and her interest in Rosicrucianism to Nazi mysticism, Aleister Crowley, homosexual Knights’ Templars, the cult of Bathomet, ancient Egyptian sects, and so forth (Medvedva & Shishova 2001). With the benign aid of “liberal” Russian NGOs, IPPF and allies such as WHO strive to eliminate Russia demographically by proliferating an immoral and promiscuous lifestyle that, ultimately, will aggravate the already alarming abortion rates and lead to mass infertility due to STDs (Medvedva & Shishova 2001). Their 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. Russian stories are located to the West, as to underline the foreign origins of Evil – English children are, as an example, said to begin their sexual life at the age of nine and suffer from impotence by the age of twelve (Medvedva & Shishova 1996).

Sociopolitical environment: Power and the civil sector

A significant role in “anti-sex” conspiracy narratives is played by a purported well-greased fifth column of Russian state administrators, liberal politicians, and NGOs, who 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 such joint projects were indeed common in the 1990s. The high rates of abortions and of HIV-infection made Western aid agencies prioritize projects related to reproductive health, and these were usually carried out by Russian NGOs, frequently in cooperation with local authorities.

This “first generation” of NGOs was largely engaged in human rights, gender equality, and other aspects of democracy building, while others worked to compensate deficiencies in the crumbling sector of social welfare. Many of them developed into specialized advocacy organizations, working more or less like independent businesses with permanent staff and facilities. Their expertise frequently resulted in productive joint projects with sectors of the state administration, but the professionalization simultaneously caused an estrangement from ordinary grassroots (cf. Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). In effect, the presumed new civil sector was by many perceived in terms of the old nomenklatura; a remote and privileged elite benefiting from resources unavailable to others (Hemment 2004). Thus they were rewarding scapegoats of nationalists, although it would take some time before the time was ripe for “moralist” civic action at a larger scale. People in general were too preoccupied with plain survival to have much time and energy left for collective mobilizations, while extreme nationalism (sexualized or not) was confined to a limited set of social networks without substantial strongholds in the higher echelons of power.

A few years after the shift of the millennium, the political opportunities changed radically. While the Yeltsin administration neither encouraged nor impeded civic activism, the Putin regime actively favors the development of a civil society. The latter should, however, serve a common national cause, not advocate the interests of particular social groups (Henderson 2011). A federal Civic Chamber was created to counsel the Duma on social issues and to distribute government funds to the civil sector. The Western influence in the civil sector has in the same period been drastically reduced, as anti-Western policies have made Western funding exceedingly complicated and inopportune and the relative economic stability has prompted foreign development agencies to pull out of Russia on their own accord. Russian financial sources, state as well as private, are loyal to the now officially promoted values of patriotism and “traditional morals” (aka Orthodoxy), and in effect, it has become very difficult to engage in human rights and reproductive health. In practice, the “anti-sex crusaders” thus left the battle field as conquerors.

In spite of improved birthrates in the 2000s, the imminent “death of the nation” is focal to the patriotic official rhetoric of the Putin era, and so is the claim that the most effective remedy is pronatalist 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 so-called third sector of non-state organizations. The latter category includes a number of well-funded pro-family organizations engaged in charity, educational projects, pro-life agitation and demographic research. In contrast to e.g. the US Christian Right, these nationwide elite organizations do not simultaneously try organize local grassroots networks (Irvine 2004) but 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 represents an entirely different kind of social activism. They are grassroots, they are sceptic to elites of all kinds (even conservative ones), and few if any groups entertain international contacts outside of the former USSR. As such, they are symptomatic of a general upsurge in social protests and grassroots movements from the mid-2000s onward. Although without precedents in the post-Soviet period, these social mobilizations are nonetheless not an entirely new phenomenon. As pointed out by Vorozheikina (2008), the Glasnost period displayed a similar wave of popular movements. The proliferated distrust in the state and in formalized structures in general makes Russia comparatively fertile soil for grassroots activism, she suggests, since people are used to rely on informal forms of cooperation. The subsequent “transitional” turbulence put a temporary end to this kind of activism since, in short, it is difficult to pursue specific goals in an environment of total social collapse. The relative stability of the 2000s has once again made it possible to address particular problems upon which there is a realistic option to exert influence. According to Chebankova (2013), additional important factors are increased corruption and political repression. The new movements are largely constituted by a new proto-middleclass, which is as dissatisfied with authority abuse as it is conscious of its own vulnerability to economic downturns. Educated and professionally experienced, this category is capable and willing to organize itself and to make claims. To this, one may add that the development of Internet has significantly improved options to create and maintain networks, which cannot be underestimated in a country as vast as Russia (Zuev 2013, Gladarev & Lonkila 2012).

Social research has primarily focused on new grassroots movements less devoted to the present regime, for instance new trade unions, housing rights movements, environmental groups, or protests against rigged elections (Vorozheikina 2008, Gladarev & Lonkila 2012, Aron 2012). Less attention has been paid to nationalist or conservative religious groups (for an exception, see Zuev 2011), who endorse the authoritarian system as such but resents bureaucracy and corrupt and indifferent state officials. So-called liberals are no exception to the general dislike of the state administration, but locate the responsibility of its evils to the highest echelons of Russian power. Nationalists, in contrast, blame transnational structures and global policy processes. Putin himself is by parental debaters and other nationalists usually portrayed as a strong and wise Tsar, whose firm hand is perennially misled by his own corrupt administration and by United Russia, his own back-up party. Hence the President's vision of a loyal, patriotic civil society is generally endorsed by nationalists, or, 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).

The emergence 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 a 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 50 people 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, which provided a locality for free for a second meeting. About half of the participants returned, and now they worked out a long-time strategy and set up working groups for different purposes.

They got in touch 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 so-called “standing,” *stoyanie*, which blends elements of a religious prayer meeting with a picket line. By then, 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 some 70 other organizations around the country.

Judging by my other respondents as well as existing sources at the Internet, Igor's story is not unusual among parental activists, and according to Vorozheikina (2008) most of the new grassroots mobilizations follow the same pattern. Some catalyst spurs informal networks of people – neighbors, co-parishioners, friends and acquaintances – to organize public meetings or spontaneous protest manifestations, after which some of them decide to consolidate their efforts into a non-profit organization. The driving forces are usually middle-class professionals – Igor was once a civil servant, while others I met were engineers, journalists, political scientists, and so forth – with some sort of organizational experience, be it from work, from the near-compulsory Soviet youth organization Komsomol, or from free time engagements related to children's schooling or hobbies. Until about 2010, the mobilizing factor of conservative parental groups was usually local medical centers providing sexual education, while legal initiatives in the field of family policy took over later. Dimitry, 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 disadvantaged legally, she said, but such parents are also frequently looked down upon by civil servants, who consider them to be irresponsible and incapable of planning their lives (an attitude confirmed by e.g. Lovtsova & Iarskaia-Smirnova 2005). The forum grew into a nationwide coalition embracing more than a 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 facilities for meetings, family vacations, and so forth. 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. There are no formal connections with the ROC as such, however, nor are parental activists uncritically loyal to the Church as a whole. The ROC is more heterogeneous than its public image indicates (cf. Papkova 2011), and the groups associated to the Parents' Movement should rather be seen as one of its most conservative lobbying groups.

Rather than external support, mutual assistance in-between parental organizations have been fundamental to the organizations whose origins I can trace in the first place. 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 IT-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 hitherto most sustainable (although far from the only) coalition, "Association of Parents Committees and Societies."⁴ Another such consolidating force is a Moscow-based coalition of ultra-nationalist Orthodox groups called "The People's Council" (*Narodniy 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 to themselves many of the most influential and productive public debaters, they constituted the movement's ideological nexus for many years. Together with, among others, Olga and Igor, they also arranged the

⁴ Assotsiatsiia roditel'skikh komitety i soobshchestv, ARKS.

series of congresses mentioned by Igor. These “Parental Forums” gathered from 1300 participants in 2009 to 4000 in 2011,⁵ but were preceded by a large number of smaller events.

“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 money or Russian, 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 “sense of the game” (in Bourdieu’s sense) with reference to power. The professionals are, to put it short, more at home with funders, state administrators, and politicians than 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. In line with Vorozheikina (2008) and most of my other respondents, he related this ethos to 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 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 10 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 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 bulk of the activities of Dimitry’s group consist of family-friendly leisure activities. All of

⁵ For a video clip from the Forum held in 2011, see <http://rutube.ru/video/701cd2d60207a718ed75997d091c77fc/> (accessed 2014-09-30).

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 you if ask in the name of an organization, it often works.”

The strong desire for autonomy makes funding a sensitive issue. Very few parental groups are formally registered with the authorities, which according to Russian law is required to engage in any kind of financial operation (for the mere status as a civil organization, a statute adopted at a foundational meeting is sufficient).⁶ “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.” Some groups prefer to register, in particular those who wish to expand their charity work, and nobody holds this against them. Still one’s moral credibility fares better without registration or funding. “Everybody knows that the one who pays 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 the 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 to the aforementioned elite profamily NGOs stems from their Kremlin connections inasmuch as from their oligarch financiers.

The antipathy extends to the very concept “politics,” which is rejected *en toto*. 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 rather that 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 enter into communication with them on their

⁶ The reluctance of parental groups to register is confirmed by the Ministry of Justice’s register of non-state non-commercial organizations, where very few of the ones involved in the Parents’ Movement are listed.

terms, to become one of them. Politics is thus the antithesis of everything that “civic” is associated with – communitarianism, autonomy, and transparency.

However, the meaning of activism is to exert influence on political actors, and for this some sort of dialogue is needed. One strategy is to associate oneself with supposedly loyal ones, 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 on political connections. It is more controversial for activists to join political parties; Olga is, for instance, sharply criticized by ideological purists for being a member of United Russia, be it that many other activists apparently trust her dedication as a veteran activist.

Another strategy is professionalism, but in a different sense than elitist isolation or political dexterity. In the same interview, Dimitry 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.” In this context, “professionalism” is conceptualized as disinterested expert knowledge, a prerequisite to get the attention of power without for that sake compromising one’s moral integrity. Education and knowledge are thus also important aspects of civicness, which is hardly surprising since most prominent activists belong to the educated strata. A large share of the movement’s events consist of seminars, roundtables, conferences, and public hearings, while a regular staff of experts (mostly psychologists, jurists, and clerics) occupy a central position in the movement as public debaters.

Many organizations, the ones of my respondents included, 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 are wary that even lobbying might lead to the aforementioned, less benign, aspects of professionalism. In particular the most ultra-nationalist 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. Nonetheless, the commentary fields in numerous Internet

debates on the issue simultaneously reveal 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 usually tend to navigate pragmatically between potential partners in both camps, without for that sake being questioned.

The agenda: Global conspiracy 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. Laws and policies have always been central to the conservative opposition, and already in 1997 the “anti-sex crusaders” smothered a draft law about sex education in schools (Kon 1999). Nonetheless, the early rhetoric was passionate and 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, however, since the nascent opposition had not yet identified itself as a social movement and, thereby, as a civic actor.

The decisive impetus to a social movement came in 2006, when a new issue was introduced to the conservative profamily agenda: the UN Convention of the Rights of Children. Russia ratified the CRC already in 1990, but for fiscal reasons (as I take it), no comprehensive attempt was made to implement it legally until a few years into the 2000s. The resulting legislative transformation is referred to by parental activists as *yuvnal’naya yustitsiia*, Juvenile Justice, or just YuYu. The eponym stems from an envisaged reform of the youth penitentiary system, which was initiated in the late 1990s by state administrators, NGOs, and Western development agencies. The project aimed to streamline a hitherto quite uncoordinated array of state agencies dealing with youth at risk and socially vulnerable families, and to include a new system of youth courts into this integrated juridical and administrative structure (Komarnitsky 2010:441ff). In spite of the ambitious plans, the implementation of the system was hampered in 2002 when the Duma turned down a draft law on youth courts on constitutional grounds.⁷ In the successive years, the idea of one single

⁷ The new system of youth courts was to be independent from the ordinary court system, but such a division is not permitted by the Constitution.

system was abandoned altogether, but many of the suggested changes were carried through locally, or have reappeared in a series of federal draft laws and policies from 2008 onward. Some examples are a strengthening of the legal authority of the child protective services (2008), new legal terms defining target categories (such as “difficult life situation,” 2009), the introduction of federal Child Commissioners (2010), harshened punishments for “cruelty against children” (2010), or new forms of social assistance (2012).

In 2006, the aforementioned duo Irina Medvedeva and Tatiana Shishova called attention to Juvenile Justice in a series of publications at nationalist Orthodox websites, and other debaters and parental groups within the conservative opposition soon made this new social threat a priority. The initial critique had little or nothing to do with the original Juvenile Justice project or with youth criminality, but attacked Child Rights in general and the increase in state surveillance that the implementation was expected to cause. In effect, the entire spectrum of real or anticipated legal changes was conceptualized as Juvenile Justice, be it within the social services or the systems of health or education. The ubiquitous adjective “juvenile” is frequently attributed even to issues with little or any connotation to the CRC or the social sector, such as biometric ID-cards or homosexuality.

In essence, the critique against the CRC converges with reservations made all over the world since it was drafted in the late 1980s. A main objection is that the Convention ignores local conceptions of childhood and parent-child relationships in favor of a eurocentric ideal of children as autonomous subjects (Schabas 1996). Secondly, it is considered to turn the state into the ultimate guarantor of the rights of children, thus sidestepping the right of parents to socialize their offspring as they see fit. Thereby the civil rights to autonomy and integrity are neglected, and the family is eroded an autonomous social unit (Hafen 1996).

The Russian debate tends to oscillate between the first and the second set of objections. One strongly ideological set of assumptions concerns Russia’s position towards the infringements of a morally degraded West. It overlaps with a more pragmatic concern about the inherent risks of inserting new and foreign norms into an already malfunctioning national state administration. Both tendencies have always prevailed in the debate, but emphasis has gradually shifted from the former to the latter, and I will therefore begin by an account of the more ideological objections to Child Rights and continue with its anticipated practical effects in the next section.

In their seminal publication “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 perversion 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.” (Medvedva & Shishova 2006, my translation.)

As the authors conclude, besides a coordinated child protecting system, the main innovation of the “agents of change” is to enable children to take their parents to court if their rights are violated. The argument is lavishly illustrated with disparate depravity stories about children in Western countries reporting their parents to the authorities for light corporeal reprimands or for not being allowed to play computer games.

Neither this text nor the numerous ones to come are unanimously negative to the CRC as such. The issue is rather how it should be interpreted and by whom. Appeals to the Convention are often used to justify reforms that the Movement approves of, for instance obligatory religious education in schools or bans on homosexual “propaganda.” Despite the conservative success in these particular questions, international agencies and the forthcoming Russian juvenile system are assumed to implement the CRC to the disadvantage of Russian tradition. Abortions or sex and brutality in mass media are not defined as violence against children, it is argued, while this clause without doubt will be applied to a light smack on the bum. Children will be encouraged to report a grounding and a withdrawal of privileges as “psychological abuse” to the totalitarian network of crisis telephones, Children’s Ombudsmen, and social workers, after which they will be removed from their families and, finally, exploited for their final purpose – to be adopted 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 outmost 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 their own best and cannot foresee consequences, and parents need to set clear limits. Moreover, few parents suffered from an occasional and well-deserved bashing 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 corporeal reprimands was thus as absurd as prohibiting hugs. As he put it, Russians in general value authority and corporeality more than Westerners. Perhaps he is right – e.g. 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.⁸ 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 are 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 nativity. Since the first attempts to arrange gay 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 as such. Women’s emancipation is, in contrast, commented very sparsely, which is somewhat intriguing since the role of women as

⁸ Shmidt (2012a) argues that the Russian tendency in Russia to perceive of children as essentially dependent is reflected also in the new Russian legislation, which in spite of the CRC transfers the overprotecting function from parents to the state. In some sense, her conclusion thus supports those of the concerned parents, but as pointed out by Sherstneva (2013) she simultaneously appears to ignore paragraphs in the draft law she discusses that explicitly state the right of children to have their opinions taken into account.

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 it is not necessary. Most ordinary Russians endorse a division between fathers as main breadwinners and of mothers as responsible for home and children, and neither parental activists nor public opinion object to supplementary female wage work. Nor have there been many legal initiatives to protest against; only 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).⁹

Expansion: Juvenile Justice hits the headlines

By 2009, the conservative opposition had consolidated enough to refer to itself as a movement, a progress manifested by the first Parental Forum in December. Soon afterwards, other events played into its hands. In 2010, an escalating number of reports appeared in mainstream mass media about child removals on unjustified grounds. Most of them concerned Russia, but even more attention was given to a handful of cases of 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. They contextualized the seeming tide of child removals in Russia in relation to recent legal changes. A law from 2008 enabled deprivation of parental rights without a preceding court case, while a legal amendment in early 2010 broadened the definitions of “violence” and “neglect” in parent-child relations. According to parental activists, the latter law was now so blurry that any parent could be incriminated. Moreover, routine assessments of unacceptable living conditions had become much stricter in recent years. New and vague categories defining

⁹ 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. This appears to be the result of a globally coordinated project by various reactionary religious agencies (e.g. the Holy See or Evangelical Right organizations such as aforementioned WCF) to return the world to “traditional values” that began already in the 1990s (cf. Butler 2006) and certainly begs for further scientific investigation (Case, 2012, is one of few academic texts on the subject so far).

target categories (e.g. “dangerous life situation”) opened up for arbitrary interpretations, with the result that some of the notorious removals were 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 cases 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 nobody can combine a large bunch of young children with a perfunctory clean home and a permanently filled-up fridge.

Moreover, parental activists had warned against such a development since the onset of the campaign against Juvenile Justice. The Western bias of the CRC would, according to its critics, logically result in new normative grounds of the Russian system and, thereby, enable state intervention in any family deviating from Western standards – moral as well as material (cf. Terekhov 2007). At an early stage, they had emphasized that murky legal categories and new parameters would increase corruption and authority abuse. Then, the focus was parental discipline rather than living standards, but the point was nonetheless that individual administrators would have to act on subjective grounds. Now, the nightmare was seemingly coming true; in a number of the reported cases, the child protective services were indeed accused of having fabricated allegations of physical violence to blackmail parents, for financial gain or for political reasons (cf. Zimbovskiy 2010).

Moreover, these tendencies would soon aggravate. A draft law project initiated in early 2010, “the law on social patronage,” merely copied the first “juvenile” model of a coordinated and streamlined welfare agency, which would be immune to other legal authorities. The draft law 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 parents is a supposedly temporary place at an orphanage for the children. Since few parents apply 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.¹⁰ The idea of the reform was, ironically, to amend these flaws and reduce the orphanage population, but since the bill

¹⁰ Estimations vary of the number of children in state or foster care who are so-called social orphans, i.e. whose parents are alive but deprived of their parental rights. According to the (relatively liberal) Orthodox news site *Pravoslavie i mir*, 15 March 2014, the percentage for Moscow is 75%. (http://www.pravmir.ru/direktor-detdoma-gde-usynovili-vseh-detey-o-tom-pochemu-v-rossii-stolko-sirot/?fb_action_ids=805386419480819&fb_action_types=og.likes_ accessed 2014-09-30).

proposed only “medico-psychological” aid and not monetary assistance (which is what crisis families usually need most) it did not convince even liberal child rights advocates (c.f. Tsvetkova 2013).

The public appeal of the Parents' Movement increased significantly when tangible everyday realities were highlighted more rather than dystopian and abstract future scenarios, 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. Furthermore, the increased focus on jurisprudence and a new cohort of regular debaters contributed to a partial change of style in parental rhetoric. The hitherto almost uniformly polemical and emotional prose was supplemented with a more legalistic and dispassionate rhetorical strand, in which references to religion and, even, tradition were replaced with appeals to civil rights and to the Russian Constitution.

In debates pertaining to Russia, the Parents' Movement thus promoted itself as an autonomous and uncorrupted voice of “the people,” understood as a citizenry threatened by an omnipotent and debased state administration. However, when the notorious cases of child removal abroad were at stake, it constructed itself as the voice of “the people” understood as *Russians* threatened by an omnipotent and corrupt West, and it did so by retaining the old style of rhetoric. The notorious foreign cases consisted of a handful of Russian women, most of them living in Finland, from whom children had been removed by the social services between 2010 and 2012.¹¹ Russian media depicted the causes as false allegations of physical violence, usually because the children had said something about “a smack on the bum” in school (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. The media hype was extensive, and parental as well as mainstream media made extensive use of the entire battery of depravity stories, hyperboles, and straight falsifications. (To those who did

¹¹ For an account in English of some of the Finnish cases, and for examples of the predominant style of rhetoric, see http://voiceofrussia.com/2012_09_30/Finland-s-strange-policy-towards-Russian-children/ or http://english.pravda.ru/society/family/28-01-2014/126694-finland_juvenile_fascism-0/

not know it, Finland habitually incarcerates children of Russian decent in concentration camps in Lapland, to strip them of their language and culture.¹²⁾

Progress: Parental political correctness

By 2010, however, this kind of polemic was no longer specific to a marginalized cohort of ultranationalists. Power had, as it were, met the Parents' Movement halfway, and the political environment was by then nearly as anti-Western and paranoid as the early parental polemic (cf. Ortmann & Heathershaw 2012). To the politically opportunistic popular press, a benign coverage of the Parents' Movement was thus (I take it) a convenient way to prove one's political correctness, and occasional attempts at investigative journalism were drowned in the maelstrom of nationalist hyperbole.¹³ As noted by Irvine, truth is immaterial to this kind of rhetoric: if an incident turns out not to have happened in one place, it is assumed to occur somewhere else, some other time. The purpose of the narrative is not to provide facts, but to shock and accommodate an emotional climate (Irvine 2004:58). In this case, a causal link was established between the domestic upsurge of child removals and a foreign system gradually penetrating Russia, while the foreign cases merely confirmed that the Western world was already lost.

Finally, the “anti-YuYu” campaign found resonance among politically established actors. In 2010, the Communist Party, the ROC, the Federal Child Commissioner Pavel Astakhov, and others officially distanced themselves from what they vaguely referred to as “the Western model of Juvenile Justice.” So did Elena Mizulina, head of the Duma's committee for family questions and only a few years earlier an ardent advocate of Juvenile Justice. Then, however, she referred to a reform of the youth penitentiary system, as did most state administrators and legal professionals at the time. The Parents' Movement, in contrast, has always applied the term to any legal reform that might challenge parental authority, be it towards the state or towards children. The broad public, finally, received a diluted media interpretation with the rough meaning “anything that enables the authorities to remove

¹² http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2010/06/23/yuvenalnaya_yusticiya_put_k_fashizmu/ or http://english.pravda.ru/society/family/28-01-2014/126694-finland_juvenile_fascism-0/ (both sites accessed 2014-09-30).

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 15.10.2012, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-nw/piter/1582101.html> (accessed 2014-09-30). 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).

children.” Most probably the latter equated the “Western model” rejected by Mizulina and others, because at the same time as she renounced it, she also initiated the preparations of the abovementioned draft law “On social patronage.” To her, it had nothing to do with Juvenile Justice, while parental activists considered it to be the most dangerous attempt to introduce the system so far.

When the bill was finally launched in March 2012, it was met by a wave of protest manifestations all over the country. The largest ones in Moscow reportedly gathered over 4000 participants, and in the summer, activists gathered 140 000 petition signatures and delivered them to the Duma.¹⁴ By then, the Parents' Movement had grown considerably. Since 2010, new Parental Committees mushroomed all over the country, while a heterogeneous cluster of already existing organizations and movements adopted Juvenile Justice as a top priority. Most of these are primarily nationalist but in some cases more pro-Soviet than Orthodox; hence the largest one, Essence of Time, has become a nationwide movement on its own through the project “USSR 2.0.” Others had no previous ties with nationalist or Orthodox associations at all – Dimitry’s Parents’ Committee, for instance, consists mainly of his neighbors and acquaintances and, as he told me, considers itself to be secular. Although his website is one of very few that omits “Orthodoxy” among the stated goals and aims (but not, I should note, “tradition”), the content of many other sites reveal that in spite of the label, religion is not the primary uniting factor.

Throughout 2012 the parental rhetoric became increasingly triumphant, and in early 2013, a victory of sorts was achieved. Putin himself made a guest appearance at a parental congress, solemnly pledging to respect public opinion in the consideration of the draft law, since it does not take Russian family tradition into account. The bill on social patronage somehow disappeared on its way through the readings in the Duma, and it has not been brought up again. Judging by the abundant commentaries at parental web forums the same spring, the victory was twofold. The loathed draft law was defeated, even though everybody knew that it would soon be replaced by new juvenile encroachments (which was also the case). But first and foremost the concerned parents had manifested their strength as a social movement, proving themselves as worthy representatives of an authentic and patriotic civil society. A commentator from the Congress notes: “[Speakers] proposed the idea of a new

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http://ruskline.ru/monitoring_smi/2013/02/16/chto_eto_bylo_dobrozhelatelnokriticheskie_zametki_o_vserossijskom_roditelskom_sezde_9_fevralya/ (accessed 2014-09-30).

format of politics and of the birth of an authentic nationally oriented civic society,”¹⁵ “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.”¹⁶

Reflection: Where do we go now?

The above quotations conclude two vital criteria for the parental ideal about civiness. Patriotism excludes all purported liberals from the civil sphere, be they professionals or grassroots. Authenticity demarcates morally upright grassroots from any potentially corrupt establishment, 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 has resulted in increased heterogeneity, and already before Putin's speech it was evident that new 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, i.e. 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 content is cooperation with elite structures and, by implication, also how to manage “professionalism” in a benign way without suffering its negative consequences.

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 the Civic Chamber. Some have accepted to the strong disappointment of others, while a second contentious issue is the charismatic but controversial leader of Essence of Time, the largest new contribution to the Movement. Sergei Kurginyan has a past not only as a TV-profile but also as an academic, a political analyst, and a Kremlin advisor, which makes him a respected expert to some but deeply suspect to others. Still many of his critics agree that Putin would hardly have paid attention to the parental congress without Kurginyan's connections, and that

¹⁵ http://tgrcom.nichost.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1490:2013-02-25-00-47-10 (accessed 2014-09-30).

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http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2013/02/14/triumfalnaya_pobeda_roditelskogo_soobwestva_nad_yuvenalnoj_yusticiej/ (accessed 2014-09-30).

the novel opportunities to exert influence at higher political levels beg for a reconsideration of such involvement.

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 both as expert competence and as a capacity to communicate and cooperate with the state administration. At the same time, there is simultaneously a heightened awareness of the inherent risks of such approaches also by groups with a more pragmatic approach in these matters.

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, which has made civiness crucial to the movement's collective identity. Until approximately 2012, neither “purists” nor “pragmatists” had to face in practice the far reaching consequences of their own standpoints since, to put it bluntly, parental activists were not – in spite of elite rejections of “Western models” – invited to the more influential (and potentially polluting) political arenas. The main questions 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 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, is the question whether or not one is actually *willing* 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 & Rogers 2013), but such cooperation may simultaneously be very productive (Chebankova 2013). 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. So far, the negotiations continue, as summarized by an anonymous voice in a commentary field:

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 sipper through these cracks and lead the parental resistance astray.¹⁷

¹⁷ http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2012/12/28/davajte_pogovorim_o_glavnom (accessed 2014-09-30).

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