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The Men's Movement in Post-Soviet Russia

Diploma Thesis

Prague 2022

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Department of Gender Studies

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“I declare that I wrote the thesis independently using the sources dutifully cited and listed in the bibliography. The thesis was not used to obtain a different or the same title.”

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Prague, 25 June 2022

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Lyudmila Sharko

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to four persons, who played a significant role in my intellectual development: my Polish, Jewish and Ukrainian grandmothers and grandfathers. Even now, I still grieve their untimely deaths that occurred at the time when I was a child - the deaths from illnesses caused by the ordeal of forced deportation from the native land, famine and years in concentration camps of the Soviet GULag system. My grandmothers and grandfathers taught me to value the best human qualities: open-mindedness, humanness and perseverance and in all my professional or academic endeavors they will forever remain my guiding stars.

כדי הסבא האהוב שלי ג'ורג'
הוא לימד אותי להיות חזק.

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Найщирішу вдячність висловлюю своїм друзям в Україні за підтримку та розуміння; за інтерес до моїх творів; за те, що завжди поруч зі мною.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION:

A simplified version of the BGN/PCGN transliteration system^A is used in this thesis to romanize words written in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. In the simplified version no apostrophes are used for the Cyrillic letters ‘Ъ’ and ‘ь’.

Unless otherwise stated, the translations of titles or direct quotations from the texts or video transcripts, originally written or said in the Russian language, are mine.

^A <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/romanisation-systems/russian-romanization-april-2019>

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the men's movement in post-Soviet Russia – the first grass-root gender-based movement of men and a social phenomenon unique for the whole post-Soviet area that emerged in Russia in 2000.

The social phenomenon was studied by the method of non-participant remote ethnography, involving multi-year observation of online activity of the Russian men's community, using the theoretical framework, built on R. Connell's masculinity theory and the Russian and Western academic sources. The online texts and video narratives of the research sample were analyzed focusing on the social and economic reasons for this men's movement beginning and the evolution of their cause from anti-feminist backlash to a more progressive and gender-sensitive one over the 2000-2021 period of existence. The liberal wing of the Russian Men's Movement, the Egalitarian Men's Movement, undergoes special scrutiny to determine whether it signifies that progressive trend in the Russian masculinity transformation. The research project provides insight into the controversial views of the Russian men on feminism and the social role of women, as well as into the ways the Russian men construct, perform and contest their masculinities with all the contradictions and inconsistencies that this process may involve.

Keywords: Post-Soviet, Russian men's movement, Russian masculinity, masculinity project, progressive masculinity, anti-feminist, gender equality

POST-RESEARCH NOTE

All events described in this paper have occurred until 31 December 2021 and the data presented herein have been collected from the open online sources by this date.

As of June 2022, the situation with the social phenomenon analyzed in this paper is as follows: two websites of the Russian Men's Movement – MensRights.ru and <https://www.egmrm.ru/> – are not accessible, except for the webpages archived by Google; the Egalitarian Men's Movement have been renamed to the “Rights Protection Movement”; following the Russia's invasion in Ukraine and the start of war, the unity of nine activists, representing the research sample, broke: in YouTube videos some of these men openly supported the invasion, one man openly opposed it, others avoid the war subject in their video content and overall remarkably reduced their YouTube activity. Some movement's supporters have already voiced their concern in YouTube comments that the men's movement in Russia is dead.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction includes brief description of the background for my choice of the topic of study, explanation of some terminology, overview of the geographical area under study and of historical context of the post-Soviet masculinities' formation, as well as discussion of the study relevance, the research goal and questions and, finally, the statement and outline of the thesis.

Background

This thesis examines the Russian men's movement – a unique for the post-Soviet area cultural phenomenon – the first grassroots, gender-based movement of men that emerged in post-Soviet Russia in 2000, nine years after the Soviet Union's demise, and that by 2018 won some following all over the country. Around this time, the activists of this movement gained visibility in the Russian information space: they published books, some of which are still freely available or are on sale online, several interviews with the books' authors were published in the regional and mainstream media, and activists participated in two popular programs on the Russian television dedicated to family issues (Seleznev, 2017). Also, the fast increase in the number of men's groups in the Russian social network VK (former name: VKontakte) evidenced to the growing popularity of men's movement ideas. While before circa 2015 the men's movement was represented by two websites: Masculist.ru¹ and MensRights.ru² that served as major online platforms for exchange of ideas and sharing and discussing men's concerns, after 2016, the men's movement moved beyond these two sites and the range of men's groups declaring to belong to men's movement rapidly expanded on the social network VK. About this time, Masculist.ru renovated its design to become more user-friendly and until now remains the major Russian forum for men supporting the men's movement ideas.

According to observations, the more organized and visible Russian men's movement groups until 2018 included MGTOW Russia³, Masculist Initiative⁴, Incels' Movement, Men's State (Muzhskoje Gosudarstvo). These groups existed separately, some even competing with each other, and promoted differing ideas as concerns objectives, men's rights, family, relationships with women and the attitude to gender equality or sexual minorities. Some of them, for instance, Masculist Initiative, still directly forbids its members to disseminate ideas

¹ <https://www.masculist.ru/>

² <https://mensrights.ru/>

³ <https://vk.com/mgtowrussian>

⁴ https://vk.com/mra_initiative

promoted by other men's groups. The real number of various men's groups in the Russian virtual space is difficult to determine because they spring up and disappear very quickly or may be deleted by the online media for spreading hateful content or calls for violence against women or gay men.

I started to follow seven of such VK groups in 2016, and to date only two of them still exist – MensRights⁵ with over 37K members and The RealMen⁶ with 485 members, while others either were deleted or are no longer active. Also, the group Men's State (Muzhskoje Gosudarstvo) once very active since 2016 ceased to exist in 2020, when their account in VK was deleted based on other users' complaints and the founder has narrowly escaped a prison term and left Russia (Mazanov, 2020).

The research of all available (though scarce) online sources of information about men's movement in Russia helped me to trace its history starting from 2000 and earmark some specific features and transformations, which will be detailed in further chapters.

From the beginning, the Russian men's movement proclaimed a backlash, anti-feminist agenda and existed as an invisible, almost underground, unorganized community. With the time and emergence of more men's groups with a range of diverse agendas, the rhetoric gradually changed from the radically oppositional to feminism and women in general to a more collaborative one. By now, there are two men's movement groups with more progressive approach pursuing the social change towards gender equality and tolerant to feminism. One is Masculist Initiative existing only as a small group on the online platform VK that declares to support full equality of its members irrespective of their gender or sexual preferences. Another one is the group, which is the subject of this study - Egalitarian Men's Movement, founded in October 2018 by the long-term members of the Russian Men's Movement, who were active in developing and maintaining Masculist.ru website. While the former is barely known and has only three thousand members, the latter is the most active, has own website (egrmm.ru) and eventually gained some visibility through the Russian mainstream press, television and radio as well as due to the active creation of YouTube content by its activists. Egalitarian Men's Movement (further throughout this thesis referred to as the "EMM") was organized end of 2018, when the Russian Men's Movement (hereinafter referred to as the "RMM") split and men, who were dissatisfied with the outdated patriarchal and misogynistic ideas promoted by the oldest RMM members, joined the EMM.

⁵ <https://vk.com/mensrights>

⁶ <https://vk.com/therealmen>

I chose to focus my study on the EMM, which is only a small part of the RMM, because I assumed, based on their activities, that they offer to men a new progressive agenda and, at least judging by their Charter and Manifesto⁷, they declare to distance themselves from the old RMM's objectives of restoration patriarchy in Russia as according to them it is the only way to address the problems in relationships between sexes, high divorce rates and a growing number of fatherless households.

Terminology:

Russian Masculinity and Russian men

The terms "Russian masculinity" or "Russian men" for the purpose of this research are used as umbrella terms relevant to men from post-Soviet Russia, without highlighting their ethnic and class differences. The initial intention was to analyze the Russian masculinities' variations from the perspective of gender and class intersection, including a race/ethnicity dimension, since Russia is a multi-nation federal state and it would be reasonable to expect that RMM and EMM have supporters and activists of different ethnic origins and social status. Then the idea was abandoned after the thorough study of the data showed that the chosen sample is composed of men of similar social status and financial standing, and that men of non-Russian ethnic origin (e.g. Tatars, Korean) in the chosen sample do not display any ethnic differences and in the studied part of their video content identify themselves as Russians. On this reason, the analysis of influence of class and ethnicity on the RMM ideology or on performance of masculinity by RMM/EMM men is not a part of this research. Following consideration of the data obtained on this issue, I assumed that the terms "Russian masculinity / masculinities" and "Russian men" are appropriate for this project as they focus on the masculinities formed within the common cultural context of post-Soviet Russia.

Progressive

The definition of the word "progressive" as regards defining to what type of movement the EMM belongs, is quoted here from the online resource Dictionary.com:

"making progress toward better conditions; employing or advocating more enlightened or liberal ideas, new or experimental methods, etc.:

Progressive ideas or systems are new and modern, encouraging change in society".

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/progressive>

Geographical Region of Study

My initial research design included much wider scope, and I planned to study activities of the men's movement, originated in Russia, within the wider area of several states

⁷ <https://www.egmrm.ru/manifesto>

– former parts of the Soviet Union with large shares of the Russian-speaking population. Later, following a closer look at the RMM history and at the geographic locations of RMM supporters and activists shown online, the decision was taken to narrow the scope of the research to include the geographical area of Russia only. Main reason for this decision was the understanding that the largest RMM community is located within Russia's territory and that RMM (and EMM) has not gained much support in other post-Soviet states. For instance, my research found only five RMM supporters in Kazakhstan, Latvia, Ukraine and Belarus. It must be acknowledged though that in other, even distant Western countries (the US and Canada) there are RMM supporters – Russian-speaking men, who once emigrated from post-Soviet states, but their number is too small to pay special attention to and they are not very active online.

Research on Men and Masculinities by Russian scholars. Research Goal.

The study of academic sources at the preparatory stage of this project revealed certain differences between the research on men and masculinity in Western countries and the post-Soviet countries as expounded below.

For the objective reasons, the Soviet (before 1991) sociologists turned their attention to gender and sexuality studies after the proclamation of Gorbachev's Perestroika in 1985, in the last years of the Soviet Union existence, due to the removal of ideological barriers by the Soviet government and opening up the country to the influx of Western social theories. There was an objectively conditioned difference though: while Western men's studies have been driven by and developed together with the women's / feminist studies and within the feminist theory framework, but as its separate area (e.g. H. Brod, R. Connell, J. Hearn, M. Kaufman; M. Kimmel, M. Messner and others), men's studies in the post-Soviet region formed a minor part of gender and sexuality studies and were and still are based on various Western social and feminist theories adapted to the post-Soviet context (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2018). Based on the academic men's studies literature reviewed for this project, the Western theorist most often cited by the post-Soviet researchers is the Australian feminist scholar Raewyn Connell with the concepts of fluid nature of masculinity depending on social and personal factors, of multiple masculinities (Connell, 2005) and of hegemonic masculinity respectively (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

My understanding is that the sociological science in the former Soviet countries did not produce such a significant theoretical work in men's studies as its Western counterpart. Among the known Russian researchers of men and masculinity the following can be named: Ihor Kon (2009); Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2000, 2018), Irina Tartakovskaya (2016).

Based on the preliminary study of literature, the research of the Soviet and post-Soviet men and masculinities is available from Western scholars (Rebecca Kay, 2007; Ashwin, Eichler, 2012; Pilkington, 1996) or from the Russian scholars in collaboration with Western colleagues (Rotkirch and Temkina. Ashwin and Lytkina, Pilkington and Omelchenko). However, these authors focus solely on masculinities and their transformations within the post-Soviet period or on post-Soviet youth subcultures (Pilkington & Omelchenko, 2010), but the oppositional Russian men's movement did not attract attention of any researchers, so far. Now, twenty years after its emergence, men's movement in post-Soviet Russia still remains unexplored both by the post-Soviet and Western scientific communities.

The goal of this research project is to partially fill this gap and offer some insight into the nature of the Russian men's movement and masculinities representation within this movement. The RMM is a unique phenomenon for the post-Soviet area because it is an example of activism growing from below, from the masses of population, unauthorized by the state institutions of power. This phenomenon is quite unusual for the countries with centuries of existence within the paternalistic government systems, where all changes used to be initiated from above – either by monarch or by Soviet Party leadership (Randall, 2012; Nowakowski, 2012). On this reason the research of RMM/EMM can offer a better understanding of how the new type of the Russian masculinity is formed and contested in the situation of the radical social, political and economic change.

The relevance of my project therefore is conditioned by a complex social situation in post-Soviet Russia, where the patriarchal and progressive attitudes coexist and oppose each other (Mercurieva, 2019). On the one hand, the old patriarchal traditions and deeply rooted gender stereotypes of “a real man” and of “a real woman” are shared by the majority of both male and female population without any critical reflection as shown by regular polls (VCIOM, 2021). On the other hand, since Russia is (not yet) closed to the world, as, for example, North Korea, some part of the population learns about and strive to accept more progressive egalitarian principles, which fit better what is called a modern society. This situation of co-existence of two opposite social strivings: desire to preserve the patriarchal status-quo and desire for the social progressive change creates certain ambivalence for men's movement in Russia. The analysis of the program documents of EMM and the video content created by its activists exposed the major contradiction: EMM activists proclaiming progressive agenda and rejection of patriarchy, still are not free from the patriarchal values in the way they self-identify as men or conceptualize their relationships with women. This

existence in a situation of two conflicting realities creates an especially interesting case for the sociological study.

Research Questions

By studying the men's movement in post-Soviet Russia as a previously unexplored social phenomena, I wanted to compose a genealogy of the movement and trace the transformation of their agenda and objectives that will serve the basis for the analysis and defining the type of masculinity project they offer to the men in Russia. Hence, two research questions have been formulated as follows: Research Question 1: *What are the reasons for the Russian Men's Movement (RMM) creation?* and Research Question 2: *Does the Egalitarian Men's Movement, a progressive RMM's wing, offer a new masculinity project to the men in Russia?* These questions will be explored in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Thesis Statement

The study of online resources and collected data suggests that a set of intertwined social, economic, global and personal factors prompted the anti-feminist RMM emergence, that the EMM signifies a gradual transformation of the Russian masculinity towards a more progressive gender-sensitive type and that the EMM in this sense cannot be defined as a purely anti-feminist backlash movement, despite that it is not free from the outdated patriarchal views on the gender roles, existing in contemporary Russia.

Thesis Synopsis

This thesis comprises six parts, including Introduction and Conclusion. The first part is the introduction to the scope, goal, terminology, providing also the description of the geographical region under study and a brief discussion of the research goal and questions, study relevance and the thesis statement. Chapter 1 includes a review of Western and Russian academic literature on men, masculinities and men's movements, and the third chapter discusses the research methodology, ethics of the research and the reflexive positioning of a researcher in this project. Fourth chapter presents the genealogy of the RMM with some detailed information about its most prominent activists, and also contains analysis of the reasons for the RMM emergence to address the Research Question 1. Chapter 4 contains the analysis within the scope of Research Question 2 and discussion of the analysis results to prove the credibility of the thesis statement. The last part concludes the thesis and is followed by the list of references, including Appendix with the list of YouTube channels of the EMM activists, representing the chosen sample.

Chapter 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of two aspects related to the RMM: reasons for the emergence of the Russian Men's Movement (Research Question 1) and the type of masculinity project the EMM offers to the Russian men (Research Question 2), including, as a side task, defining the movement type the RMM and EMM belong to (oppositional/backlash or collaborative) (Connell, 2005).

The theoretical part includes a review of literature on sociological research dedicated to men, masculinity, and reasons for the men's movements that will contribute to addressing the research questions related to the men's movement in post-Soviet Russia. Also, this chapter provides explanation of concepts, pivotal for understanding the phenomenon under study: masculinity, multiple masculinities, hegemonic masculinity, gender order and gender regime. The main conceptual source used for this research is the book *Masculinities* (2005) by R. Connell.

The foundational concept for this research is 'masculinity' as, based on the sources (Connell, 2005; Hearn, 2006), it will be instrumental in understanding the reasons of the masculinity related issues, the causes of men's movements creation, including men's movement in post-Soviet Russia, emerging as the opposition of men to social changes whether achieved by the feminist movement or ongoing due to other political reasons.

However, the review of the academic sources theorizing masculinity shows that defining the masculinity concept is a complicated task since the scholars provide a variety of different perspectives on masculinity and either contest the existing definitions or even reject the concept as such (Connell, 2005; Hearn, 2006; Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2018). Connell acknowledges in *Masculinities* (2005) that, as regards masculinity, no definitive science field has been produced by research not due to the low level of research, but due to the nature of the phenomena which makes the task impossible. There is a contradiction in the popular understanding of masculinity: on the one hand it is believed as something inherent in men, but on the other hand it is something that men are supposed to achieve (as "becoming a real man") (Pascoe & Bridges, 2016). To get a deeper insight into the concept, Connell suggests that masculinity should be viewed in a much broader perspective: first of all, not as an isolated coherent object, but as a part of a larger structure, that is gender relations. Thus, the analysis of gender relations and the way masculinities are located within this structure is, according to Connell, the task to accomplish to define the real nature of masculinity and dynamics of change of its various forms (Connell, 2005, p. 67).

Connell argues that masculinity and femininity are culturally defined concepts that contrast each other and that the interactions of relevant practices constitute the process of “doing gender” (Connell, 2005, p. 68). This is a constructionist approach to masculinity accepted by other scholars both of feminist spectrum and those conducting research in gender history (cf. Kimmel, 2013; Hearn, 2006; Mosse, 1998).

According to Connell then the masculinity can be defined as the practice of engaging in gender relations and the way it reveals itself “in bodily experience, personality and culture” (2005, p. 71). Connell sees the task of gender research in discarding the idea of fixed sex roles (men versus women) because it ignores the diversity and fails to address inequality in gender relations (Connell, 2005).

Introduction of the masculinity concept attracted criticism from other men’s researchers, who considered it vague or unsatisfactory or suggesting to speak about men not masculinity (Brod, 1994; Hearn, 2004). Connell (2000), while acknowledging some difficulties in defining the term, and its wrongful use by some authors as “a simplified and static notion of identity” (2000, p. 5), justified the use of the *masculinity* term by the need to find the language means to discuss the pattern of conduct of men in order to distinguish it from other patterns existing within and formed by the gender domain.

Since the target group for this research are Russian men, it would be viable to compare Connell’s definition of masculinity with the same of a prominent Russian sexologist Igor Kon. He also defines masculinity as an identity, constructed, performed and changing within a concrete social environment and reflecting the popular opinions and stereotypes characteristic of the given culture. On the other hand, Kon suggests dissecting this gender category to see that masculinity has three different meanings: “descriptive” (behaviors and character traits), “ascriptive” (symbolic features ascribed to a man in a given culture) and “prescriptive” (manly ideal or normative masculinity – “a real man’ stereotype based on the idea of hegemonic masculinity) (Kon, 2009, pp. 31-34). These meanings much likely correspond to three approaches to defining masculinity, critiqued by Connell: essentialist, positivist and normative (2005). But while Connell points out at the weaknesses and contradictions in these approaches, Kon, despite leaning to the constructivist approach in understanding the masculinity, does not provide any criticism of the said “meanings” and in that respect Kon’s study seem to be outdated. Russian sociologists Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2018) in the studies of men use the Kon’s term of “prescriptive” masculinity expressed in popular social gender stereotypes, which can also be defined as the normative masculinity accepted by the society at large.

Connell (2000, 2005) presents a dynamic view of masculinity and femininity, which are gender projects and configurations of practice. Connell argues that gender configures such social practices as policymaking in the state, internal division of labor or recruitment in institutions. This view allows for understanding of the two-ways dynamic process of production of gender by social structures and vice versa. Thus, the configuring influence of gender is registered in any analysis of any aspect of social world where not only gendered individuals but also gendered institutions (such as the state itself, the army or schools) are produced. Connell moves from general theorization of gender to considering the ways of gendered practice and gender relations production in a particular gender order. In this theory, the 'gender order' is defined as a configuration of gender relations specific for the certain space and historic time, while 'gender regime' denotes the gender relations in smaller social institutions such as a family that may have a gender regime differing from the prevailing gender order (Connell, 2000; 2005). Kimmel and Hearn further specify gender order as the expression of power dynamic between masculinities and between the collective masculinity and femininity, where some men can dominate over women and over other men (Kimmel, 2002; Hearn, 2006).

Theorizing about gender, Connell argues that it "is an internally complex structure, where a number of different logics are superimposed. This is a fact of great importance for the analysis of masculinities" (2005, p. 73). Therefore, any form of masculinity is prone to contradiction in its nature and can vary over historical periods unpredictably (Connell, 2005). Recognizing class and gender intersections in various class-based masculinities, which both cooperate and conflict with each other in occupational, organizational and other settings, Connell formulated a model of 'multiple masculinities' (for example, protest, subordinated, complicit, or marginalized) and the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' to explain the complex and diverse character of gendered identities and practices within the given gender order (Connell, 2005; Hearn, 2006). However, Connell warns against the simplistic understanding of the multiple masculinities and falling into a mistake of making a simple scheme as, for instance, an opposition of masculinities of different social classes. She underlines that gender relationships in general should be studied as a dynamically developing process (Connell, 2005).

Kimmel also pluralizes the term of masculinity justifying it by the fluid nature of this social phenomenon, which is contingent on the time and location and intersect with such social dividers as class, age, ethnicity and others (Kimmel, 2002). Hearn, however, sees some problems in the idea of multiple masculinities arguing the term is used too widely and

imprecisely and is prone to free interpretations. This, he argues, poses a possibility of earmarking an infinite number of masculinity forms masking various features found in any given individual (Hearn, 2006, pp. 43-44).

As has been discussed above, masculinity is a complex social practice and bears the following features, important for this research: every masculinity is constructed of four mutually interacting aspects (power, production, emotional and symbolic relations); relationships among all masculinities are those of hierarchy and contestation; moreover, every individual man cannot choose a masculinity to his preference, but has to enact various configurations of masculinity in the social power hierarchy according to his status and depending on the given social context and the type of interaction a man is involved (Connell, 2005; 2000; Kimmel, 2002; Kon, 2009).

As regards this research, the target group of men to be studied is mono-racial, all ethnically identifying themselves as Russians, all belonging to educated middle-class financially stable professionals with only some age variations. Therefore, the aspect of gender interaction or intersection with class or race/ethnicity and consequent inequality will not be considered in this research.

The existence of multiple masculinities implies that there are more privileged masculinities that gain more benefits in the form of power, authority or money than the others from the situation of social inequality and what they are willing to defend. Connell defines these benefits as the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell, 2005, p. 74; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and the privileged masculinity as “hegemonic”, which supports the dominance of some men over women and over other, unprivileged groups of men (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Since the concept of hegemonic masculinity is important for this research, during the study of academic literature, special attention was paid to its contingent and situational nature as this type of masculinity is usually established in a situation when the institutional power of the state conform to the cultural ideals of the society. Another feature of hegemonic masculinity is its contestability as in certain social conditions and at certain time it may be challenged by feminism or other contesting men’s groups, representing subordinated and complicit masculinities (Connell, 2005, p. 76).

The fluid character of masculinities in general and hegemonic masculinity in particular has been suggested by other sociologists, who studied men in post-Soviet Russia based on Connell’s theoretical framework (Ashwin, & Lytkina, 2004; Vanke & Tartakovskaya, 2016; Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2012, 2018). They note that hegemonic masculinity underwent some evolution after 1991 in post-Soviet Russia: while in the 90s, at the time of political

turbulence and economic instability, the hegemonic masculinity was associated with high material status, physical strength and the ability to resort to violence, in the 2000s it became characterized not only by success in business or a post in government bodies, but also by instability and the lack of legitimacy. The sociologists highlight that even successful men claiming hegemony in modern Russia are aware of the instability of their hegemonic position, because this hegemony has been granted by the powerful state and any moment can be taken back. Thus, a man who may be powerful in relation to the complicit masses of population, lives in fact as a slave to the state authorities (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2018, p. 57). They also argue that, on the one hand, the inequality among Russian men persists based on the relationships of hegemony, subordination and marginalization, but, on the other hand, the position of men changes and men lose patriarchal privileges due to the changing position of women (Vanke & Tartakovskaya, 2016). Some masculinities support the patriarchal order with the hegemonic masculinity, while others subvert it by forming other masculinity types (pro-feminists, transgenders, etc.). Zdravomyslova and Temkina define the masculinity hierarchy as “a complex dynamic continuum of inequalities and privileges” that in turn produces relations of conflict and contradiction between different masculinities and within any given masculinity type (Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2018, p. 67).

Despite the differences in defining and understanding masculinity, the scholars definitely agree on two features of masculinity. First line of agreement is that this is a social construct and second is that masculinity is not a fixed social phenomenon, but is the one that varies among cultures, historical periods and individuals. This constructionist approach debunks the myth that human behavior is determined by their biology and exposes the truth that inequality between men and women is not something natural and predetermined (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016). Also, the researchers agree that people in the course of social interactions continuously construct and contest or submit to the existing practices of masculinity. Some groups of men representing various masculinities not only can compete with each other but also can oppose to any action perceived by them as a threat to their privilege of domination either over women or other subordinated or marginalized masculinities (Connell, 2005). Connell argues that men by applying a number of tactics to defend the hegemonic masculinity coupled with large number of economic resources in their possession have been largely successful over the past decades providing an example of Eastern Europe, where, after the Soviet Union collapse in 1991, the system of social guarantees for women was broken (Connell, 2005, 2005a). However, while it was certainly true for the 90s, now the situation

improved in post-Soviet states⁸. As of 2019, according to the statistic report (CIS Statistics, 2019) on post-Soviet states, a number of measures have been taken to restore the social guarantees for women and motherhood support over the past two decades as well as to ensure gender equality in education and employment through adoption of relevant laws and decrees. Nowadays in Russia alone more than three thousand NGOs are available to protect women's interests, including those involved in feminist activities (Bukina, 2017). The largest of them is the *Union of Women of Russia*⁹ – an NGO opened in 1990 for protecting the interests of women, family, motherhood that has local offices in all regions of Russia. It is supported by the Russian government in implementation of their initiatives, cooperates with the *Alliance of Women's Organizations of Post-Soviet States* and with various parts of the UN Organization, OSCE. On the other hand, same statistics show the problems of violence against women and the unused potential of educated women in employment and business. These problems coupled with emergence of the men's rights movement in post-Soviet Russia is the evidence that not all men are ready to accept the ongoing gender equality efforts and that the masculinity ideology is still strong in post-Soviet area (Janey *et al.*, 2006).

While reviewing the academic sources discussing the causes for the men's oppositional movements, one can meet the concept "crisis of masculinity" (Connell, 2005, Kon, 2009; Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2012, 2018). It is used, for example, by Kaufman (1999), referring to the opposition of men to feminist movement, which challenged the men's power and was immediately felt by men as a threat of "dislodging the hegemonic masculine psyche" (Kaufman, 1999, p. 80). Connell contests the concept and argues that "crisis" can apply to a system, and since masculinity does not belong to such category and is a configuration of practice, so logically there cannot be a crisis of configuration. Therefore, for the purpose of theocratization either we should speak about the "crisis of a gender order" (Connell, 2005, p. 84) or the "crisis of gender identity" (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004, p. 197).

On the other hand, Connell acknowledges that there are crisis tendencies in the gender order structures such as power relations. It is seen, despite the men's opposition, in that the patriarchal power has lost much of its legitimacy due to the actions of feminism and LGBT movement challenging the dominant heterosexuality (Connell, 2005a). In this situation various groups of men react differently: some seek the way to collaborate with women for change, some prefer complicit relations, others choose the open anti-feminist stance.

⁸ No data is provided here for the states of Eastern Europe, which have become members of European Union, since it is not relevant to this research.

⁹ <http://wuor.ru/>

From the onset of Women's Liberation movement in the West, there were groups of men that supported the women's efforts for gender equality due to common interests in reforming masculinity (Clatterbaugh, 2000). Nowadays there are numerous campaigns and initiatives such as *Men for Gender Equality* (Sweden), *International Planned Parenthood Federation* (United Kingdom), *Sahayog* (India) and the *White Ribbon Campaign* (Canada), advocating gender equality, organized both by NGOs and local governments. The largest international institutions, participating in this work, include, for example, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) founded in 1976 as a part of the UN Organization; the European Institute for Gender Equality cooperating with *MenEngage*¹⁰ - a global alliance of NGOs and UN agencies that aim at engaging men in gender equality work. There are many examples of such work not only in developed countries, but all over the world that show that men can oppose patriarchy and go beyond the rigid frame of certain masculinity types.

However, as the purpose of this research is studying the RMM, which initially was founded as an anti-feminist movement, the study of academic literature includes the overview of scholarly opinion as to the causes for this type of movements' emergence.

Parallel to the men advocating the change in gender relations, other groups of men in developed countries have been involved in backlash or oppositional movements (Connell, 2005, pp. 248-253; Kimmel, 2005). These are anti-feminist "men's rights" movements organized to resist the change, pursuing the male self-interests. Such movements first appeared in the U.S. in the late 1970s and this tendency is continuing until now. They are still small-scale and do not have much influence on the social or political life or much support from the communities since some of them openly proclaim men's and women's interests as opposing each other (Connell, 2005, p. 253; Clatterbaugh, 2000).

Scholars offer a wide spectrum of reasons for the men's opposition to the social change, which includes economic ones, growing women's employment rates and the loss of a breadwinner's role by men, among others. Kimmel's opinion is that men's oppositional movements are formed by men, who are resentful to the "collapse of domestic patriarchy" (Kimmel, 2005, p. 416) and express the desire to return to the traditional gender order in the family and the society.

According to Connell (2005), the inequality among men's groups based on class, race, age, ethnicity and other differences lead to the uneven distribution of 'patriarchal dividends' among them. Therefore, as Connell argues, the advantages for men involve certain

¹⁰ <http://www.menengage.org>

disadvantages. For instance, men pay more taxes, constitute the majority of workforce in dangerous and life-risking occupations (army, firefighting, police forces), men experience stronger pressure from the society to be employed and be a main breadwinner for the family (Connell, 2005). Besides, according to the statistics data on post-Soviet countries (CIS Statistics, 2019), for example, in Russia, men's life span is about ten years shorter than that of women, there are more men among those who commit suicide not to say about the higher percentage of men in the prison population. The situation of existing diversity of masculinities, complex and often conflicting relations between them coupled with social and economic pressures on men may serve a fertile ground for the men uniting in the men's movement, often with the agenda oppositional not only to feminism, but to women in general (Connell, 2005; Flood, 2004).

One more reason is marked by Connell, who warns that it should be a mistake to consider the patriarchal ideas of preserving inequality simply obsolete, because these ideas seem to attract some groups of younger men to the ranks of men's rights movement nowadays (Connell, 2005) as happened in case of the RMM, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Moreover, men from other countries can take over these ideas and organize men's movement locally. One example is an explicitly backlash movement *Men Going Their Own Way* (MGTOW) initially organized in the U.S. This is an antifeminist group, comprised of straight, white men now active in the U.S., Canada and Europe, that espouse the abandonment of any relations with women proclaiming that Western society is gynocentric and corrupted by feminism (Lin, 2017). MGTOW ideas and mode of activity have been copied by some men in post-Soviet Russia by organizing small online groups, which keep low-key and the majority of Russian are not aware of their existence.

The resistance to any gender equality action may be not only in the open form of the backlash movements, but can go on as routine daily activities (Wootton, 1993). Referring to studies, Connell (2005) states that in the occupational environment and schools the masculinized culture still persists, there are men who maintain their dominance in households and some businesses and public institutions resist the gender equality measures. Same as Kimmel (2005), Connell argues that the reason for this resistance is the fear of men to lose patriarchal dividends, the threat to the masculine identity presupposing that the men must be tough and command women in all aspects of life (Connell, 2005; 2012).

There is another reason for men's resistance, noted by Connell, which is not so evident. Connell argues that gender-equality policies of the state or institutions aimed at actions to benefit women, where men are represented as a background element, can cause the

oppositional or antifeminist response from men to any such policy (Connell, 2005). This was indirectly confirmed by the Russian sociologist Irina Tartakovskaya, senior researcher at the Federal Research Sociological Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In the interview to the Russian Office of RFE/RL in response to the question about the reasons for the Russian men organizing men's right protection groups, she explained that "the patriarchal traditions prevailing in Russia do not imply the creation of special services to protect the rights of men. Their rights are enshrined traditionally and seem to be something natural" (Merkurieva, 2019). In her opinion, men react aggressively to the social change causing the change in relations between the sexes (Merkurieva, 2019). As will be discussed further, the men's exclusion from the state health-care or other state funded programs is one of the claims of the RMM to the Russian authorities, because multiple programs and initiatives are aimed at protection of women and children only.

Connell sees the troubling consequence of such defense and opposition of men in slowing down the social justice changes, dominance of hegemonic masculinity in institutional systems, increase of economic inequality and development of military means of destruction all over the world, i.e., the spread of masculinized culture. In Connell's opinion the situation may be improved by gender-equality reform strategies that should involve men as active counterparts of women. In fact, since historically men were also instrumental in the success of the feminist's initiatives, the active engagement of men, making them visible in women's discourses should be taken into account in pursuit of the social change. For this purpose, the problems of men and boys, the issue of changing and conflicting masculinities construction within the existing gender order, as well as the politics of men's movements should become the subject of discussions and wider research (Connell, 2005, 2012, 2014).

The conclusions to be made upon the review of concepts of Connell's theory, including masculinity, gender order, hegemonic masculinity and the masculinities fluidity, the complex relations among them, and the reasons for the emergence of oppositional men's rights movements, are as follows:

The terms of 'masculinity' and 'hegemonic masculinity' in Connell's theory are contested by other scholars, but for the time being they serve well for the purpose of the masculinity analysis as justified by Connell (2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Although the notion of 'masculinity' as a stable and self-evident thing persists in public conscience, the true understanding of masculinity can be achieved only through the distinguishing characteristic of plurality and intricate relations of conflict and cooperation

among the diverse masculinities, shaped by power and inequality, forming a conditional hierarchy from hegemonic through complicit, subordinated down to the marginalized ones. Moreover, every masculinity form is not something fixed in time and space, but is a fluid configuration of practice, which is always contingent, contestable and contested and subject to change. It applies also to the hegemonic masculinity, which, being on the hierarchy top, may produce the appearance of stability, but is also historically and socially constructed and enacted by individuals and groups in varying ways (Connell, 2001; 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hearn, 2006; Kimmel *et al.*, 2005; Brod, 1987).

Masculinity is a gender project and configuration of practice and its study helps to reveal the dynamic, configuring influence of gender on any aspect of social world, where social structures produce gender and vice versa in a given gender order (Connell, 2001; 2005). Gender is interacting or intersecting with other social structures of class and race and the relations of inequality within the masculinities hierarchy can be understood only with consideration of gender relations as a major component of social life. So to say, various class-based masculinities both cooperate and conflict with each other in occupational, organizational and other settings (Connell, 2005; Hearn, 2006).

Men enjoy certain advantages in the society, including higher incomes, possession of material resources. However, these advantages condition the disadvantages: societal pressure to earn more and be successful, shorter life span and higher mortality rates as compared with women due to various reasons (Connell, 2005; CIS Statistics, 2019). The important point is that benefits brought by the said advantages are distributed unevenly among masculinities and this is the fertile ground for conflicts. Therefore, the attitude of different groups of men to the efforts against inequality varies from full support or quiet complicity to the stark opposition. The latter mode of action is chosen by groups of men forming explicit backlash movements aiming at protection of men's rights, as they understand them, against the feminist actions or gender equality measures of their governments (Connell, 2005; Wootton, 1993). Despite that, these backlash movements are small-scale and have no political influence, within the last decade they remarkably became more active and, judging by online resources, receive more support from the younger men (Lin, 2017).

The reasons for the opposition to any attempts to transform masculinity also vary: this may be an economic reason, when women are seen as competitors in employment, or the fear of losing the privileged position and power in the society. However, one more reason for the men's opposition that can be eliminated is that men are not fully involved in women's initiatives, while, as the history of Women's Liberation shows, men's support was also

important in the success of reforms for gender equality. Therefore, certain groups of men experiencing inequality should be more actively engaged in the activities to change the societies, most of which are far from being gender-equal.

The search for the academic sources specifically discussing opposition of men to gender equality measures and to feminist activities in post-Soviet Russia, shows that for the time being, men's movement in Russia as a new social phenomenon still remains unnoticed by local sociologists. The only source that has been found so far is the article by the Russian researcher Elizaveta Ruzankina, a holder of a graduate degree in philosophy, who focuses on the gender issues, feminist activism and inclusive education. Ruzankina's article *Men's Movements and Male Subjectivity* was published in 2010, where she argues that "Men's social movements in Russia are seen as a reaction to women's movements. They represent both backlash and generators of social reform" (Ruzankina, 2010, p. 8). However, despite the promising title and an introducing sentence cited above, Ruzankina theorizes all through the article on the male subjectivity and men's movement in the West, citing Foucault, Jane Flax, and Michael Kimmel, while men's movement in Russia is not mentioned elsewhere. In the same manner, a prominent Russian sexologist Igor Kon writes about Western men's movement mostly presenting summaries of Western sociologists' research (Kon, 2009). The only way therefore to investigate the men's movement in post-Soviet Russia and partially fill the research gap, is to study online resources, where representatives of RMM declare and promote their ideas. The empirical data gathered from the online resources and its analysis within the framework of the theoretical ideas, reviewed above in this chapter, will be expounded in Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis following the discussion of the research methodology, positionality and ethics.

Chapter 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The idea of research related to men's movement in post-Soviet Russia did not come spontaneously, but rather grew from several interests and experiences. Firstly, as a part of my life I lived in the Soviet Union and another part – in a post-Soviet country, I had an opportunity to experience and observe the life of men and women and dynamic changes in the families and relationships between them that occurred during the period of 1991-2000 transition from the socialist to the capitalist free market economy. Also, since 2016, I followed online and in social networks the activities of some men, who called themselves 'men's movement', were very secretive, almost all of them were present online under nicknames and they were continuously discussing how bad women were. Initially I thought that these were just some funny men, who release their discontent over personal issues with women online anonymously. With the time I saw their rhetoric changes and with the appearance of new activists they began to open up, started YouTube channels and it became interesting for me to find out why they call themselves 'men's movement', what grievances they have and what objectives they pursue. Thirdly, due to the study and extensive reading in feminist thought I obtained some, however limited, theoretical background relating to gender impact on social interactions and gender issues. These interests and experiences in comparing Soviet and post-Soviet relationships between genders, in following the activists' online activity and the study of academic feminist literature combined played a decisive role in the decision to explore the first gender-based grass-root movement of men in Russia – the RMM.

My initial intention was to examine the RMM in several post-Soviet countries, not in one country only. I intended to compose RMM's history, including its objectives and ideology, and explore the reasons for the RMM emergence by searching its roots in the Soviet past that would include exploring historical literature on gender roles, family models and youths' socialization in the Soviet Union. My plan was to get some of related data directly from the RMM men through the online interviews. However, with a closer look at the unexplored phenomenon and my failure to get these men's agreement to be interviewed, it became clear that (1) my initial goal is hard to achieve so I have to reformulate the research goal and questions; (2) this scope is too large for one thesis so I have to narrow it down; and (3) I have to choose a different research method. In more detail, I had to change my initial plans on three reasons:

Firstly, my attempts to contact two RMM men - active YouTubers - brought no expected results. One man (known online as Mikhail N.) first agreed, then became suspicious and after the long period of correspondence by e-mail, asking more and more personal questions about myself, in the end asked me to pay him a significant sum of money for the online interview, which I could not afford and the interaction stopped. Interestingly, that soon after our e-mail communication this activist posted a video on his YouTube channel titled Real and False Enemies of Men's Movement (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2020). In the video he warned other RMM men that there might be female feminists, who would try to contact them with evil intentions, though he did not specify what kind of evil intentions these may be. The second activist simply never responded to my e-mail request for an interview.

Secondly, while gathering data for my project by reading blog posts and watching videos of activists in the selected target group, I discovered that this RMM is a group of men, who are Russian nationals living in Russia, and who promote the RMM ideas through the Russian-language online platforms. It meant that I was wrong, thinking that this movement had wide support in other post-Soviet countries beyond Russia. I tried to determine the geographical area by searching through RMM activists' and supporters' accounts in the Russian social network VK. The search revealed that the majority of accounts belong to men living in Russia with small inclusion of men from other post-Soviet countries.

Also, I did extensive search through the Russian databases of published academic research papers (for example, in "Cyberleninka" - the largest Russian scientific electronic library¹¹), but no academic research on the Russian men's movement have been found.

2.2 Research Questions

Considering the above-described changes in my plan, for this research I chose the strategy encompassing two major phases. At the first stage I intended to acquire as much data as possible to understand the nature of this new phenomenon and determine what social, economic, global or personal factors prompted the decision to organize the men's movement in Russia. According to the Western masculinity researchers (cf: Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2002; Flood, 2004; Kimmel, 2013; Pascoe & Bridges, 2016), the men's movements in the West began as a reaction to women's fight for their rights, when women started to challenge "gendered ideologies of citizenship that bolstered systems of men's collective power and privilege" (Pascoe & Bridges, 2016, pp. 40-41). My aim was to find out if this was true for the men's movement in post-Soviet Russia.

¹¹ <https://cyberleninka.ru/>

The other stage of my research was to study the EMM, which was organized end of 2018 after the split of the RMM. My intention was to review the EMM objectives and examine the masculinity self-representations of the chosen sample of nine EMM activists. I wanted to explore how they define, perform and/or contest the masculinity within the social context of contemporary Russia on the individual and collective levels and if they share a common pattern of doing gender (Connell, 2005, 2005a).

The scope of this research therefore was to include a three-fold task: Firstly, compose a history of men's movement in post-Soviet Russia, including description of the ideological platform and agenda. Secondly, to examine the representation of masculinities in the online content and define how they are conceptualized, performed or contested by the EMM activists under study, and, finally, to reflect on the question if the EMM manifests the desire of the Russian men for the progressive social change within the post-Soviet cultural environment, or if the EMM was organized as a tool for men to re-negotiate their place in the hierarchy of masculinities caused by the fear of losing the masculine privilege. Hence the following research questions have been formulated: Research Question 1: What are the reasons for the Russian Men's Movement (RMM) creation? Research Question 2: Does the Egalitarian Men's Movement (EMM), a more progressive RMM's wing, offer a new masculinity project to the men in Russia?

Governed by the stated purpose of finding answers to the research questions and fulfilling the relevant tasks, the online sources, including YouTube, Masculist.ru, MensRights.ru and other online media in the Russian-language segment of the Internet, have been studied by the method of remote ethnography or studying cultural practices at a distance since my attempts as a female researcher to reach to the EMM members for direct interviews were met with hostility and suspicion and I had to finally abandon this idea. The observation and data gathering lasted over the period from 2017 through 2021, and then the empirical data have been analyzed to gain exposure to the ideas and perceptions of the chosen sample and gain understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

2.3 Choice of Method

After the clarification of my research goal and research questions, the second task was to choose appropriate methods for the research so that to decide how I can know what is to be known.

But first, two not less important questions should be discussed at least briefly: What makes my research feminist? Can a feminist researcher study men or masculinities? These questions were asked by the students of the Theological Faculty, when we discussed feminism

in general and the subject of my research. When I acknowledged that I study men's movement, which is generally understood as anti-feminist, these students were surprised and asked me how it is possible that the men's movement and masculinity can be the subject of research for a student of Gender Studies. I believe these are legitimate questions that invite some reflection and for this purpose I revert to the works of the feminist methodology scholars: Reinharz and Davidman (1992), Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) and Letherby (2003).

According to these authors, the distinguishing characteristic of feminist social research is that it is based on the feminist theory and give preference to the interpretive paradigm within the frame of qualitative methods, presupposing more reflexivity and special attention to the ethical non-authoritative attitude to the researched individuals or groups (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Also, for a feminist researcher it is important to study a person or a group not in isolation, but capture the rich experience and existence of gendered lives within a wider context of the network of social interactions and relationships with other people and institutions, producing knowledge that is locally situated. On this reason, feminists criticize the traditional social quantitative research methods since they are "context-stripping" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 145). Secondly, it mainly focuses on disempowered, oppressed groups, who are or may be politically irrelevant or even forced to exist on the margins of the society as happens to some subcultures that for some reasons have not caught attention of the traditional social science. By this focus, the feminist research aims at giving the voice to the oppressed or powerless, exposing inequalities and promoting social change to eliminate them or at least promote wide public debate to struggle for such a change (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 215). Overall, according to Ramazanoglu, "the point of doing feminist social research is not to score points for political correctness, or to attain methodological purity, but to give insights into gendered social existence that would otherwise not exist." (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 145). Certainly, from the feminist perspective, the RMM men cannot be called disempowered or oppressed as compared to the women situation. However, that is how the RMM activists represent themselves: as a social group oppressed based on their gender and they also acknowledge they are powerless because, they argue, Russia is a feminist state, where all power is in women's hands. This assumption will be discussed in more detail in the Chapter 3.

The answer to the second question "Can a feminist researcher study men or masculinities?" was in fact given in the above paragraph. However, it can be added that focusing on studying women does not make a social research feminist but the framing of

study with a feminist theory (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 145). As detailed in the Literature Review Chapter, to date the study of men, masculinities or men's movements that started back in the 70s has become an important part of the feminist scholarship and continues to develop. Finally, as I told these students, I fully agree with Connell (2005, 2005a, 2012, 2014) and others (Flood, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Smiler, 2015) who, while presenting shrewd critique and analysis of the backlash men's movements and masculinities call for the cooperation with men as beneficial for the feminists' cause of elimination of gender inequality.

As for the methodology of my research in the answer to above questions I would add that there are no particular methods that can be defined as purely feminist rather any qualitative or quantitative methods and techniques or their combination can be used within the framework of the feminist theory depending on the concrete research objectives and features (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 15; Reinharz, 1992). According to Letherby, "it is not the use of a particular method or methods which characterizes a researcher or a project as feminist, but the way in which the method(s) are used" (Letherby, 2003, p. 4).

2.3.1 Three Dimensions of Choice: Theory, Practice and Ethics

The choice of method is based on three dimensions: theory, practice and ethics of the research.

As for the theoretical dimension, methodologically this research rests on the constructivist paradigm, which means that any answers that will be given to the research questions are constructions, "inventions of human mind and hence subject to human error" (Guba&Lincoln, 2005, p.108). On the other hand, my research questions and the interpretation of obtained data are shaped and guided by the feminist theory.

From the feminist perspective, gender in general and masculinity and femininity in particular are not a set of biological, natural traits, given at birth, but social categories constructed individually and collectively within the given culture. Masculinity is not fixed but a changeable socially constructed category that is shaped and transformed under the influence of social, economic and political factors, including dominant ideology or religious traditions prevailing in a given culture. It is a historically and culturally situated phenomenon characteristic for the certain historic time and locality (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Gardiner, 2002). Based on the Connell's masculinity theory, the masculinity is examined in this research as a configuration of practice and as an individual gender project that each man in the given sample performs and transforms in the process of social interactions (Connell, 2005).

Speaking about the practical dimension that influenced the choice of research method, the important aspect to consider was how to gain access to the research sample. Initially I planned to conduct a series of online semi-structured interviews with at least ten RMM activists. This method was deemed attractive because for me the direct interaction with people is the best way to comprehend the phenomenon I am interested in as a researcher. Interviewing is also a method that grants certain flexibility to the researcher as there may be initiated a fruitful discussion with the interviewed respondent to reveal new valuable details for the research analysis. However, I had to abandon the idea to use interviewing after two attempts to directly reach the RMM activists had failed. Therefore, I had to find a method that would allow me to study the subject without any direct interaction in a covert mode and gather the data I need to make this research valid. After consideration of these concerns and factors, a method of distant observation or remote (online) ethnography was chosen – a qualitative method involving interpretive approach, which allows to study the nature of the social phenomenon as it develops during a lengthy period of time and grasp its meaning as it is experienced by people involved in the creation of this phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Mead *et al.*, 2000; Postill, 2016). Despite that qualitative research lacks the reliability or scientific representativeness of the quantitative methods like generation of statistic data through a quantitative survey, as one example, the benefit of the chosen method is that it is not content-stripping and help the researcher to grasp the meanings people attach to their activities and interactions observed (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 108).

I chose the method of **remote ethnography** or studying cultural practices at a safe distance (Mead *et al.*, 2000; Postill, 2016; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016) because my attempts as a feminist researcher to reach to the members of the RMM for interviews were met either with hostility and suspicion or my written requests were left without response. Consequently, I was forced to seek for an appropriate method to reach the aim of my research. On the other hand, knowing that practically all activities of the RMM/EMM over two decades (2000-2021) of their existence have been conducted within the cyberspace I consider the method of remote ethnography as the most appropriate for my project because it allows me to explore the chosen groups of men without direct contacts and therefore without disturbing them or causing the hostility to myself.

Remote ethnography is a research method that presupposes using online and media resources to gather data through the analysis of written texts and videos (Postill, 2016) - a type of research mediated by technology (Wittel, 2000; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016). It is in fact what is defined as “ethnography without the ethnos” (Gupta *et al.*, 1997, p. 2), studying

cultures and practices of individuals situated in them from the safe distance over a certain, usually long period of time. For instance, I have been studying the online activities of post-Soviet Russia men's movement groups through written texts and video channels over the period of the last five years. The purpose of this ethnographic work is to gather data in order to produce a comprehensive picture of post-Soviet RMM, its history, ideological platform and agenda and finally to attempt to determine what this phenomenon signify: progressive transformation of the Russian masculinity or simply an anti-feminist backlash.

Remote ethnography has **advantages** as compared to the traditional fieldwork, but there are also some concerns related to this method of research.

The remote ethnography as a new method became possible due to the rapid growth of online networking technologies, expansion of social media changing people's practices with transfer of social interactions to the virtual space. While traditional ethnography was tied to a certain locality, online resources provide an opportunity for a multi-sited ethnography when a researcher can observe multiple sites without physically visiting them, thus ethnographic research transformed from in-person to a virtual mode (Wittel, 2000; Hine, 2015; Postill, 2016).

Remote or virtual ethnography with a researcher "being there' from afar" (Postill, 2016, p. 8) is the right choice for a feminist ethnographer, who cannot reach the target sites or respondents due to the potential safety risk of meeting with aggression or harassment while exploring the exclusively male territory such as men's movement that may promote anti-feminist agenda and will be unwilling to interact with a feminist researcher.

There are some more evident advantages this method offers (Wittel, 2000; Postill, 2016). It is less time-consuming and thus cost-effective as a researcher does not have to travel anywhere. It is fast and flexible since a researcher can pick up the right sample or groups for study within a shorter time frame and with no extra costs. Besides, the internet technology enables a researcher to observe people in their natural environment. During face-to-face interaction, study participants may change their behavior and be untruthful either to please the researcher or on the contrary trying to guard themselves from the researcher in case no rapport has been developed between two parties by the time of interviewing. Social distancing allows for the elimination of the researcher's influence on respondents' behavior and environment and a researcher can observe them in recorded videos or through online live streams in the environment where they feel themselves comfortable. However, there is no scientific data to support the assumption that people in recorded videos or during live streams are more truthful than during the face-to-face interaction with the researcher (Wittel, 2000; Postill, 2016).

On the other hand, this method is not without **shortcomings** and concerns that scientists try to address. Contemporary shift of ethnographic research to the cybernetic space (or ‘cyberspace’ in short) can never be a substitute for the real presence and face-to-face interaction with respondents (Postill, 2015). In case of interviewing, what remote research cannot offer is observation of instant reactions of a respondent to the researcher’s questions as well as observing how a respondent interacts with other people around or how a respondent arranges and decorates own home or a workplace, what smells and noises are there. These minor details can provide plenty of information to a researcher about a person under study and that is what remote ethnography is lacking (Wittel, 2000; Postill, 2016).

Unpredictability is another point of concern for a researcher of online sources as events can arise and develop rapidly bringing in major change in the life or activities of the observed group or radically changing the interaction among individuals. This feature of remote ethnography creates a stressful situation for the researchers and requires psychological flexibility and an ability to quickly react to the changes and capture the data within a developing process (Hine, 2015, p. 18). That is what occurred in the RMM in 2018 when the movement suddenly split up to two opposing groups. Or rather a group of activists broke up from the RMM and started a new project called the Egalitarian Men’s Movement (EMM). This new movement gave up an open backlash anti-feminist agenda and declared itself to be a part of the international men’s rights movement. Besides, while for the eighteen years the activities of men’s movement in post-Soviet Russia have been limited to the cyberspace, the EMM started to organize protest actions and managed to attract the interest of Russian mainstream media. Therefore, such a major event in the activities of post-Soviet men’s movement forced me to adapt my analysis and approach to reflect the new developments. However, I have to acknowledge that the research should not be so adaptive as to blindly follow the new events as they occur. Rather a researcher should take an active approach to the studied groups and adapt methods and strategy or reconsider a choice of tools in order to capture the required data and reach the research purpose. Thus, there is “no single model of ethnography for the Internet” (Hine, 2015, p. 54) and a researcher needs to be “flexibly adapting and developing new methods [...] yet retaining reflexive awareness of the nature of the knowledge produced and of its limits and strengths (Postill *et al.*, 2012, p. 4).

Hence, the purpose of this project is not to automatically collect data, but to create deep understanding of the observed subjects through intensive reflexive process for the production of ethnographic knowledge (Letherby, 2003).

Another issue with remote research arises in connection of the feminist approach to ethnography. According to such approach, it is suggested for a feminist researcher to accept a non-positivist perspective and use a constructivist framework as guidance in social research. It means to accept that a social reality under study cannot be independent of the observer and that the researchers within the constructivist framework “interpret and define reality” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 46). Indeed, as it was mentioned above, remote research cannot substitute real fieldwork with the researcher’s physical presence and therefore some important details of behavioral patterns or practices may be missing in the research done remotely. However, the study of contents of books, websites and video content created by the RMM men included into the research sample coupled with reflexive approach can to some extent compensate for this shortcoming. After all, any qualitative research is subjective to a varying degree and a researcher approaches and analyzes the data with certain knowledge, biases, assumptions and beliefs acquired through the life experience (Darke and Shanks 2000). Also, the exploration of people’s activities in virtual spaces presents a problem of validity of some data on the studied sample. It mostly concerns personal information: age, nationality, ethnicity, location, or occupation, or gender, as Internet provides an opportunity for any user to present any identity that differs from the real one. This information is hard to check, therefore, instead of “relying on hard facts, the ethnographer relies on the user's trustworthiness and on her own judgement” (Wittel, 2000, p. 6).

Based on the above discussion of the remote ethnography features, advantages and concerns, and considering the narrow scope of this research, including gathering of data to produce a comprehensive picture of men’s movement in post-Soviet Russia, its ideological platform and agenda, and finally trying to prove by means of data analysis that EMM does not represent an openly backlash movement and that the way its activists self-identify as men allows to assume the representation of a new, more progressive masculinity type, it may be concluded that the chosen research method of remote ethnography, involving data gathering from web resources, is considered quite sufficient for the stated purpose. The contemporary reality is such that the ethnographic study has to follow people who move to live and act in the virtual “fields” or digital spaces and the tools and methods of ethnography have to be adapted to be suitable for such developments. Despite certain implications, discussed above, that this major change incurs on the models of scientific inquiry, with a carefully chosen strategy and awareness a researcher is able to capture the features of social formations and strategies of self-presentation and finally reach the goal of the scientific knowledge production (Wittel, 2000; Hine, 2015; Postill, 2016; Caliandro, 2017).

Apart from the theoretical and practical considerations, **ethics** of the research is the third major dimension that influenced my choice of the research method. The process of taking a decision on the research method suitable for my research involved a good deal of reflection on the ethical challenges that may be encountered through the use of the chosen method. Remote ethnography, while being the best method for my research purpose, considering the challenges discussed above, is still not free from some ethical concerns. The minor one is that conducting research remotely raises a question of the legitimacy of research from afar without physical presence in the geographic location. However, ethnography is a flexible tool of research and a traditional method also may, in case of non-participant observation, involve observing people who are not aware that they are observed by a researcher (Sveningsson, 2003, Hine, 2015). Also, with the development of internet technologies and creation of virtual lives and communities and new social practices, it is inevitable that research moves to the cyberspace as well (Postill, 2016; Caliandro, 2017). For this project this ethical concern may be considered as not valid since the recorded videos and texts that have been examined were willingly posted by the authors on social network platforms and other web resources for other users to see without any restrictions. However, the remote ethnography method posed for me a certain moral dilemma that could not be ignored: Is it ethical to disclose personal details of the men under study to ensure the higher degree of validity of my research or not? In fact, these men in their creative textual, or video, or audio content provide to the public some personal details, including their real names, age, marital status, type of education, information about their illnesses or disabilities, exact residence locations, or even information about friends and relatives, etc. On the one hand, this data is available and can be collected from the open sources through which the data owners made it public on their free will. On the other hand, this fact does not relieve me from a moral responsibility of using this data arbitrarily without their express permission due to the objective impossibility to obtain it. Therefore, to eliminate this ethical concern, I decided to resort to a partial disclosure: use the names of those, who include their them in the titles of their YouTube channels, and for others use the nicknames under which they are active online. As for other personal details (age, location, marital status) these will be included into a summarized description of the sample without indicating concrete people to which they belong. Also, the personal information of the RMM activists that is available only to the registered users on some RMM forums has not been disclosed in this thesis.

2.4 Research Sample

The sample of nine men was chosen exclusively from the EMM group that was organized as a separate branch of the Russian men's movement in October 2018, because the review of collected empirical data suggested that the EMM represents a more progressive Russian masculinity whatever backfalls to the old patriarchal views it can still involve.

The nine EMM male activists are all active YouTubers chosen for the study based on the following criteria: active participation in the EMM activities and public actions; dissemination of men's movement ideas via YouTube online platform; constant online presence; being vocal in promoting and explaining the EMM cause through the YouTube content; discussing men's problems based on feedbacks and participating in support activities for men in their communities; cooperation with the other RMM groups with differing perspectives, such as Fathers' of the Country (Otzi strany), who cooperate with authorities in case of divorces or children's custody battles, Men's Way (Muzhskoi put) pursuing a very conservative agenda for the patriarchal extended families aimed at improvement of Russia's demographic situation.

Based on the data available online, the majority of men in the sample are divorced, pay child support, but some of them have never been officially married preferring partnership relations with women. They are all self-identified as being of Russian ethnicity, residents of the largest Russian cities: Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Voronezh, Ryazan, Krasnoyarsk. They are educated with graduate and some with postgraduate university degrees, all employed, are active bloggers and authors of books about relationships between men and women. Though I tried to compile a diverse research sample comprising men of different educational, professional background or social and economic status, to select such a varying sample proved impossible. All the EMM activists essentially belong to the same group of middle-class white straight men of the same ethnicity and even their age variation is not high – all of them are aged between 35 and 45, except for one activist who is 30.

2.5 Positionality: Female Researcher Studying Men

Feminist study, involving the use of qualitative methods, as discussed above, requires, or rather presupposes, greater reflection by the researcher not only on the methods to be used to achieve higher validity of the research, but also on the way the researcher's life experiences, principles and views may impact the study process and consequently its results. Following the discussion of the ethical concerns, I present the reflection on my positionality as a researcher.

At the beginning of my research in 2017 while planning interviews with RMM activists I did not expect any opposition from their side as to interaction with the female student of Gender Studies. At that time, I reasonably pondered that since these men seek for publicity and I observed their attempts to reach mainstream media and can see my interviewing as an opportunity to gain some visibility. Quite unexpectedly for me, the online correspondence with two activists brought no good results and then I had to restructure the whole of my research methodology. This rejection and suspicion from RMM men understandably did not cause any good feelings and then I had to make a good deal of self-reflection how to mitigate my anger and prevent any negative emotions to influence the collection of data and my analysis. Also, I reflected on the biases I had against these men as a feminist researcher as I did not share most of their opinions and especially ant-feminist and often anti-women views and agenda they promote. This self-reflection process proved to be a useful mental exercise in an attempt to find the answer to a pivotal question: How to position myself in relation to the studied sample comprised of RMM male activists? It helped me to remain critical to my actions and experience and acknowledge all the benefits of the chosen method of remote ethnography or observing from the safe distance and stay away from the display of some's negative attitudes or feelings. Besides I understood that a good researcher should utilize reason not emotions studying any phenomenon, which exists independent of what we think of it, and if any researcher's bias or taken-for-granted assumptions interfere with the research, the losing party will be the researcher not the respondents. Finally, what the process of observing the RMM men taught me is that in whatever disagreement I might be with them as concerns their attitudes, ideas or behavior, I should respect their views.

On the other hand, there is another challenge for a woman studying men, especially considering rich variations of masculinities, which means for her to enter the unknown territory. I suppose that a male researcher would be more suited for studying masculinity and would be more quipped to understand men's issues being a male. For instance, many researchers of the masculinity issue are male: Michael Messner, R. Connell who is a biological male, Michel Kimmel and Michael Flood, Jeff Hearn to name a few. Nevertheless, I have access to the academic knowledge on masculinity and also as an adult I have "experiential knowledge" (Letherby, 2003, p. 20). Usage of the combination of these two knowledge types plus exercising reason and pragmatic approach in pursuit of my goal may be a good recipe for the production of a valid research.

Finally, despite the above said I have to admit that my research in no way can be absolutely free from my preferences and subjectivity since the relationship between the

researcher and the studied subjects, between the researcher and the given culture are so complex that the researcher doing qualitative research cannot always remain a neutral gatherer of the data. The impact of the researcher's personality on the research is inevitable – the best the researcher can do is to use precautions against biases and false assumptions by exercising reason and always remaining reflective and critical to own actions while gathering and analyzing the data.

Concluding the above, I have to acknowledge that studying a men's movement is a completely new experience for me, and due to studying it at a distance, in the absence of dialogical interactions on the objective reasons, my understanding of RMM/EMM men concerns cannot be full and complete.

This chapter discussed the background for the choice of method of remote ethnography along three dimensions: theoretical foundations of the research, practicality of this method in terms of time and costs savings and safety risks mitigation; and ethical concerns related mainly to the disclosure of the chosen sample's personal data. Further the advantages and shortcomings of the remote ethnography were pondered on to justify the suitability of this method for my research in consideration of impossibility of direct interaction with the target group of men. This chapter concludes with the description of the research sample and reflection on positionality of the researcher, considering potential impact of the researcher's personality and life experience on the study's validity.

Next chapter will present the genealogy of the RMM over the 2000-2021 period and analysis of empirical data gathered from the online sources to find out the reasons within and beyond the RMM men's control that prompted them to start the men's movement.

Chapter 3. RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What are the reasons for the Russian Men's Movement creation?

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the genealogy and timeline of the men's movement in post-Soviet Russia from its inception in 2000 through 2021, including a description of relevant online platforms, key political and legislative concerns and claims, as well as their agenda formation and transformation over the time period studied. Analysis of this empirical data against the socio-economic background of the 90s-decade that led to the RMM inception in 2000 is expected to produce the answer the Research Question 1: What are the reasons for the Russian Men's Movement (RMM) creation?

I draw on online data I have gathered over the period of five years between 2016 and 2021 of my remote observation of the RMM and EMM online presence. I screened the RMM and the EMM sources (listed in Appendix hereto) that are available on the Russian-language part of Internet (so-called "RUnet"), specifically, three RMM websites with forums and seventeen YouTube channels. Overall, over the above-mentioned period I have watched 1452 videos on YouTube channels of the RMM activists. Aiming at finding videos that contain the data most suitable for the in-depth analysis based on the concepts reviewed in Chapter 1, I selected and transcribed parts of forty-three videos (referenced herein) from this pool (see the Appendix for a list of YouTube channels). The other data sources for analysis include interviews of activists and Russian scholars published in the Russian online media, referenced throughout the text.

At the data-gathering stage, I had two tasks to fulfill: firstly, to compose a timeline of the RMM's development and to see how or if the RMM agenda has been transforming with time and, secondly, to find out what factors prompted the idea to organize a men's movement in Russia. I assumed at that time that by this exercise I would achieve a higher level of understanding of the social phenomenon under study to produce valid answers to the Research Questions.

There were two factors though that turned the effective completion of these tasks into a challenging and time-consuming endeavor. First obstacle was the lack of academic research on the RMM, from which I could have derived some data. I had therefore to rely solely on the RMM declarations and posts on their websites to see how they in their own words explain the reasons for launching the movement and define its objectives that altogether constitute their agenda. Another obstacle I encountered while composing the genealogy of the RMM was that

the majority of posts on the RMM websites bear no indication of the posting dates, which I needed to trace the RMM events in the chronological order. I therefore examined the comments on these websites under the posts of my interest, because the websites have a function of automatically indicating the dates. when the comments are posted.

With respect to the timeline, the chapter identifies **four** distinct time periods detailed in Section 3.2. The first part of this Section focuses on the 2000-2010 period of inception describing the declared objectives of the RMM; the second one examines the ways in which the RMM agenda started to gain popularity (2012-2018); the third offers analysis of the impact of the prominent RMM activist Oleg Novoselov on the formation of the RMM key ideas; and finally the fourth part, covering the years between 2018 and 2021, provides a brief description of the RMM split to factions and founding of the Egalitarian Men's Movement (EMM). The analysis of the EMM as a new masculinity project in Russia will be presented in Chapter 4.

3.2. Genealogy of the Russian Men's Movement

3.2.1 2000-2005: The inception and founding principles of the RMM

According to Igor Kobelniuk (2016), the administrator of one of the oldest RMM websites Masculist.ru¹², the RMM history started with creating a men's electronic journal Men's Almanac (Muzhskoj Almanakh)¹³ back in 2000, which is still available today though the last update on this website is dated 08.03.2008. The Men's Almanac was started by a man, who was active online under the nickname 'Aleks Svetly' and, as Kobelniuk claims, is considered "the founding father" of the men's movement in post-Soviet Russia (2016). The Men's Almanac was defined on its home page as the "unique website for men and others, dedicated to the most complex problems in the relationships of sexes" and includes among others such sections as "Antifeminism", "Men's Rights", "Discrimination of Men", and "Fathers and Children". Its declared purpose was to promote the idea that "men also should fight for their rights against discrimination exerted by the state and by women" (Kobelniuk, 2016). In 2003, Russian journalist Aleksandr Leo joined and became another administrator of Men's Almanac. The separate section of the website titled "Cabinet of Leo" with his posts is

¹² Website Masculist.ru for men's education in such areas as gender relations, discrimination against men, men's rights, family and marriage (www.masculist.ru)

¹³ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/>. Note: The word "almanac" in the Russian language means not only the calendar and weather forecasts, but a collection of written or video / audio materials (https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc_literature/4811)

still available on the website¹⁴. Aleksandr Leo translated to Russian and posted in the section “Female Feminists about Feminism” the short articles by various Western authors about men’s movements and feminism, all of which criticize alleged shortcomings of the latter. Most of the articles were originally authored by the American journalist Catherine Young, American author Christina Hoff Sommers and the Canadian individualist feminist Wendy McElroy¹⁵. Also, there are texts by more than 20 Russian authors posted on this website within the period of 2005-2008.

This resource in the Section “About Us” describes the Men’s Almanac project as antifeminist and anti-Marxist, but advocating men’s cooperation with women and joint actions for better family relations based on the patriarchal values and religious belief¹⁶.

The character of the potential movement, which they intended to create, is expressed in three main concepts: Anti-feminism, Patriarchy and Religion. It can be concluded that the RMM started as an oppositional movement, which, as will be described further in this paper, was destined to transform and change its outdated agenda to a more liberal approach in line with social and economic transformations of the Russian society after 2000.

3.2.2. 2006-2010: Launching New Websites

In 2006 a major event occurred in the RMM history, which is a launch of three new web resources: Multimedia Archive of web content of the Men’s Almanac¹⁷, MensRights.ru, that meant the start of the project of the Men's Movement "For the Rights of Men", which agenda differed from the one declared on Men’s Almanac (this transformation will be discussed in detail further), and Masculist.ru. The latter included the first RMM forum¹⁸ for discussion of men’s issues, which is still active today. That year, the RMM for the first time showed signs of social and political organization by publishing on MensRights.ru a Manifesto that proclaimed the education and enlightenment of men, the fight against gender stereotypes and men’s discrimination as their key objectives¹⁹ (Kobelniuk, 2016). These two online platforms, Masculist.ru and MensRights.ru, differ in their goals. Masculist.ru, which is still a major Russian platform for the RMM supporters, positions itself as “a non-profit project created to educate men on the topics of gender relations, the status of men in society...”²⁰. It

¹⁴ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/leo.html>

¹⁵ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/finsabfms.html>

¹⁶ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/project.html>

¹⁷ <http://menrights-offline.narod.ru/>

¹⁸ <http://menrights.mybb.ru/>

¹⁹ <https://cc.bingj.com/cache.aspx?q=menrights+ru&d=5060738834040463&mkt=en-WW&setlang=en-US&w=DvC6bBn2-UP9W7SZc4ot6Zr4sxEuv7he>

²⁰ <https://www.masculist.ru/info/rules.html>

also declares that it does not represent a particular public organization or NGO, while supporting the project of the Men's Movement "For the Rights of Men"²¹ acting via the website www.mensrights.ru and further herein referred to as the MensRights.ru. This project then actually represented the RMM and defined itself as a platform of the men's movement, which is “an association of people, who realized that the cause of a demographic catastrophe, the collapse of the family is the matriarchal imbalance in society, which consists in infringing on the rights of men, [...] abandoning a patriarchal family model that has been tested for millennia.”²².

As compared with Men's Almanac, MensRights.ru project chose in their fight for the rights of men a liberal agenda and focused on the need to pursue the radical transformation of the Russian family law. To achieve these legal changes, they intended to lobby the introduction of the shared custody model for divorced parents that gives both parents equal rights in participating in the child's life after divorce, and criminal penalties for falsely claimed paternity. On the other hand, MensRights.ru project borrowed the key objectives from the Men's Almanac, namely the opposition to feminism, support of traditional values and the patriarchal family type. However, unlike the Men's Almanac, MensRights.ru project declared that they are not misogynistic, but support the unity of two sexes, while opposing the “propaganda” of the lifestyles of sexual minorities. This suggests that six years after its inception, the RMM preserved its gender essentialist pro-patriarchy and anti-feminist stance, rejection of homosexuality and other gender-queer lifestyle²³. Besides, with launching the MensRights.ru the RMM acquired the official logo that complemented their foundational text and was adopted and shown on the home page of MensRights.ru in 2010.

The year 2009 marks another important milestone in the history of RMM - the publication of the first edition of *Woman: A Textbook for Men (Zhenshchina: Uchebnik dlya muzhchin)* by the RMM activist and self-proclaimed scientist Oleg Novoselov. Novoselov presented in this book his “ranks theory” that posits a hierarchy of human males, including *alpha*, *beta*, *omega*, which, according to Novoselov, is a natural characteristic of human society since the Stone Age (Novoselov, 2009). The book was enthusiastically welcomed by the RMM community and formed the ideological platform of the RMM for the years to come. I will return to the discussion of influence of Novoselov's ideas in Section 3.2.4 below.

3.2.3. 2011-2018: Becoming Visible

²¹ <http://mensrights.ru/>

²² <http://mensrights.ru/wp/f-a-q>

²³ <http://mensrights.ru/wp/f-a-q>

In June 2012, for the first time, a break in the quasi-underground existence of the RMM occurred, when four long-time activists of the RMM Georgy Alpatov, Oleg Novoselov, Alexander Biryukov, and Dmitry Seleznev appeared on Russian State Television channel Russia 1 in the talk-show "Love you!" to discuss the topic of child support by the divorced fathers (aniytikm, 2012). On 12 February 2013, Dmitry Seleznev published the article "Six reasons not to marry a divorced single mother" (Seleznev, 2013). On 10 August 2013, the article was published in the Russian journal *Snob*²⁴ (Seleznev, 2013a). This publication provoked negative reaction from both female and male readers regarding both its message and the lexicon used by the author (Shpilman, 2014, p. 72).

In 2014, Dmitry Seleznev was again invited to the TV talk-show "They and Us – Single Mother" (Seleznev, 2017) on the major state Russian TV Channel 1, which broadcasts across all post-Soviet countries, to discuss the message of this article, which is that a divorced single mother is not a suitable marriage prospect for any man. This article and the author gained popularity in the RMM community. According to the Masculist.ru website metrics, of all 202 posts posted by Seleznev²⁵ from 11 February 2013 till 17 November 2020, this post attracted the largest number of views (more than 91 thousand), while the views for his other posts range from 4 thousand to maximum 43 thousand. In another post on Masculist.ru, Seleznev says he did not expect that this article would cause such a storm of negative comments (Seleznev, 2014). There is evidence that the article is still popular. In 2019 the informal leader of the EMM Anton posted a video discussion of this article with Seleznev on his YouTube channel (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2019, August 11). A Google search for this article as of 20 June 2022 showed 498 results for videos, bearing the same titles as Seleznev's post, and 18,700 results of this text shared in 2018-2021 to various Russian, Kazakh, Ukrainian, Latvian web platforms.

In 2015, the RMM made its first unsuccessful attempt to get involved in real 'offline' activism by publishing on MensRights.ru the letters to the Russian Parliament, calling for the change of the existing family law to "stop robbing men under the legal guise of child support legislation and abolish the conscript army"²⁶. The petition demanding "to oblige the State Duma committee on family, women and children's issues during 2015 to develop and approve in the Duma in the form of appropriate laws a legal mechanism for control over the

²⁴ Snob is a Russian media project with access by subscription that positions itself as a project for an international community of successful professionals, at <https://snob.ru/basement/>

²⁵ <https://www.masculist.ru/users/1391>

²⁶ <http://mensrights.ru/wp/boris/peticii>

expenditure of alimony on the part of the alimony parent”²⁷ was initiated by Dmitry Seleznev in 2014, but failed to collect the required 20 000 signatures - it was signed only by 1600 people and eventually abandoned. The comments available on MensRights.ru website, suggest that this demand was not supported by the RMM community, who preferred to continue with the low-key online existence. Between 2013 and 2018, I did not find any record of RMM activists appearing on Russian mainstream television or being mentioned in the Russian mainstream press. Increasingly though the RMM activists moved their activity to YouTube, opening up own channels mainly to promote the RMM ideas largely borrowed from Novoselov’s book that will be discussed further and Seleznev’s article mentioned above.

3.2.4. The RMM’s Ideology: Oleg Novoselov and Influence of Patriarchal Ideas

The history of the RMM cannot be well understood without discussion of the role of a Russian author Oleg Novoselov in the RMM development. In 2009 he published his seminal book *Woman: A Textbook for Men* (Russian Title: *Zhenshchina: Uchebnik dlya muzhchin*), which became a must-read and is still the most popular text for the RMM and wider circles of the Russian-speaking men. In this book Novoselov presented his “ranks theory” and other ideas, discussed below.

Novoselov is an electronic engineer by profession, a self-proclaimed scientist-ethologist²⁸ with no educational background in either natural or social sciences, and the former editor of the main RMM website Masculist.ru. For more than a decade, Novoselov has been instrumental in forming the RMM’s ideological platform and spreading the ideas of the RMM across Russia and its neighboring countries with significant Russian-speaking population – former parts of the Soviet Union. He is still considered “an ideological father” of the men’s movement in Russia. In May 2021, Anton Sorvachov, a founder of EMM, invited Novoselov to take part in a roundtable meeting in the EMM studio, and expressed his high appreciation of the role of Novoselov and his book in the RMM and EMM development (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2021, May 17).

Novoselov describes his ambitions in his autobiography as to struggle by means of his literary work “against the matriarchal degradation of the post-Christian civilization. In the modern world I do not see more worthy points of application of efforts than the correction of the evolution of sapiens.” (Novoselov, 2018). There are three main tenets of Novoselov’s book that were enthusiastically accepted as a sort of ‘revelation’ by the RMM community

²⁷ <https://chnng.it/G8HDFkbcN2>

²⁸ Ethology means an area of knowledge studying the evolution of human character and behavior of animals (See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethology>).

and, according to the comments on Masculist.ru and YouTube, helped many men in Russia to “awake” and join the RMM. These include the “ranks theory” that will be discussed below; the propositions that “women are less human than men”; and that “Russia is a matriarchal state”, where men are discriminated against by the state and by women as the state’s helpers or minions (Novoselov, 2009).

With respect to the “ranks theory”, Novoselov offers his own version of human history, claiming that in modern civilization, in their choice of life partners some humans are still driven solely by animal instincts, similar to non-human animals. He promotes this theory arguing that a natural hierarchy between and among males and females “in a human herd” has been preserved from the Stone Age (Novoselov, 2009, p. 6). Novoselov claims in his book that the hierarchy of males includes “high-ranking - self-confident, successful, authoritative, cool ‘alpha’, medium-ranking ‘gamma’ and low-ranking ‘omega’ (losers and weaklings) males” (Novoselov, 2009, p. 29). According to the RMM and EMM activist Mikhail N., “the ‘ranks theory’ and related vocabulary was first put forward by a Russian ethologist Anatoly Protopopov in his 2002 book *Treatise about Love as a Terrible Bore Understands it*. Mikhail N. argues that “Novoselov ripped off the ideas and used for his book. In Protopopov's work, much was concealed [...] narrated in a veiled manner, [...] information is expressed in the terms of ethologists, who have studied animal behavior.” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2018, February 16). Drawing on Protopopov’s theory, Novoselov (2009) classifies humans according to a scale, ranging from highly “*primativny*”. to low “*primativny*”. He uses the Russian word “*primativny*” borrowed from Protopopov’s book and this term needs additional explanation because a single-word equivalent for it is non-existent in English. The Russian word “*primativny*” is derived from the Russian word “*primat*” (Eng – “*primate*”) and refers to character traits and behaviors characteristic of nonhuman primates as opposed to humans. For the purpose of this research, I simplified the translation of the word “*primativny*” by adding a suffix *-ive* to the word “primate” to replace the ending *-e* at the end similar to the formation of many English adjectives (e.g. effect-ive, product-ive) and obtained the word “*primat-ive*”. According to Novoselov, *highly primitive* people are “driven only by emotions and desires (instincts)”, while *low primitive* are those capable of rational behavior and of controlling their emotions and animal instincts (Novoselov, 2009, p. 31).

With respect to the lower status of women, Novoselov claims that while men are rational *low primitive* beings, women belong to the *highly primitive* type, who cannot make rational decisions because they are egocentric and care only about satisfaction of their immediate desires. He adds that “universal suffrage is a deadly mistake that must be corrected

first” (Novoselov, 2009, p. 24). This view can be illustrated by a citation from Novoselov’s 2018 interview to the Russian radio *Komsomolskaya Pravda’s* program titled “Who is the chief in the family?”, where he stated that “A woman is, of course, a human. But a man has a far greater ability to create than women. [...] In this sense, a man is a human to a higher degree than a woman.” (Novoselov, 2018, March 07). Also, Novoselov claims in his book that Russia is a matriarchal state, because its legal system creates discrimination against men through their higher legal pension age as compared to women, their mandatory military conscription and the capital punishment, which applies to men only as per the Russia’s Penal Code.

Pondering on the reasons for the high popularity of Novoselov’s ideas despite the evidently pseudo-scientific and sexist character of the "rank theory" and its essentialist argumentation, I want to suggest that this popularity exposes the degree to which Russian society from the gender equality perspective is still deeply patriarchal and traditional. This is shown by recent surveys in Russia, where Russia proves to be one of the most conservative cultures among the surveyed countries. The sociological survey was conducted in 2020 by the research holding Romir and the international community of research companies GlobalNR. 71% of Russians surveyed believe that traditional gender roles for boys and girls are best for society, the highest number after China (Litvinova, 2020; Pipiya, 2018), which can explain why Novoselov’s ideas that a man as a rational being is superior to a woman, that a woman is only a half-human, and that a “woman can gain happiness only in a patriarchal monogamous marriage” (Novoselov, 2009, p. 192) appear to remain popular. Back in 2015-2017, some YouTube bloggers were creating video content solely based on Novoselov’s book. One example is a video by an RMM YouTuber Nick Bond posted on 10 May 2017 and titled *Rank and primitivity of a man. Difference between a high-rank highly primitive man and a high-rank low primitive man* (Nick Bond, 2017). Mikhail N. who is now an activist of EMM and the harshest critic of Novoselov, back in 2011 wrote a book under the influence of Novoselov’s ranks theory, titled *Omega’s Memoirs*, in which he qualified his belonging to the low “omega” rank in the male hierarchy according to Novoselov.

Actually, this book made Novoselov a most influential figure in the RMM history, a “guru” of RMM, but eventually along with growing popularity, more critical voices started to be heard and the activists, who later formed the EMM, started to critique and finally in 2018 rejected his ‘ranks theory’ as unscientific. From 2017 and especially after the organization of EMM, EMM activists in YouTube videos were warning followers not to accept Novoselov’s ideas uncritically. According to Mikhail N., Novoselov’s impact on the RMM has been two-

fold: on the one hand, he “littered” the brains of the Russian men with the outdated patriarchal ideals of the family and society, which have no future in the twenty first century. On the other hand, he had done a good thing by telling men the truth about “the matriarchal Russian state” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2020, April; 2021, August 08).

The influence of Novoselov patriarchal ideas was strengthened by new vocabulary that he injected into the RMM. He enriched the lexicon of RMM with a phrase “*prozrevshiy muzhchina*”, which, when translated from Russian, means “a man, who became able to see the reality, a red-pilled man or a man, who awoke” (Novoselov, 2009, p. 176). For convenience, the term “a red-pilled man” will be used further in this paper as a closest equivalent belonging to the men’s movements’ vocabulary. Novoselov does not give an exact definition of “a red-pilled man”, but the long description in his book suggests that “a red-pilled man” is a man who “began to see the truth” (Novoselov, 2009, p. 173). This “truth”, accepted both by RMM and more progressive EMM, consists of a man’s awakening - understanding that he lives in a matriarchal society with a matriarchal legal system, which discriminates against him and benefits women. According to Novoselov, “a red-pilled man” is the one, who becomes aware of his role of a “slave” and starts to fight against “matriarchal discrimination” (Novoselov, 2009, pp. 173-176).

Other popular terms that entered the RMM community through Novoselov’s book and are still often used by the EMM activists in their video narratives include “domestic prostitution”, a term that refers to the ostensibly “parasitic” matriarchal marriage, where a woman trades sex for the life-long material support by a man (Novoselov, 2009, p. 30) and the “inversion of dominance” meaning the occurrence of a woman trying to dominate over a man in a relationship (Novoselov, 2009, p. 27).

The popularity of the book suggests that some Novoselov’s fans in Russia have been building their masculinity around the ideas of moral and intellectual superiority over the female gender. To give credit to the EMM, its activists totally rejected Novoselov’s deterministic and archaic idea that a woman is not equal to a man intellectually and that men surpass women in rational thinking.

Since the book publication date, the RMM supporters and activists actively promoted Novoselov’s “ranks theory” through video content and website posts. Also, they liked to assigned these ranks to other men, but none of them, with the exception of Mikhail N, has ever discussed their own ranks within this hierarchy. In YouTube videos and on Masculist.ru forum, “ranks theory” was presented as if those who discussed it perceived the ranks as something that do not directly affect their own masculinity cases, as if their masculinities

were beyond this hierarchy. The explanation to this avoidance, I assume, was provided by EMM activists REALIST and Mikhail N. They noted in their YouTube video blogs that the favorite topic of discussion among RMM men remains how women are inferior to men, while none of these men want to recognize that some of them may belong to the lowest rank in Novoselov's hierarchy and that men and women are equal humans (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2021, April 18; REALIST, 2021, April 14). The attractiveness of Novoselov's 'men over women superiority' idea can be explained by the fact that Novoselov offered a visible and easy target, a scapegoat – women – to which men could project their dissatisfaction with life. With such an enemy readily available, Russian men do not need to interrogate the reasons for personal, social and economic dissatisfaction and trouble, or analyze their own failures or wrongdoings. Instead of showing the Russian men a way out of the existential crisis occurring due to the government actions, social and economic reasons or own shortcomings, Novoselov handed over to the Russian men a simulacrum of an enemy and this posed a “roadblock” towards more progressive masculinity projects, and gender-equal relationships with women those Russian men might have pursued (Libanova *et al.*, 2018; Torosyan, 2018).

Despite the popularity in the RMM, Novoselov's ideas went largely unnoticed by the Russian scientific community. Only some Russian feminist groups and later the EMM activists and bloggers began to refute these unscientific ideas and the archaic misogynistic stereotypes promoted by the book. In 2015, the Russian feminist group EQUALITY²⁹ applied with a letter to the Russian Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Justice asking to ban this book³⁰. This attempt was not successful, and they posted online the well-grounded and science-based critique (alexa, 2015), where the authors attempted to prove the pseudo-scientific and misogynistic character of Novoselov's ideas. However, as seen from the RMM forums on Masculist.ru and content of YouTube videos of RMM bloggers posted in 2015 and 2016, these efforts of Russian feminists caused the opposite reaction in the RMM community and only boosted Novoselov's popularity. The general tone of comments on Masculist.ru forum was that if feminists are against Novoselov, then men must be pro-Novoselov. In 2015, Novoselov became the chief editor of Masculist.ru and thereby gained access to a valuable resource for further promoting his book.

Despite these attempts to ban or denunciate the Novoselov's theory, the book has been republished in 2013, 2015 and 2018 by the Russian mainstream publishers ACT (Moscow)

²⁹ https://vk.com/g_equality

³⁰ <https://feministki.livejournal.com/4053315.html>

and this is the best evidence that it is still in demand among the Russian readers. As of March 2022, in the largest Russian online bookstore Ozon.ru the book (published in 2018 by ACT, Moscow, as part of the Series “Training Star”) is on sale and is marked as ³¹bestseller. Also, in neighboring Belarus, a branch of this online bookstore advertises this book as the ‘Top leader of sales’³².

In conclusion, over the eighteen years of its existence, from 2000 to late 2018, the RMM has not undergone much transformation with respect to its objectives and ideas. It started as a small antifeminist and pro-patriarchal group of men, whose existence was practically unnoticed by the Russia’s public until 2009. This small group transformed into a movement and gained impetus after Oleg Novoselov joined the movement in 2009 and through his book offered the Russian men a solid ideological platform by presenting the ideas stated on Men’s Almanac in a clearer and more radical form, which turned to be appealing for the Russian men.

3.2.5. 2018: Breakup of RMM

By the beginning of 2018, the RMM was no longer a united community and some activists began to show signs of dissent and disagreement with the dominant pro-patriarchal tenets dominated by Novoselov’s ideas. At this time, RMM activists Mikhail N. and other activists, who later formed a core of the EMM, in their YouTube content denounced Novoselov’s “ranks theory” as “unscientific and ignoring the modern economic and social situation in the civilized world” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2018, February 16) as they perceived women not to be subhuman, but independent and equal to men.

In March 2018, RMM activists organized a meeting to discuss the movement’s future and concerns in the face of the emerging signs of serious division of RMM into groups with competing ideas and objectives (Krasnaya Tabletk, 2018). At the meeting, older activists such as Dmitry Seleznev called on other activists and supporters to stop the tendency of separation to avoid splitting into groups based on ideological differences and unite their forces to reach a common goal of fighting against men’s discrimination. However, the split of the movement occurred at the end of 2018, when RMM members with a more progressive stance broke off from the so-called “patriarchs” - those who supported the return to the families and social lifestyles based on patriarchal rules and religious traditions promoted by Oleg

³¹ <https://www.ozon.ru/person/novoselov-oleg-31231365/>

³² <https://oz.by/books/more10410587.html>

Novoselov and supported by those running the major RMM platforms Masculist.ru and MensRights.ru.

The year 2018 therefore marked a first serious rupture of the RMM community culminating some preceding period of growing dissatisfaction and even rejection of Novoselov's women-hating / misogynist rhetoric and patriarchal ideas appeared in relation to his presentation of woman's character and role in the society.

The RMM broke down to the so-called 'patriarchal' faction of RMM led by Novoselov and a more progressive one – the EMM. Later, in February 2019, the most conservative faction of the RMM lead by Oleg Novoselov registered a new public association "Man's Way" ("Muzhskoi Put'")³³, which for reasons of scope will not be examined in the remainder of this thesis. The EMM project, its agenda and difference from the original RMM will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The exercise of composing the RMM's genealogy and review of the written works of prominent RMM activists, who influenced the RMM agenda formation until 2018, revealed that the RMM was prompted by the idea, as the authors of the Men's Almanac alleged, that the Russian men should fight against men's discrimination committed by the feminist institutionalized system in Russia. However, the genealogy and review exercise only registered the objectives and concerns declared via the RMM's web resources, but did not provide a substantiated list of reasons for the RMM creation that is needed to find the answer to Research Question 1. I expect that this gap can be filled in by the analysis of the social and economic transformation in post-Soviet Russia drawing on the theoretical framework, presented in Chapter 1. Therefore, the purpose of the below Section 3.3 is to present such analysis and see if any social and economic factors in the context of 1991-2000 period of economic and social turbulent transformations in post-Soviet Russia played a motivating role in the RMM's beginning.

3.3. Socio-Economic Factors

In this section I focus on two related concerns, namely the tensions in the constructions of masculinity in the period that immediately followed the Soviet system collapse and the motivations for the organization of RMM. In particular, this section will examine the social and economic changes in post-Soviet Russia that occurred in 1991-2000 to reveal the hidden forces that might prompt the idea to organize a men's movement. I will draw on the critical theory of masculinity discussed in Chapter 1 and stating that masculinity

³³ <https://xn--flagcgmhkmcg4h.xn--p1ai/>

is the inherently contradictory phenomenon that changes in line with social and economic transformations in a given culture (Connell, 2005).

3.3.1. Declared Reasons for Opposition

On the Men's Almanac website, the first online platform created to unite men in Russia, which started the RMM, the reasons for the men's movement emergence in post-Soviet Russia are explained in the Section "Positions and Objectives of Men's Movement in Russia" with no indication of authorship and date of posting. The unknown author declares that "the position of the Men's Movement regarding the state of affairs in Russia is based on the fact that Russia [...] was subjected to the most total and deep capture by the ideology of feminism, that feminism and its consequences - man-hating - were the state ideology of the former USSR"³⁴.

The study of all sections of Men's Almanac reveals the antifeminist character of all the posted materials and the project authors acknowledge that fact in "About Us" Section. The explanation of the gender regime of state feminism as the motivating factor justifies the primary goal of the RMM, that is the 'salvation' of Russia from the national 'catastrophe' of male discrimination that is evident in low birth rate and high men's mortality. Also, there are the RMM priorities as ways of 'salvation' that include, among others, the quality medical care for men to fight the high men's mortality rates, a "fundamental reform of the marriage legislation, transforming matriarchy into patriarchy."³⁵.

A more attentive reading of declarations of the Men's Almanac website reveals some undeclared details. As it has been mentioned above in this chapter, the Men's Almanac was launched to promote the idea that "men *also* should fight for their rights against discrimination exerted by the state and by women" (Kobelniuk (2016). In the phrase "men also should fight for their rights", the word "also" might imply that the RMM actually copied some tenets of the Western men's movement, which was organized as a response to the women's movement and change in the roles and status of women in the society (Flood, 2004; Connell, 1990). Given that post-Soviet Russia after the fall of the "iron curtain" experienced a huge influx of information from abroad (Zdravomyslova&Temkina, 2018), we can assume that the RMM was created under the influence of Western ideas. This is suggested also by the early posts of the Men's Almanac that describe different types of men's movements in the US, posting articles and references to books by Western authors that are advised to read, such

³⁴ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/mt/principle.html>

³⁵ *ibid.*

as Warren Farrell, Daniel Horowitz, Richard Driscoll, Christina Hoff Sommers and many others. The article *Men's Movement as a Reality of our Time*³⁶ cites Wendy McElroy, a Canadian individualist feminist, as saying that men's movement is the last resort to eliminate men's discrimination and restore the equality of the rights for men³⁷.

However, Men's Almanac could hardly be viewed as the movement as such since beside the statement of their position and objectives no signs of an organization has been found. According to "About Us" Section, it started as a knowledge-sharing and discussion platform for those concerned with the state feminism and men's discrimination. The first signs of the movement organizing appeared with launching the Men's Almanac successor - a new website MensRights.ru in 2006 that for some years became the main forum for the RMM activists and supporters. This event marked the evolution of the RMM: a small group gained support and formation of the movement with clear goals and objectives has started. The FAQ section of MensRights.ru describes the objectives of the movement as follows:

"The Men's Movement is an association of people, who realized that the cause of a demographic catastrophe, the collapse of the family, and the countless misfortunes of millions of people in their personal lives is the global matriarchal imbalance in society, which consists in infringing on the rights of men, suppressing everything male, abandoning a patriarchal family model that has been tested for millennia and consumerism, elevated to the rank of social idea."(<http://mensrights.ru/wp/f-a-q>)

A comparison between the objectives and concerns stated on Men's Almanac and on MensRights.ru shows both similarities and differences. First, both sites refer to the matriarchy and patriarchy, but while Men's Almanac openly calls for "transforming matriarchy into patriarchy"³⁸, the MensRights.ru expresses regret due to "abandoning a patriarchal family model"³⁹. Secondly, Men's Almanac pinpoints "feminism" as the main enemy of men in Russia, but MensRights.ru prefers a cautious approach as to defining the reason of their opposition. They use the term "global matriarchal imbalance" as the key problem⁴⁰. Also, instead of naming a concrete country (Russia in this case), they use the word "global" that suggests they consider themselves as part of men's movement in other countries. When both above statements are analyzed considering the economic and social transformations in Russia within the decade from 1991, the year the post-Soviet Russia started its new history, and until

³⁶ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/menmov.html>

³⁷ The article *Gender Issues Impacted by Masculinists* by Wendy McElroy was originally published on 03 June 2003 on <https://www.independent.org/news/article.asp?id=1140> The Russian version of the article is available at <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/fvf/mascul.html>.

³⁸ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/mt/discrusmen.html>

³⁹ https://web.archive.org/web/20111229061728/http://mensrights.ru/wp/?page_id=249

⁴⁰ https://web.archive.org/web/20111229061728/http://mensrights.ru/wp/?page_id=249

the year of 2000, when the RMM first appeared, from behind the statements cited above, the other motives start to transpire.

3.3.2. Undeclared Reasons for Opposition. Socio-Economic Factors and the New Gender Order.

After the Soviet Union breakup, a structure of the Russian society underwent significant transformation due to transition from Soviet government-regulated to the new market economy and intensified cultural exchange with foreign countries across the open borders. This transition to market economy involved the emergence of new classes that had been absent in the Soviet Union (business owners, unemployed, workers of private services sector) and either positive or negative change of financial and social status of all population groups (Vanke, 2018). Consequently, the gender order that is the configuration of gender relations, the power dynamic between masculinities and between the collective masculinity and femininity, specific for the Soviet period also underwent a change. (Connell, 2000; 2005; Hearn, 2006; Kimmel, 2002).

Tiomkina and Rotkirch (2002) describe the changes in the Russian society at the end of the 1980s as contradictory attempts to preserve the Soviet gender order and to adopt the “Western” family lifestyle and practices, which for the former Soviet citizens meant the ability to become a property owner and a consumer of goods and services. The most visible change concerned the woman’s role as a working mother and female sexuality that tended to be repressed in the Soviet times. On the one hand, sexuality started to play an important role in gender and family relations and became a consumer product. On the other hand, women were no longer provided with a guaranteed job as was in the Soviet Union and many of them faced the pressing demand to provide for a family in any possible ways, since many fathers and husbands proved unable to cope with the new economic reality. However, as was mentioned before, there emerged a new class of men of the dominant type comprised of businessmen, who managed to use the market economy and new business opportunities for their benefit. They were accumulating power and resources and were able to support a new feminine identity that turned sexuality into a bargaining item. Some women of post-Soviet Russia preferred to enter into a sponsorship relationship with affluent men thus discarding the Soviet ideal of a working mother (Tiomkina & Rotkirch, 2002).

Tiomkina and Rotkirch (2002) argue that the Russian society distinctively divided into two main classes: a small group of rich dominant men, who recreated a traditional family type that was prevalent in pre-Soviet Russia with a man’s role of breadwinner and a woman’s role

of a housewife; and men, mostly from the low-income families, who were unable to perform the role of a provider and became marginalized. In the families with failed men, the working mother had to take on the role of the main breadwinner (Tiomkina, & Rotkirch, 2002). According to Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2012), in Russia at that time the old and new gender orders started to oppose each other and cause uncertainty and frustration for non-dominant masculinities. This was a situation when existing diversity of masculinities, complex and often conflicting relations between them coupled with social and economic pressures on men may serve a fertile ground for the men uniting in the men's movement, often with the agenda oppositional not only to feminism, but to women in general (Connell, 2005; Flood, 2004). This suggests that one of the reasons for organizing the men's movement in Russia was the inequality among groups of men based on the class, that causes the uneven distribution of 'patriarchal dividends' among them (Connell, 2005) and the consequent frustration.

In particular, these changes and transformations were not welcomed by people, whose financial and social status downshifted, such as the educated class of ex-Soviet population, which was called in the Soviet Union "intelligentsia" (engineers, scientists, academic staff). The biographical information of RMM activists examined for this research, which they revealed in their YouTube content, suggest that they were raised in the families of the said Soviet 'intelligentsia' class, belonging to which was considered prestigious in the Soviet Union. Their parents had graduate and postgraduate degrees and belonged to what today is the middle class. In the Soviet Union they held jobs in so-called research and design institutes or in educational institutions funded by the government. After the Soviet Union collapsed, their parents lost the jobs, which was once the stable source of income, and their social status suddenly changed to the worse. As far as I understand from the activists' life stories, none of their fathers managed to enter the business sphere and rise on the social class ladder in post-Soviet Russia.

In the situation of great uncertainty in the 1990s, massive unemployment, breakup of the Soviet family with two working parents and ceased support of mothers by the government, many "Russian men found themselves in the precarious position" (Janey *et al.*, 2005), unable to survive in the situation of the complex market economy amid the economic turmoil and scarce employment opportunities (Tkach, 2003). Collapse of the government-regulated economy, high unemployment, rising divorce rates and plummeting birth rates, raging criminal wars and military conflicts inside Russia – these were the features of the stormy decade of 1991-2000.

These social issues of the transition period are mentioned or implied in both statements of the RMM objectives available on Men's Almanac and MenRights.ru websites, cited above in Clause 4.2. However, one cannot find any attempt to analyze the economic causes of the social change in these statements. Instead, on both sites the authors declared either feminism or patriarchy to be the cause of all social problems described above.

Judging by the said RMM objectives, they mobilized to organize the men's movement not as a reaction to the profound economic and social changes, but because they saw the social process of gender order changing as undermining their male hegemony. Their objectives suggest that they perceived growing independence of women as a threat to the age-old "natural" foundations of human civilization, and urged men, as traditional defenders of stability and order (i. e. patriarchy), to put an end to this 'degradation' and bring society back to a calm and secure past (Flood, 2004; Wood, 2013; Blais & Dupuis-Deri, 2012). The RMM's declaration on MensRights.ru about "infringing on the rights of men, suppressing everything male" evidences to these men's belief that women seized the power from men and men became an oppressed sex. This suggests that the RMM might be following part of the Western men's movements, which mobilized against the "excessive emancipation of women" (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2012, p. 8). They used the "scapegoat thesis" (Blais & Dupuis-Deri, 2012), blaming women for feminization of the society that causes the devaluation of men, and see the solution of men's question in returning to the patriarchal order with women's subordination to men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Kimmel's argument that Western men's oppositional movements are formed by men, who are resentful to the "collapse of domestic patriarchy" (Kimmel, 2005, p. 416) and the desire to return to the traditional gender order in the family and the society, is fully applicable to the RMM. As has been mentioned above, both cited declarations of the RMM declare patriarchy as the preferred form of marital relationships between men and women.

One can conclude that the RMM men were unable or not ready to meet the economic and social challenges of the 1991-2000 transitional period between two opposing economy models in post-Soviet Russia. Despite the ongoing social change and "expansion of the scope of normative and pluralization of masculine roles" (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2012), the RMM continued to focus exclusively on what they constructed as the traditional masculine role of the protector of patriarchal values, the bearer of traditional consciousness, failing to see the potential for liberating men from the traditionalist views that ongoing social changes opened to them (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2012; Kosygina, 2007).

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought the answer to my Research Question 1, and my task was to find out the root causes of RMM creation through a critical analysis of the RMM's declared objectives and the action of socio-economic factors within a transformation period of 1991-2000 in Russia. To achieve my goal as regards Research Question 1, I traced the genealogy of the Russian men's movement between 2000 and 2018 and summarized some of its stated key data collected by examining the contents of major RMM web platforms: Men's Almanac and MensRights.ru. The data collection exercise revealed that initially the RMM was organized around the idea to fight men's discrimination in Russia, which is a feminist state same as the Soviet Union was. The analysis revealed that from 2006 the RMM formulated clear objectives of liberal nature suggesting to fight men's discrimination in Russia by the amendments of the Russian laws. Nevertheless, the revisionist trend of return to the patriarchal family model and the idea of Russia being a feminist state, where men are a subordinate class, first put forward by authors of the Men's Almanac, remained unchanged till 2018.

Also, I have contrasted the theory-based analysis of the declarations of objectives, available on the Men's Almanac and MensRights.ru, with an account of the socio-economic changes of transition period in the 1990s. This analysis revealed several unstated reasons for the emergence of RMM, including Western influence due to the intensive knowledge exchange after the fall of the "iron curtain". However, the analysis suggests that the RMM was prompted by the phenomenon unheard of in the Soviet Union - the rise of the "new rich" class, representing dominant masculinity, and the class of "failed" men, mainly university-educated professionals (*intelligentsia*), who could not adapt to the market economy conditions and often became marginalized. In this case the RMM may be seen as an attempt to oppose this marginalization, to contest the subordinate masculinity status and claim some power from the dominant class, as well as to use the men's movement as the channel of releasing frustration in the situation of transition period's turmoil.

On the other hand, such reasons as the fear of losing the masculine privilege or "patriarchal dividends" (Connell, 2005, p. 79, p. 202) and frustration due to growing economic independence of women, who were more flexible in adapting to new economic situation and were often becoming breadwinners in the family (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2012), should not be discarded. And last but not least, the RMM creators strived to return to the patriarchal family model possibly driven by the desire to have the power over women as the last area, where they could assert some power and control while belonging in fact to the

powerless class. Such a loss of power by men over women might contribute considerably to the creation of the RMM.

Together this suggests that at the dawn of the new millennium, the RMM emerged as a backlash movement (Connell, 2005, pp. 248-253; Kimmel, 2005; Clatterbaugh, 2000) against what they constructed as “feminist gender regime” in Russia despite the absence of concrete facts to support this construction. Defining the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia as the state “captured by the ideology of feminism” (<http://menalmanah.narod.ru/menmov.html>) contradicts the historical facts. While there was a feminist movement in the nineteenth century’s Russian Empire and during the first years of the Soviet Union’s existence, the second wave of feminism that occurred in the West in the 1970s had neither influence nor following within the Soviet Union’s closed borders (Atkinson et al., 1977). Some feminist groups and NGOs appeared after the start of Perestroika in 1985 in the Soviet Union and organized legally in post-Soviet Russia after 1991, but there is no data supporting the RMM’s claim that they were powerful enough to determine the state policy in any sphere of life in Russia at that time (Kay, 2000; Noonan & Nechemias, 2001).

My next task within the scope of Research Question 2 is to determine what kind of masculinity project is offered to the Russian men by the EMM - this will be discussed below in Chapter 4, which is to analyze the masculinity patterns represented by the chosen sample of the EMM activists, the components of these patterns, considering the areas of concern revealed in the this, and to define what kind of masculinity these men present to the outside world. Then finally, using the analysis results, I will test my assumption that through the EMM, as the more progressive wing of the RMM, a new masculinity project is offered to the Russian men.

Chapter 4. RESEARCH QUESTION 2: Does the Egalitarian Men’s Movement, a more progressive RMM’s wing, offer a new masculinity project to the men in Russia?

4.1. Introduction

Assuming the possibility that the Egalitarian Men’s Movement (EMM) signifies the formation of a new, progressive Russian masculinity, this chapter examines the ways the EMM activists construct and perform their masculinities. The masculinity concept in this chapter will be analyzed as configuration of practice and a gender project that both each individual and groups of individuals live out, construct and reconfigure in the process of social interactions. The analysis will be built on the transcribed narratives of the EMM activists they present in their YouTube video content to see how these narratives reflect the individual and collective performance of masculinity and how (Connell, 2005).

Seeking the answer to Research Question 2, I formulated the secondary questions that I will address in this chapter: Are the masculinities, which the EMM men display, progressive and gender-sensitive and to what extent? What are tensions and contradictions in the masculinity pattern the EMM men present? What is the foundation on which the EMM men build their preferred masculinity model? Is the EMM an antifeminist oppositional movement as is the RMM?

My suggestion that I expect to prove by addressing these questions and analyzing the discursive construction of masculinity is that the EMM unlike the original RMM represents a more progressive gender project.

As outlined in the above section *Research Sample* of Chapter 2, nine men who were active in the EMM were chosen for the in-depth analysis because, as I assume, the EMM is a project of the more progressive Russian masculinity in terms of the attitude to gender equality, whatever backfalls to the old patriarchal views it can still involve. My starting point, based on five years of observation of the RMM and EMM online activities, is that the chosen sample represents the masculinity, which is more gender-sensitive than another part of the RMM. This conclusion is made, first of all, on the basis of the EMM Manifesto and Charter⁴¹ declaring that the EMM opposes the patriarchal family ideas and that men and women are equally valuable members of the society with equal rights and responsibilities. In my analysis I will compare and analyze representations of diverse masculinities based on the data obtained through the observation of the sample’s online activity. Here I examine how EMM activists construct and represent their masculinities and ideas in their YouTube videos and compare

⁴¹ <https://www.egmrm.ru/manifesto>

those with the movement's goal and objectives, their demands to the Russian Government and the EMM Manifesto and the Charter.

While examining the YouTube videos of the EMM activists, I paid special attention to biographical details, including the family they were raised in (one- or two-parent family, social class), trying to perceive what the cultural models and norms they endorsed and how they interpreted those through their experiences in order to understand their views on gender relations and social roles of women and men in their native culture. Also, I am attentive to how they perform their masculinities, favoring the gender roles of a domineering man and submissive woman, or the equality of men and women in the family and in the society. Another task for me was to find out whether all nine activists use the same pattern of constructing their masculinities or this construction pattern varies and is unique for each of them.

4.2. The Egalitarian Men's Movement (EMM)

EMM was organized by a group of new and long-standing RMM activists, including Anton (organizer), Mikhail N., Aleksandr Leo, Brissen, Pavel Khokhlovsky, Vantala TV, and REALIST (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2018, October 03). The new movement launched its own website www.egmrm.ru which had a modern design, two language versions (Russian and English), a new simplified version of the Men's Movement logo and a list of contacts ("first aid") for men, who need urgent assistance in legal matters. Even through EMM's main documents (its Manifesto and Charter⁴²) contain some objectives taken from MensRight.ru (such as abolishing the conscription army, adopting the same legal retirement age for men and women), EMM's agenda pointed to a radical change compared with its predecessor RMM. As I will examine below, it departed from the patriarchal and antifeminist ideas to pursue a more liberal turn towards a gender-equality agenda, which may be defined as the most progressive in the history of RMM.

In their Manifesto and Charter, EMM declared a liberal idea of pursuing social change through amendments of the Russian legislation. Unlike the RMM, EMM acknowledged that existing family problems were not conditioned by the "feminist ideology that captured Russia"⁴³, but caused by "the imperfection of family legislation and objective social, biological and economic prerequisites, [...] not by personal qualities of individual women or men"⁴⁴. What radically distinguished EMM from the RMM is their expressed refusal to

⁴² <https://www.egmrm.ru/manifesto>

⁴³ <http://menalmanah.narod.ru/menmov.html>

⁴⁴ <https://www.egmrm.ru/manifesto>

support any kind of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘patriarchal family’. The EMM declared in their Manifesto that they exclusively stand for partnership and equality in family relations. In other words, the EMM did not inherit the aggressive anti-feminist agenda from the RMM and only declared its opposition to what they considered the “radical wing” of feminism, providing no explanation of their understanding of “radical”. The majority of its objectives are dedicated to the amendments of the Russian laws to remove any mentioning of gender and ensure a complete gender equality before the law. Unlike a patriarchal part of the RMM, the EMM distanced itself from religion and foreign policy of the state and in its Manifesto declared to oppose any ideas of patriarchy or matriarchy, of racial or ethnic superiority, or any discrimination on the grounds of sex⁴⁵.

This major split in the RMM community may be interpreted as a sign of transformation from the movement that was organized as a backlash against the (evidently exaggerated) spread of feminism in Russia to the movement that abandoned patriarchal traditional values as outdated and chose to funnel their efforts to the achievement of social change through the perfection of legal system, which can be equally beneficial for men and women.

This transformation might signify the change of opinions of some Russian men who, according to the EMM’s informal leader Anton, strive to leave the “patriarchal swamp” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2018, October 03) and pursue a more progressive and more egalitarian masculinity projects, commensurate with the social reality of the twenty first century. This issue will be discussed below to prove the assumption, formulated as the Research Question 2, that organizing of the EMM signifies the emergence of a more progressive Russian masculinity.

4.3. The EMM Protagonists

The sample comprises nine EMM activists of similar age (40-50), except for Pavel Khokhlovsky who is 30. They share similar experiences: two-parent families, middle class, that is, not poor, but not rich, university education both in Russia and the US. Mikhail N. and Iogann Sebastian studied in the USA, five of them (Sergey Mokhrov, Brissen, Iogann Sebastian, Mikhail N., Pavel Khokhlovsky) speak English and four activists have authored books about men-women relationships. All come from major Russian cities (eight of them from Moscow), have no connections in government, have stable employment in IT, retail business and other medium managerial positions, except for Mikhail N., who has a certified

⁴⁵ <https://www.egmrm.ru/manifesto>

disability and lives on welfare, and Anton, who runs his own lawyer's business. Seven of them are divorced and two have never been married. These men share much as regards their material status, social status of their families and went through similar experience of divorce and loss of connection with their children despite paying alimony. The masculine identity they present through the video content consists of representation of themselves as well-read in natural sciences and social history (Mikhail N., Sergey Mokhrov), psychology of humans and men-women relationships, philosophy and theology (Iogann Sebastian, Sergey Mokhrov, TRASH Labs), cognizant of modern politics (Pavel Khokhlovsky, Anton, Brissen).

The study of video narratives of the EMM activists revealed both common features and some differences in the masculinity representations. The narratives of Pavel Khokhlovsky, Mikhail N., Sergey Mokhrov, Brissen and Ruslan Galiayev support the idea of the EMM that women and men are equal in all respects and that EMM aims to force the authorities to align the Russian laws with this modern-day situation. On the other hand, the video narratives of REALIST, Anton, TRASH Labs are more contradictory and contain a mix of progressive ideas of gender equality and acceptance of sexual minorities and, on the other hand, the traditionalist gender binary promoted by Novoselov's "ranks theory" that posited men's superiority as rational actors and women's inferiority as a victim of her emotions. This is what Connell defines as "[a] familiar theme in patriarchal ideology" and "a deep-seated assumption in European philosophy" (2005, p.164). Also, in my analysis I considered the attitude of activists to culturally approved representations of masculinity and femininity (stereotypes), prevalent in Russia, and how/if they contest them as an important factor in understanding how the said activists construct their individual masculinities.

For the purpose of this research, below I present more detailed description of the roles the activists play in the EMM, based on their video content.

Anton is a lawyer and presents himself as a specialist in the family law and in the legal protection of the rights of men during divorce proceedings. Anton is the driving force behind the EMM as is acknowledged by other activists and is the author of the EMM goal and objectives, nineteen requirements to the Russian Government and the EMM Charter. He launched the EMM website www.egrmm.ru using his own funds, through his connections managed to get interviewed by the mainstream press (RFERL, BBC Russia, Russia Today, TV Center) in 2018 and 2019. However, Anton has never openly acknowledged himself to be the EMM leader.

The activist known only by the nickname Brissen is a Russian citizen, who now stays in Cuba as a member of the Russian foreign trade mission. He does not reveal much personal

details about himself, but says he travelled a lot around South America and Asia, has extensive experience of living abroad. Through his video content he appears to be the one most fair-minded and unlike other activists under this study he criticizes men for unhealthy life habits like? and negligence, for being shallow and too lazy to take care of their own intellectual development. While other activists always blame Russian authorities for the existence of such problems such as the high rate of men's suicide and the shorter life span of men as compared to women in Russia, or the lack of psychological help and shelters for male victims of domestic violence, Brissen holds men responsible for their early deaths and high suicide rate and refuses to blame it on women or state only (Brissen, 2021, April 10). He critiques men who consider the EMM's objectives and main provisions of the EMM Charter as dogmas and attack those, who have a different opinion. This feature of the EMM was confirmed by Anton, who said that "EMM has no dogmas... men's movement must make a man happy, if a man does not feel happy being a men's movement member, then he should seek for happiness somewhere else" (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2019, December 26).

Sergey Mokhrov presents himself as an intellectual, he speaks fluent English, and produces video reviews of new books written in Russian and English, films and documentaries, talk shows and government and public debates for the EMM that are related to family issue, men-women-children relationships and domestic violence. He acknowledges that Sergey is his assumed name and unlike other activists never shows his face in his videos. Many of his videos are dedicated to the alimony (Sergey Mokhrov, 2019, May 22; 2019, September 09; 2020, October 27). He discusses alimony for children and former wives? from several viewpoints - psychology, law, morality and religion and arguing that its "philosophy of alimony is simple: it 'is psychopathic, immoral, anti-Christian. It is a shame on civilization and a stone around the neck of the family system, because the alimony kills the family.'" (Sergey Mokhrov, 2019, May 22). Sergey authored a book "Beware the Family" (2014), which is available only for online reading on his Blogspot pages. Here is an example of his rhetoric about women's role in the legal battles for the child custody: "... women of the entire modern pan-European civilization are special people, let's say, with a special morality, which was perfectly formulated by one Moscow [female] judge (speaking about herself): "I have no conscience, I have children"." (Mokhrov, 2014). Sergey often mentions how hard it was for him to survive the divorce and the separation with his son. Now he is in a long-term relationship.

The activist, who has a YouTube channel REALIST, and is known under this nickname, plays a role of “First aid” for men, who found themselves in difficult situations with respect to marriage or relationships with women, or parents. Same as Sergey, he dedicates many videos to the discussion of child support (alimony) issues.

Mikhail N. is one of the oldest activists of RMM, who had two YouTube channels: *Mikhail N. Muzhskoe prozrenie*, which is active now, and *Mikhail N. LIVE. Men’s Movement* which was deleted by YouTube in 2021. He has a bachelor’s degree in biology and his video content is dedicated to the discussion of human instincts and their influence on men and women behavior and social life. In the EMM he is the harshest critic of Oleg Novoselov’s “ranks theory” and a patriarchal part of the RMM.

Other activists mostly discuss what they portray as real-life stories of men-women relationships and give advice how to resolve the arising issues, while the activist known by the nickname TRASH Labs gives audio lectures in human psychology and men’s health issues.

The five-years observation of these men’s activity on YouTube allows to trace the evolution of their views and the way they verbally express them in their videos, as well as departure (however partial) from the RMM patriarchal narratives. The evidence of the turn to more progressive and egalitarian agenda is based on several reference points: (1) denunciation of Novoselov’s “ranks theory” and patriarchal family and society model, (2) rejection of a “real man’ stereotype, which is a part of the masculinity construct in the Russian culture, (3) partial departure from the harsh misogynist rhetoric of the RMM. On the other hand, in their views on the woman’s role in a family or in a male-female relationship, the old RMM’s idea that a man must be a dominant partner in the family still persists. As regards the attitude of the EMM activists to other men, in their video content they display the covertly domineering role of teachers for ‘non-red-pilled’ men and their followers at large.

Consequently, the masculinity they represent is built on the foundation of a man’s life rules comprising both progressive ones, different from the rules of the patriarchal part of the RMM (for example, rejecting the aim of restoration of patriarchy in Russia), and the rules shared with the RMM: “no dating or marrying single mothers; no legal marriage in Russia until the family law is changed; men shall not allow women to be used as financial resources” (Vantala TV, 2019, March 11).

4.4. Critique of Novoselov's Ranks Theory by the EMM

The first signs of the change of RMM activists' attitude to the Novoselov's 'rank theory', which for many years has been regarded by the RMM as the undisputable truth, appeared back in 2015. Mikhail N. in his videos explains in detail why Novoselov's theory of human herd ranks is false:

“So-called “rank theory” is a myth. One can't transfer ranks from animals to humans. Novoselov made several serious mistakes: His main mistake is that he transferred the ethology theory to humans. [...] then, in the ancient times people lived in a resource-deficient environment. But now the resources are abundant, and woman can survive without a male. Modern man cannot be perceived by the rank he would have occupied in the primitive herd. [...] this is nonsense and obscurantism. But this theory has found its way to the crowd's minds and now we are reaping the results. How correct is it to transfer the rank theory to the modern man? It is true for school, army and prison - they behave there like primitive beasts. But this is an unnatural environment. This is not right for a free society. In such a society, who is alpha or beta? The one who is stronger or the one who has more deadly weapons? Alpha rank is conditional, the rank theory cannot be applied to humans. Animals establish their status or rank through violence. But in a normal human society a status is won by intellect or professional skills. Novoselov cut a tunnel for us to the light but now it is necessary to depart from his theory of “high-” or “low-rank”, it was a childhood illness of men's movement and now it should be gone.” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2018, February 16).

Other EMM activists (Anton, Pavel Khokhlovsky and REALIST), cited below, denounced Novoselov's theory using the same arguments: animal ranks cannot be applied to men, these ranks are conditional, situational, unstable.

Anton explains:

“Today you can be an alpha male in your family or to your colleagues and tomorrow the state will come to you and order you to go to the obligatory military service and you suddenly sink to the omega status – a slave with no rights and no voice ... There are physically strong men who think they are alphas they mock men's movement saying it consists of wimps and gays. I saw such tall and muscled men in courts and I saw how they were losing in courts when the state owned them and stripped them of all possessions to give them to their ex-wives. I saw them crying like babies.” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2020, February 23).

Pavel:

“Novoselov's call to return to patriarchal family is retrograde – such return is impossible because women now are economically independent in a situation of abundance of material resources” (Khokhlovsky, 2020, June 26).

Sergey:

“A man can be beta for his family or colleagues but a woman who loves him can think he is alpha. The rank is assigned by people surrounding you.” (Sergey Mokhrov. (2021, May 19).

As seen in these extracts from the video and written content, all these men regard a masculinity rank (the hierarchy described in Novoselov's book *Woman. A Manual for Men* (2009)) as a social construct of the unstable nature. They underline that any masculinity rank is a behavioral pattern, a role, which is not fixed, but can vary depending on the character traits and the social environment that can change. They advise men not to take the hierarchy of ranks too seriously because a man's behavior and performance of masculinity can change depending on the social situation, type of people surrounding this man and how the man feels himself in a given situation. This understanding of masculinity as a social construct of unstable fluid nature indirectly supports the conclusions of masculinity researchers (Connell, 2005; Bridges&Pascoe, 2014). Though these men never mention any names of scientists or book titles they might have read on this subject, it can be reasonably assumed that they are well read on the masculinity construct and its features.

The second reference point to be discussed here is rejection of social stereotypes about men's social roles by the EMM activists.

4.5. Refiguring the Trope of the “Real Man”. Opposing Gender Stereotypes.

The most popular target of the EMM activists' criticism is the toxic masculinity behavior displayed by physically strong so-called 'alpha-males', 'macho men' that is connected to violence, especially against women. EMM activists dedicated several videos to discuss why some women prefer to date 'macho men', arguing that these brutal men are abusive husbands and bad fathers (Pavel Khokhlovsky, 2020, July 21; 2021, April 20). Anton in a video dedicated to denunciation of male 'alphas' even claims that “alphism” is just a facade for someone weak, “a loser” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev. (2020, February 23).

All nine activists are unanimous in rejecting one of the most persistent stereotypes related to toxic masculinity – that “boys don't cry”, arguing that compassion and sensitivity are not and should not be associated exclusively with femininity. They openly speak about their shortcomings and mistakes, and the emotions they experienced while meeting with challenges. REALIST calls on men not to suppress emotions, not to keep silent when in trouble, but communicate their concerns to the men and women close to them. He also explains how toxic masculinity negatively impacts men's health and even drive some men to committing suicide. As he puts it “We [men] are the same type of humans as women. Learn from women how to express your feelings, seek advice and compassion” (REALIST, 2020, December 07). Of all nine men in the sample, REALIST, TRASH Labs and Brissen

specifically underline the importance for men to change gender practices as concerns men's health and pursuing a healthier life style. This is in line with Connell's (2000, 2001) argument that healthcare is an important sphere of human life, where a change of gender practices that these men invite their peers to pursue can be implemented not in opposition, but in cooperation with women "creating coalitions around shared interests in reducing violence, alcoholism, road trauma, and other toxic consequences of contemporary masculinities" (Connell, 2000, pp. 9-10; 2001).

Another wide-spread social stereotype in Russia is "a real man". It is used either to praise ("you are a real man!") or to shame men ("you are not a real man!"). But what is a real man in Russian culture? Does activists' understanding of 'a real man' or 'a real masculinity' coincide with the academic opinion? A Russian sociologist and gender researcher Irina Tartakovskaya defines "real masculinity" as follows:

"a person from whom leadership and asymmetry of gender roles are expected (that is, he will by no means behave like a woman and will not look like her in any way). He is necessarily heterosexual and necessarily successful... Traditional masculinity sees the role of a man as a warrior, a protector, a person who is ready to use force." (Tartakovskaya, 2020, February 21).

Tartakovskaya thereby highlights the two definitive roles of 'a real man', which are: a warrior and a protector. Soviet and Russian sexologist Igor Kon argues that 'a real man' is "the most harmful myth of all. The talk that a real man is a warrior and a protector is nonsense. Our civilization was created not at all by warriors, but by plowmen." (Kon, 2009, p. 25).

However, according to the empirical experience, the videos by the nine activists suggest that the understanding of a 'real masculinity' in post-Soviet culture is more complex, than the definitions put forward by these scholars. The analysis of video content of the EMM activists demonstrates that for them to be 'a real man' means not so much to be ready to fight, but to be always ready to help, to please and sacrifice everything a man has, including his life, for the benefit of a woman and his motherland. REALIST explains the meaning of this stereotype as follows:

"Many men don't know how to be modern men, men of the 21st century. Society wants men to be "real men", who will spend all their life to please and provide for women and to die, preferably before the legal retirement age not to be a burden for the state pension system and for his wife" (REALIST, 2021, April 20).

Anton recorded several videos, where he refutes the stereotype and instruct his followers how a strong 'red-pilled man' must behave in relations with women: "Do not rush

to marry, do not give her flowers or do another stupid thing. If you like to please women, who are you after that? Maybe “a real man”?” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2020, November 13).

Anton:

“What makes a man strong? What does it mean to be a strong man? To be a strong man does not mean to be a so-called “real man”. Strong men... if something does not suit them, they change it, make the world more comfortable for themselves and for women. ... Those men who do not want to change the uncomfortable environment are weaklings and losers. This weakness of Russian men is in the lack of desire to stand for their rights and this led them to the total loss of their rights.” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2020, February 23).

“...what it means to be a strong man? Be rich or have power? What men are strong? – The men who are not afraid to say ‘no’ to a woman. A strong man puts his interests first” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2019, October 02).

Mikhail formulates his understanding of a modern man as a man who must pursue individual development and be a master of own life:

“What is important for a modern man (in Russia)? Three qualities that the majority of our men do not have because these were erased from them in the childhood – human dignity, information awareness and self-control” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2021, April 18)

Individualism and “reasonable egoism” is also promoted by the activist known only by the nickname Vantala TV, who starts each of his videos with a set phrase: “A man does not owe anything to anybody, especially to a woman” (Vantala TV, 2021, May 19). another activist Iogann Sebastian advises men to be self-sufficient and not to be dependent either on other men or women, with whom men can fall in love:

“The most valuable things can be received free of charge. Is it worth begging for something that is not worth a broken penny? Look for the strongest impressions in this world. Try to keep your plans not tied to someone else. The fewer characters there are in your plans, the sooner they will come true. All the problems ... - job, relationships, etc. will vanish. Get rid of painful addictions with the help of strong impressions. This is also true for the toxic relationships” (Iogann Sebastian, 2022, January 14).

Anton supports Iogann Sebastian’s call for a man’s independence:

“You must be happy and you owe nothing to anyone. If you became a doormat for a woman – you are in deep trouble. Women love men who are proud, confident, with manly character, men who cannot be easily manipulated. Of course, they prefer to marry easily controlled ‘male doormats’, but feel real love and sexual desire to the type of men I described first. Women call such men “men who know what they want in life, from a woman”, such strong-willed men.” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2020, November 13).

The men in the sample reject this “real man” stereotype and in response to the multiple male and female critics of the EMM they readily agree in the videos that they “are not real men” within this stereotype framework. As follows from the above extracts, the activists portray a negative image of ‘a real masculinity’ quite opposite to the one defined by Tartakovskaya. Evidently, for them ‘a real man’ means a subordinate masculinity, that is a powerless “weakling” and “loser”, as Anton puts it, whose relationship with women is that of alliance and subordination and such a man voluntarily submits to women, who intimidate and exploit him (Connell, 2005, p. 37). That is why they often refer to and evidently favor a different masculinity type - that of “a strong independent man”. Thus, refuting the stereotype of an allegedly subservient masculinity of a “real man”, they in fact replace it with the other - hegemonic masculinity - as implied by the “strong man” phrase. The activists in fact construct the gendered power relations hierarchy and offer their followers a different masculinity model – of a strong-willed, independent ‘red-pilled’ man, superior in relation to “real men’ (or ‘non-red-pilled’ men) and women. In an attempt to dismantle the stereotype of ‘a real man’, fixed in the public conscience in Russia, they construct the ‘oppositional masculinity’ claiming for hegemony (Connell, 2005, pp. 37). Rejecting traditional gender role stereotypes, they represent themselves as “red-pilled men”, whose ambition and mission is to take on the role of “prophets”, helpers for the “awakening” of other ‘non-red-pilled’ men, who, according to Mikhail “live within a zone of information darkness” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2019, July 30; Mikhail N., 2011, p. 231).

Also, it should be noted that the men under study define their masculinity through women’s opinions about men. It is especially clear from below extracts, when they discuss relationship with women and what qualities an ideal woman should have to be worthy of relationships with them.

Anton:

“Women should listen to their men. If you have chosen this man, respect your choice. Stop nagging your man. ...if you want harmonious happy relationship, obey your man. A woman always want to change a man, but they should develop themselves and develop together with the man.” (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2021, April 26)

REALIST:

“Women became unfit for relationships, so it is impossible to build a family with them. It leads to a whole lot of waste and no gain. Marriage is out of the question because it is an iron cage and a trap for a man considering our legal system... I believe sooner or later we will come to androcentrism in relationships. Androcentrism is when it is not you, who is obliged to her, but she owes to you .. to deserve your attention.

She is interested in you, but you do not need her without any profit. Profit does not necessarily means financial things, profit may be emotional, spiritual. Not many learn to value themselves to such a degree as to present such requirements to women – “Be useful for me and then I will commit to a relationship with you.” Many are afraid that a woman would leave... well, let her leave. It is for a woman that if she is in a relationship her status grows up, but for you it does not matter. You are self-sufficient. I see the 21st century relationships only in such a way, but not in any other”. (REALIST, 2021, April 20).

These extracts show that in relationships with women these activists also want to play hegemonic masculinity same as in case with their social network followers but in a more open way. Their narratives suggest that they want to be accepted and recognized by women as strong, domineering partners. In some of videos these narratives sound like an ultimatum for women, the main condition of starting any romantic relationships. On the other hand, as regards the third reference point to be discussed here, despite the ‘strong-man’ rhetoric, the attitude to women and relationships with women has changed after the EMM was organized end of 2018.

4.6. Lexicon Change as a Sign of Shift to Gender-Sensitive Agenda

After the organization of the EMM, the openly sexist words, diminishing and offending women, disappeared from the video content and the general tone changed to more neutral in line with the EMM’s Charter and Manifesto, proclaiming non-discriminatory politics of the movement. In several videos, Mikhail N. in response to subscribers’ comments called them to abandon such words, offensive for women, like “*baba*” (a Russian colloquial word for a female, who is rude, aggressive and nasty⁴⁶, which by its meaning is close to English “slattern”) or to stop calling married men “*baborab*” (a Russian slang word from the RMM’s vocabulary that means ‘male slave of females’; not recorded in dictionaries).

He claims that

“The EMM stands for the equality and respect between all people irrespective of gender, we are against sexism in any form. Our objective is to push for the amendment of legal system through the peaceful civilized dialogue with authorities and we want to do it together with women” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2019, October 31).

In 2021, contrary to predominant opinion of his subscribers, Mikhail declared his support to two Russian teenage sisters, who killed their father because of alleged abuse. This was an unusual action of the oldest RMM activist (since 2009), who was earlier known for his hate speech and slur against women. In this case he went against the usual women-blaming

⁴⁶ <http://www.gramota.ru/slovari/dic/?word=%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%B0&all=x>

stance of the RMM community, who, judging by posts and comments on the RMM forums (Masculist.ru), blamed the sisters for the crime. As Mikhail N. claimed in the video, he did it for the sake of justice and the female sex of the people is not the cause to blame them (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2021, February 03).

Similar change has been observed in videos of other activists. However, Anton still sometimes uses the word “*baba*” explaining:

“Female sex is divided to “*baby*” (plural of “*baba*”) and to women (ladies). If a woman starts playing a dominance game with a man, if she is scandalous, physically and verbally aggressive to her husband, loud-mouthed, she instantly becomes a “*baba*””. (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev. (2021, April 26).

Other activists prefer a neutral “woman”. Also, another change in the EMM is that activists, except for Mikhail, began to do live video streams with women. Activists discussed men’s issues in Russia with female psychologists and feminists, did live streams with other female YouTube bloggers and women from their circle of friends. They discussed relationships between men and women, an issue of why Russian courts usually give custody of children to women. The response of their subscribers to these 2019-2021 videos and towards female guests was more negative than positive, but also some users blamed activists of becoming “female servants”, that they bent to women, or that they support matriarchal system in Russia.

4.7. Tensions and Contradictions

The EMM activists under study in their representation and promotion of ‘red-pilled’ masculinity demonstrate some contradictions, inconsistencies between the proclaimed agenda and actual rhetoric, and even double standards that will be discussed below.

In examining the EMM activists’ representation of masculinity, it is important to explore their relations with the state. While refuting the assumptions of other non-RMM or EMM bloggers that the “men’s movement is a dangerous sect, dissidents or revolutionaries” they underline that they have no intention to contravene Russian laws (Pavel Khokhlovsky, 2019, December 26). REALIST in his video says:

“We are not for revolution or riots, we are for cooperation with authorities, we teach men how to use existing legal system to claim our legal rights and at the same time we try to influence authority peacefully to amend the laws that now benefit women only” (REALIST, 2019, December 22).

This attitude to authorities is the part of the EMM masculinity representation. The EMM men in line with their liberal agenda recognize and accept the power of the state. The

masculinity they present has the oppositional and hegemonic features only in relation to women, 'real men' and partially to the culture as regards the prescribed gender roles. In this sense their collective masculinity can be classified as subordinate to the hegemonic masculinity of the state (cf. Connell's "hierarchy of power among men" (2005, p. 24)).

When I investigated whether the EMM activists represent a more progressive, gender-sensitive, more open-minded men with anti-patriarchy and gender equality agenda, this was based on a comparison of the EMM men with the majority of the RMM, who in their comments on Masculist.ru express the desire to gain back the man's power over women within the patriarchal state system. However, if the EMM activists were compared with the Western men of the same age and same education level, they could be called 'progressive' only with certain reservations. While the EMM men certainly represent a progressive though very thin strata in the RMM community, they would not fit the definition of 'progressive' within Western society characterized by high degree of gender equality. This is due to a number of contradictions and discrepancies between what they declare in the EMM Charter (e.g. change Russian legal system to achieve gender equality) and the ideas they express in their video content. Despite the departure from the open hate speech against women of Novoselov's style, sometimes their rhetoric can still be sexist or misogynistic.

They reject rigid gender roles and stereotypes as regards behaviors and duties prescribed to men and women both within a family and within the community and aim at achieving gender equality through amendment of the Russian laws and this may show them as gender-sensitive and fair-minded, but their attitude to gay men evidence to the contrary. The EMM Charter highlighted that the EMM "1. is a law-abiding association, ready for a dialogue with state authorities." and "3. Does not and cannot have the slightest relation to LGBT communities and other similar associations."⁴⁷. On the one hand, it is clear that such statements in their Charter, which was drafted by Anton, a professional lawyer, is a sign of the EMM's agreement with the Russian so-called "anti-gay" law adopted in 2013 to prohibit "Promotion of non-traditional sexual relations among minors, expressed in dissemination of information aimed at the formation of non-traditional sexual attitudes among minors"⁴⁸. In their video content the EMM activists never discuss gay men's issues and only mention gay men in the context of refuting a stereotypical view of some Russian bloggers that the RMM is composed of gay men. While rebutting these assumptions as false, Anton, Mikhail N. and Pavel Khokhlovsky underline that they respect all people irrespective of sexual preferences.

⁴⁷ <https://www.egmrm.ru/manifesto>

⁴⁸ Rossiyskaya Gazeta (2013, July 02)– Federal Issue № 141(6117) <https://rg.ru/2013/06/30/deti-site-dok.html>

Pavel Khokhlovsky dedicated two video blogs to overturning the stereotype of comparing the RMM with the “pack of gay men” (Pavel Khokhlovsky, 2020, August 07; 2021, February 15). On the other hand, all men under study can mock gay men through casual short comments and words, which is the evidence of some deep-seated homophobia and heterosexism and this is another contradiction between the declared EMM’s non-discriminatory agenda and their real views displayed in video narratives.

These contradictions can be explained through the following observations. First, by their age (30-45), these men belong to the first and second generation of Russians, who came of age in the post-Soviet period, in an open society and enjoyed the freedom of travelling abroad, and have access to the information about the life in other countries of the world. However, most of these men never left Russia and some visited Turkey for vacation. Also, they were educated in Russia and only Mikhail N. and Iogann Sebastian have a two-year experience of living abroad in the USA as students and Mikhail N. expressly said in several videos that he did not like it. Second, five of the nine men in their videos often allude to and make nostalgic comparisons with the life in the Soviet Union and two of the men in the sample (Pavel Khokhlovsky and Tsinichny Teoretik) declare to support the cause of the Communist Party of Russia that vows to recreate the Soviet Union. This suggests that the masculinity patterns of the EMM men are shaped by the culture they live in.

Some activists (Brissen, REALIST, Sergey Mokhrov, Mikhail N.) recognize women’s accomplishments in politics or business and that gender equality is and must be recognized as a reality of the twenty first century. Mikhail N. says: “When two sexes are economically independent from each other, patriarchy is impossible. A woman on average is not less clever than a man and she can provide financially for herself”. (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie., 2021, April 25).

At the same time, the same men and other EMM activists express the idea that contradicts the above progressive one. In their videos Anton, REALIST, Mikhail N., Brissen, Pavel Khokhlovsky present their division of women by grades. According to them there are women of higher grade (good, obedient wives and caring mothers) and those of lower grade (single mothers, aggressive, scandalous females) (Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2021, April 26). Despite being committed to performing a more progressive masculinity than the rest of ‘non-red-pilled’ men, these men’s performance is not free from double standards. On the one hand, they disapprove of those, who treat women as second-class humans, on the other hand, they divide them into better and worse categories. Also, they insist that based on social and economic considerations a return to a patriarchal family is impossible and

undesirable. And yet, they praise such female qualities as subordination to men, which was the approved female behavior in the patriarchal societies (REALIST, 2021, April 20).

There are other inconsistencies in the representation of their gendered identities. The masculinities they represent is a mix of fair-minded masculinity, which is if not entirely, but close to the progressive agenda of gender equality and men-women cooperation in resolving social issues (Connell, 2005; Smiler, 2015), and of the retrograde patriarchal attitudes (e.g. “Russia is a feminist matriarchal state”, discriminating men) inherited from RMM. The objectives of liberal changes in Russia, including total gender equality, the EMM hopes to achieve. are resting on the outdated traditionalistic patriarchal ideas and as masculinities are enacted in their videos, these confusions and misunderstandings are clearly exposed. For example, their claim in the EMM Charter of being tolerant to any lifestyle or sexuality is contradicted by their video content, which at times exposes at least low tolerance and one can hear their occasional racial slur, mocking these alternative sexualities, sexist and misogynistic speech. Possibly, this happens because they understand gender equality on the basis of biological determinist theory of rigid dual opposition of genders and social roles tied to them, that is why they see LGBT people as abnormal.

On the one hand, when they need to refute the traditionalist stereotypic claim that men’s traditional role is to be providers and protectors of women, they perform a progressive masculinity by recognizing that men and women are equal intellectually and nowadays have equal abilities to provide for themselves. In other cases, in a self-aggrandizing manner they do not hesitate to use the stereotype that women as a human species are biologically different and “have not changed since the emergence of humans on Earth, they still live by instincts less capable to make life decisions based on reason and only men are capable of this” (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2021, August 07; Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev, 2021, June 19). They claim that achieving gender equality is the goal of their movement, but build their understanding of gender equality on the basis of the same belief that helps the inequality to persist. It is demonstrated also in their attempts to present their image of ‘true’ masculinity. While negatively assessing ‘alpha males’ and Novoselov’s system of ranks, saying the masculine rank depends on the social situation a man appears in, mocking gender stereotypes, the EMM men still revert to prevalent gender stereotypes and teach their followers that a man is defined as a person, who, unlike women, is not driven by emotions, but by reason, has strong willpower and courage to reject cultural stereotypes and live according to own rules (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2018, December 10). Thus, performing a more egalitarian masculinity they nevertheless promote the traits of the dominant male’s hegemonic

masculinity, which they are denouncing, when speaking about ‘alpha males’, as well as about gender inequality, to which they verbally oppose (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014, p. 251).

According to the framework set out in Chapter 1 (Connell, 2000), masculinity in the hierarchy from hegemonic down to subordinate or marginalized is not something fixed, but rather represents a live process of practicing and configuring gender. Hegemonic masculinity can be performed before women and other men, who are considered inferior, and at the same time the hegemonic performance transforms into subordinate and submissive in men’s relations with a more powerful subject, for instance, the state authorities (government, police), an employer, an authoritative family member, etc. The masculinity type on display is a socially-situated phenomenon (Connell, 2005).

Therefore, the masculinity model the EMM activists represent is two-fold: performing hegemonic masculinity towards women and ‘non-red-pilled’ men and a submissive subordinate masculinity towards the state. In the first case they use “progressiveness” as a basis to top the masculine hierarchy -claim their intellectual superiority or hegemony over other men (‘macho men’), who are portrayed in their video content as intellectually handicapped, natural-born criminals, alcoholics and women-beaters, and ‘non-red-pilled’ men, who enjoy old-time chivalry to please women, and shaming them as “backward retards” and “females’ slaves”.

A common feature of the EMM men is that they deny existence of discrimination against women in Russia. They claim that women hold too much power, but they do not blame women in having that power because this power was given to them by the state and so the aim of the EMM is to negotiate with the government the distribution of this power equally between men and women. These men see the state as an incarnation of hegemonic masculinity, supreme arbiter, whose power they neither challenge nor deny. The EMM is against the unequal distribution of rights and obligations between men and women, claiming that the major share of obligations is borne by men. Mikhail argues that women same as men are slaves, who serve the government/the state, but in the power hierarchy, the state is on the top, women are below and men are below women so the state uses women to control men (Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie, 2020, December 01).

Also, the EMM men do not challenge male privilege and power, but as for the deterministic view on inherent biological differences between sexes, there are differences of opinion among the men in the sample. As has been noted above, REALIST, TRASH Labs, Brissen and Pavel Khokhlovsky call men to revert from toxic masculinity practices to more healthy gender practices taking women’s behavior as a role-model. On the contrary, Mikhail

N. and Anton, similarly to Novoselov (2009), while calling for equality always underline that biology determines the behavior and life styles of men and women. Michael Messner argues that the perception of biology of sexes as something predetermined and inflexible “makes it difficult for boys to develop their full emotional potential (e.g., empathy, caretaking skills) that they need to become healthy adults, good partners, and effective parents” (Messner, 2011, p. 164). In fact, what the EMM activists offer is the innovative idea for the Russian men, that is, to challenge the “socially constructed emotional deficit” (Messner, 2011, p. 164) in men to mitigate the risks to their health and life.

4.8. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyze the EMM – a group that broke from the RMM end of 2018 and determine whether the EMM can offer a new more progressive Russian masculinity model signifying the departure from the patriarchal one promoted for many years by the old RMM. This analysis has been done within the scope of Research Question 2. In the analysis I also tried to determine to what extent the EMM masculinity project is progressive and gender-sensitive, on what foundation the EMM builds it and explore the tensions and contradictions in the masculinity pattern the sample of EMM activists present.

This chapter described how the EMM was organized, reviewed its foundational documents Manifesto and Charter and includes brief characteristic of the sample of nine EMM activists under study. The transcribed narratives of forty-three YouTube videos produced by the sample were used to analyze how these men construct, perform or contest masculinity in the process of social interactions and allowed to reveal detect certain contradictions in the discursive masculinity presentations.

The analysis revealed a number of factors that both support and refute the characteristic of the EMM masculinity project as progressive, advocating social reforms to achieve gender equality.

The analysis has shown that the goal of EMM to achieve gender equality within the frame of liberal agenda by changing the laws is quite progressive and differs from the retrograde goal of RMM to return the patriarchal organization of the society. However, same as the RMM, the EMM’s goal has been developed on the false premise that women constitute a privileged class in Russia. It suggests that the EMM ignores the institutional root causes of inequality and therefore the EMM’s alleged struggle for gender equality turns out to be the struggle for power with the powerless – women, whom they consider to be a “privileged class” on mythical grounds.

The EMM founding documents (Manifesto and Charter) proclaim a progressive agenda and rejection of any discrimination on the basis of sex or sexual preferences, but in their videos they promote the patriarchal family values, suggesting mandatory woman's subordination, and display homophobia. Also, the EMM activists often contradict themselves in their narratives: despite their rejection of Novoselov's "ranks theory" and his idea of men's moral and intellectual superiority, they continue to use Novoselov's misogynistic definition of marriage as "domestic prostitution", which devalues specifically a female partner in the relationship.

As regards the EMM activists' self-representations of masculinity and the attitude to various masculinity types, the situation becomes even more complex and contradictory. They disapprove of toxic and hegemonic masculinities, which can be seen as a progressive feature, but in relation to the so-called "non-red-pilled" men and women they play a "strong man" hegemonic masculinity. For the sake of objectivity, I cannot but acknowledge that what these men say and the masculinity they perform in their videos should be regarded with a certain degree of doubt, since these video narratives contain apparent contradictions that this analysis has revealed. Some statements they make cannot be taken as their true views, they are cautious in their narrations being aware of YouTube policy and harsh measures against hate speech. Also, there are Russian laws to comply with: the activists often mention that they cannot say these or those words for fear of being punished under the Russian law. For example, discussion of religious topics that may fall under the Russian law about protection of feelings of religious people.

However, despite the contradictions and inconsistencies between the EMM declarations, narratives and masculine self-representations, I consider that the EMM offers a progressive masculinity model to the Russian men. The EMM pursues a clearly progressive agenda in comparison with the RMM, thus opposing a popular Russian idea of traditional gender roles and denouncing the wide-spread gender stereotypes. The EMM appearance is a sign of a positive trend towards changing the popular stereotypical views on gender roles, though nobody can predict today how it will be developing and if the EMM eventually finds the right way to achieve their goal.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of data collected through the online ethnographic observation over the 5 years period of 2017-2021 has shown that the EMM represents the Russian masculinity, which can be considered progressive if compared with the patriarchal masculinity project of the Men's Almanac time. On the one hand, their video narratives, analyzed herein, are not entirely free from the sexist and misogynistic stereotypes, that is, their gender project is not free from the influence of outdated ideas they try to oppose. Nevertheless, I would like to state that the EMM offers a different Russian masculinity pattern, which is in the process of transformation and the EMM represents a middle point on the way of a Russian man's evolution from an archaic patriarchal masculinity to an egalitarian progressive one.

The ostensibly modern elements of the Russian masculinity represented by the EMM activists under study are evident in the acknowledgement of impossibility to return to the patriarchal family model in modern Russia and denunciation of Novoselov's "ranks theory". The EMM discards this theory as outdated and misleading for the Russian men, even though they pay due respect to Novoselov and recognize his contribution to the education of Russian men as regards gender relations. Also, the EMM project bears a liberal character since it advocates a civilized dialogue with government for introduction of amendments to the Russian law as stated in the EMM strategic objectives. It pursues an ambitious goal to unite diverse oppositional men's groups in Russia through the cooperation and public actions to push the government to fix the equality of men and women before the law in all aspects of social life. Other modern features of the EMM include a masculinity project built on the awareness of gender equality, fight against gender role stereotypes. Most importantly, the EMM for the first time in the RMM history showed the Russian men that individualism and self-development must become two cornerstones of each individual masculinity.

The analysis suggests though considerable ambivalence of the EMM agenda that is committed to two conflicting goals: a 'progressive' commitment to advocating social change to achieve 'real' gender equality before the law in Russia, which will be also beneficial for women, and a 'regressive' commitment to the unquestioned male privilege based on the premise that Russia is a feminist state with women being a privileged class.

I need therefore to address the important question whether the EMM is in fact a backlash movement (Connell, 2005) just as the "men's rights" movements in other countries

that are anti-feminist and organized to resist the change pursuing the male self-interests or preservation, or restoration of the male privilege (Connell, 2005a, p.p. 244, 248).

The study of the EMM activists' YouTube video content, including the number of subscribers and views, showed that this movement is relatively small-scale. The number of the RMM and EMM supporters is unknown and cannot be assessed with more or less degree of validity at this moment. The EMM's informal leader (Anton) and some activists managed to attract attention of mainstream media (BBC Russia, Russia Today, TVTs), but this occurred in pre-COVID period and was short lived. The scanning of the Russian mainstream online media over the past year did not bring any evidence of ever mentioning the EMM or RMM. The EMM activists (REALIST, Mikhail, Pavel) mentioned in several videos that the number of EMM members has not grown since 2019: men come to the EMM seeking help in addressing personal problems with women and then leave. Therefore, it can be concluded that for the time being the EMM has little or no political or social influence in Russia despite their achievement of making the men's movement visible (at least mainstream media paid some attention to them) as compared to almost underground existence of the RMM between 2000 and 2018. Still, they remain unnoticed by the Russian population at large and by local sociologists. If we change the focus and see the EMM from the larger society side, these men, who demand social change in terms of more balanced distribution of rights and obligations between men and women before the law, and rejecting the social stereotypes that stigmatize men, especially unmarried and childless ones, are seen by the public (as evidenced by the video content of Russian female and male bloggers, critiquing and mocking the EMM), and the Russian media, as marginalized masculinities, quite contrary to the hegemonic masculinity they attempt to perform before their followers in their video blogs. In other words, the masculine identities of the EMM men cannot be classified as culturally accepted or celebrated by the public at large (Sinitsina, 2019; Yardayeva, 2020) and the movement itself is seen by their critics as oppositional to the Russian authorities, that is why activists have to refute this accusation in their videos.

Overall, the answer to the question whether the EMM falls under the 'backlash' category of men's movements, may be both positive and negative due to its dual progressive-regressive agenda. The EMM claims to be egalitarian or advocating social reforms to achieve total equality between two sexes, same as feminists do; they expressly state in the EMM's Manifesto and Charter they are not against women, and do not support only one form of feminism, that is radical. In this positive sense, the EMM may be a generator of social change

if in future, for instance, it will manage to win support of larger population groups, including women, or government officials.

Western backlash men's movements emerged in the last century as a negative reaction to women's movements, because of the unwillingness of some men to lose 'patriarchal dividends in the form of dominance within the household or in state institutions (Connell, 2005; Ruzankina, 2010, p. 8). Whether this applies to the RMM that emerged in 2000, at the end of transition period from the socialist to the capitalist free market economy, it is hard to state with any degree of certainty due to the lack of relevant sociological research. Based on the data gathered over the period of 2016-2021, feminism as such is not a point of serious concern for the RMM and EMM. Their main claim in fact has only an indirect relation to the feminist movement as these men declare that Russia is a deeply feminist state, which feature, according to them, has been inherited by Russia from the Soviet Union. The EMM cause despite its more progressive objectives is actually based on the false assumption, taken from the RMM and specifically from Novoselov (2009), that in Russia feminism is institutionalized. Therefore, it is not surprising that the EMM activists often call Russian men 'slaves to the state', especially when it concerns the mandatory military duty for men.

The EMM therefore cannot be defined as openly anti-feminist or anti-women since they are pro-equality and against patriarchy, neither it can be defined backlash in their attitude to the Russian state. The EMM makes attempts through media or petitions to lobby the legal changes and to resist the state policymaking as regards the adoption of laws they consider harmful for men's rights, but otherwise they accept the authority of the state and never question the institutionalized gender inequality.

While defining the EMM as backlash is a disputable issue, with a more degree of certainty it can be stated that the above analysis revealed a hidden agenda or reason for the EMM activities, which is not mentioned in their founding documents. The way EMM activists conceptualize masculinity and what it means to be a man exposes the response to the threat of losing masculine privilege, and the existential threat to the masculine identity based on the premise that men must be tough and command women in personal relationships (Connell, 2005a). It may happen on the reason that men, raised and socialized in the masculinized and militarized culture, "defend the only role they have internalized due to the lack of acceptable alternatives" (Smiler, 2015).

Undoubtedly, the whole RMM is an unusual phenomenon in post-Soviet area, but it is the EMM that managed to break through the information vacuum surrounding the RMM for years of its existence. However, this EMM's accomplishment has not made it visible to the

authorities or scientific community in Russia. It remains politically insignificant and is either ignored by authorities and the public or regarded as a group of marginalized men. According to the sociological polls studying the attitude of Russians to gender equality and traditional (patriarchal) family values, the public is more inclined to approve of the second as a sign of social stability. Regular polls in Russia consistently show wide public support of biologically determined gender roles and gender stereotypes such as “a real man”, “only military service can make you a real man”, “boys do not cry”. The EMM in fact moved against this popular trend by rejecting the “traditional values”, promoted in Russia by authorities and Orthodox church, demanding abolition of the conscript army and refuting the men’s role stereotypes. This EMM’s feature alone makes the EMM a social phenomenon that has a potential to influence Russian society so that to transform the conventional masculinity patterns and power relations among three actors: state, women and men. Whether this change in the construction of Russian masculinity launched by the EMM becomes a popular trend and whether in future it will cause the desired social and legal changes in the Russian state towards gender equality shall be a matter of further observation and research.

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APPENDIX 1: YouTube Channels of EMM activists:

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3. Brissen. (n.d.). *Home* [YouTube channel]. Retrieved 20 April 2022 from <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCInoTzbdGdH5JqGuv2ouLWw>
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5. Pavel Khokhlovsky. (n.d.). *Home* [YouTube channel]. Retrieved 20 April 2022 from <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC15ZwXbqZKf4XOFqU7Z8SqQ>
6. REALIST https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCn_P0_Qsm1WLkgRF_stiWUw
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APPENDIX 2: References to Analyzed YouTube Videos of EMM Activists

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVMk6B4tPmE>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2018, December 10). *Kak protivostoyat zhenskim manipulyatsiyam? (How to oppose female manipulations?)* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OmNKZ11Ds0&t=266s>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie_ (2019, July 30). *Chto takoe samouvazhenie? Detalny analiz. (What is self-esteem? Detailed analysis.)* [Video]. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SWEvWXPso8
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2019, October 31). *Live stream of Mikhail N.* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVM-rYTyRy8>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2020, April). *Mif o patriarhalnoy sem'e. Muzhskoe dvizhenie (Myths about the "patriarchal" family. Men's Movement)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yloy7UjGLCE>
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- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2020, December 01). *Tsena i stoimost' storon na dikom seksual'nom rynke. Perezalivka. (Price of the parties at the wild sexual market.* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDcWiOOFCSO>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2021, February 03). *Mif ob otsovskom vospitanii (The myth of being raised by a father)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7-mmtOr5ls>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2021, April 18). *Tri usloviya muzhskogo vizhivaniya (Three conditions for a man's survival)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GspXiqxF4U&t=323s>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2021, April 25). *Live stream of Mikhail N.* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTLN6AgYOxk>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2021, August 07). *Est li u lyudei instinkty? (Do humans have instincts?)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btArB5qLjzc>
- Mikhail N. Muzhskoe Prozrenie. (2021, August 08). *O chem ne dogovarivayet sekta "svideteley patriarkhal'noy sem'I (What the sect of "witnesses of the patriarchal family" does not talk about)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8L_ZgP6amqk
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- Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev. (2019, October 02). *YURIST O MUZHSKOY SILE I KRUTOSTI / Muzhskoye dvizheniye (The lawyer speaks about men's strength and toughness. Men's Movement.)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5VyY0VHflk>
- Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev. (2019, December 26). *Fell in love... What to do?* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Th9zXuuJydk>
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- Muzhskaya konsultatsia / Anton Sorvachev. (2021, May 17). *Sorvachev, Burkhaev, Novoselov on the air / podcast about women, relationships and the men's movement* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YS7jeBU0vY&t=179s>
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- REALIST. (2020, December 07). *Pochemu muzhchiny vymirayut? (Why are men becoming extinct?)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRhWoGyYLAU>
- REALIST. (2021, April 14). *Razbirayem "Kodeks vysokorangovogo muzhchiny" po kostochkam. Tak li nuzhen muzhchine etot "kodeks"? (We dissect the "Code of a high-ranking man" by the bones. Does a man really need this "code"?)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMp8vn_TAfM
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