

Introduction by Françoise Daucé and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozłowski (1st Issue Editors)

“*Dedovshchina* : from Military to Society”

The term “*Dedovshchina*” is widespread in post-Soviet Russia but difficult to translate into foreign languages. Indeed, translation itself does not convey either the polysemy of this word nor reflect the complexity of practices it refers to. *Dedovshchina* is not only hazing, bullying or bizutage. Formed from the root “ded”, which means “grand-father” in Russian, *dedovshchina* is manifested as violence exerted by older conscripts on younger ones. It is a military phenomenon but influenced by social, political and economic realities of Russia. Inherited from the Soviet period, *dedovshchina* is nowadays nurtured with post-Soviet practices and new values.

The purpose of this first issue of PIPSS is to provide insight into the problem of «*dedovshchina*». Based on scientific research and practical experience, we wish to explain the nature of the problem, its origins and how it is being managed. We intend, not only to study *dedovshchina* as a military phenomenon, but also to place it in the broader context of Russian society today. *Dedovshchina* appears at the centre of tensions between conflicting trends in Russia today: liberalism, communitarianism, capitalism, and patriotism. Is *dedovshchina* comparable to violence in other state institutions (prisons, schools, etc.) ? Is *dedovshchina* a specifically Russian problem, or is harassment of young soldiers a universal phenomenon? Consequently, and to conform to the plan of the journal, we provide a comparative and multi-disciplinary analysis of the problem.

The papers published in this issue deal with the following questions:

Dedovshchina and social violence

This first part is dedicated to the sociological dimension of *dedovshchina*. In his paper, an original translation of the last chapter of his book *The Anthropology of*

Regimented Society. Relations of Dominance in Social Interactions among Russian Soldiers (published in Moscow in 2002), Konstantin Bannikov analyzes the consequences of the dissemination of archaic violence produced by the Russian army among the society. Anna Lebedev, in “L'épreuve du réel. Comprendre la tolérance des familles vis-à-vis des mauvais traitements subis par les conscrits de l'armée russe» studies families' letters to the Moscow-based Committee of Soldiers' Mothers in order to understand the perception of military violence in Russian society. She deals with the ambiguities of Russian society wherein *dedovshchina* is considered as the principal reason for draft evasion but accepted as a social necessity too. Anton Oleynik, one of the best specialist of Russian prisons, proposes in “*Dedovshchina* as an element of the 'small society': evidence from Russia and other countries” a comparison of informal relationships among prisoners and among conscripts. His concept of “small society” is useful to describe what Bannikov calls “archaic rituals” in the army. Thanks to these three contributions, *dedovshchina* appears as a useful case for understanding the transformation of social realities in post-Soviet Russia.

Dedovshchina frameworks in Russia

The second part of the issue is devoted to *dedovshchina* frameworks in Russia. Indeed, this phenomenon can only be understood in the more global context of Russian history and culture. Vadim Mikhailin, in “Russian Army *Mat* as a Means of Code Speaking”, shows that language carries on a rather specific function connected with creating a man's identity as a 'military', i.e. a member of the armed forces. The military milieu has always been absolutely adequate for the 'mat-speaking' (slang). In “*Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers under Gorbachev”, Julie Elkner provides an historical account of *dedovshchina* in the transformation of the Soviet military in the late 1980s.

Dedovshchina and hazing abroad

In order to participate in the debate about the specificity of *dedovshchina* in Russia, two papers are devoted to foreign cases. The first one is devoted to a former Soviet-ised army, that of the Czech Republic. The second article is devoted to a Western European army, this time that of the United Kingdom. In her paper on Czech conscripts, Hana Cervinkova shows social phenomena close to Russian ones: army service is informally divided into four separate parts and the person's place in the hierarchy is fully determined by the time that they have spent in the military. This reality clearly echoes the Russian army. However, the military service in the Czech army appears as to be wasted time for young people and will soon be given up in the framework of NATO. Will professionalization of the army resolve hazing problems? In his article on the British army, James Wither suggests that recruits in professional armies can be as vulnerable to mistreatment as those in conscript militaries. Because basic training deliberately isolates soldiers from wider society and necessarily stresses physical toughness, it intrinsically creates an environment in which bullying can occur.

These papers are enriched with a selected bibliography on *dedovshchina* and with book reviews relating to this theme. We hope they will usefully contribute to the better knowledge of post-Soviet society and military, seeing as the Army, to paraphrase Trotsky, "suffering from all [society's] diseases; usually at a higher temperature".

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Regimented Communities in a Civil Society*

Commanders are quite right to refer to lawlessness, violence, xenophobia, etc. reigning in civvy street as a strong argument in replying to the society's claims on bullying. "Look at yourselves," they say. Indeed, people joining up the army come from *socium*, not from *cosmos*, and they are people, not angels, with all human vices and virtues, merits and shortcomings. Being guided by higher officers, service regulations or military idealism, commanders try to convert a man into a perfect soldier, to say an angel.

This comparison is arch-typical rather than metaphoric as the image of a perfect soldier reminds you of an angel, if anything, or at least a saint rather than an ordinary man. Judge for yourself : like an angel (saint), a good soldier is not an initiator, but an executor and transmitter of the will of God ; like an angel (saint), he is devoid of vices ; like an angel (saint), he is devoid of individual distinctions, up to sexual. According to the medieval Christian scholasticism, those who live in Heaven are all sexless, equally dressed and of equal height. That's why Heaven is free of conflicts. Heaven is like a model army unit.

The mission to transfigure "sinners" into "saints" in the army is assigned to commanders. The service regulations entrust the commander with responsibility for the soldier's morale, expecting telepathic abilities from the former. "They came from civvy street, they are all different, some of them cannot speak Russian, so why should I be responsible for what is on their minds ? There is a safe in my office, with a stamp on it – this is what I may be responsible for," says an indignant officer, a friend of mine. Both the Church and psychoanalysts have failed to serialize the transformation of sinners into saints. That depends on a person.

Because of specific peculiarities of ideological work with troops in the Russian army, a moral and psychological aspect substitutes for the fundamental base of material incentives any professional army rests upon. The absence of real stimuli reduces the entire service motivation to “honorary duty”, “civil responsibility”, “patriotism” and other witch-words. Even the highest categories of civil consciousness require material and legal support. *Dukhi* (ghosts)¹ experience mixed patriotic feelings when the state anthem, no matter how solemn the tune, catches them in a “crocodile pose” or scrubbing toilets for a twenty-fifth hour a day.

It's common pleasures of life - neither rank-and-file soldiers, nor officers seem to be averse to - that really stimulate service. You will find proof of that in any demob's² album³. But these pleasures are prohibited by service regulations and therefore unlawful. Allowed only to civilians, they are deathlike to soldiers. Service in general and its separate elements such as a “holiday cross-country race” or an “army song drill” are supposed to be the source of pleasure for model soldiers. But their real pleasures are on “that” side of the fence through which they go AWOL since on “this” side they are not supposed to be satisfied and there is no way to satisfy them. Can we really expect normal soldiers to satisfy their urge for alcoholic drinks with military training and their sexual instinct by putting a gas mask on? And as human wishes aren't limited to that, deprivation strain is fairly high and leads to violations of service regulations.

We agree that the pleasures of civil life are to blame for the deviant behavior of servicemen. But disciplinary standards set by service regulations can hardly be accepted as a norm, something officers working with troops actually mean when they say: “If you don't want to live like normal people, let's live according to regulations”, assuming that life according to regulations is incompatible with normal human life.

The experience of systematic violence young men acquire during 2-3 years of service, first as objects and later as subjects of hazing, is transferred to civil life, which is equally damaging both to society and the army. Hazing-related morals can be observed almost anywhere nowadays - at school, at work and inside one's family, and we shall take a close look at it below. Despite the death-inflicting function of a serviceman, it's not in the army that violence is born. Violence is inherent in human nature. But whereas in an open society aggression is rarefied, the army, by virtue of its isolation, accumulates psychophysical energy and eventually becomes a collector and transmitter of a social conflict. The army condenses rather than generates violence.

Considering the educational and socialization functions assigned to the army, the general conflictogenic situation constitutes itself as a norm and participates in the building of life scenarios.

The utopian nature of official law leads to dual-law mentality, which is on the whole a landmark situation for Russia when traditional Russian law consciousness is seen through a conflict between official truth and people's truth. Steven Frank, who analyzed this phenomenon in his brilliant research of law foundations of a Russian commune of the second half of the 19th century⁴, explains the all-too-familiar Russian "mess" in the context of legal anthropology and attributes its phenomenology to dual-law mentality blaming the latter on a gap between official state laws and people's law. But now let's consider the political and public image of the Russian army and what happens when it is discredited.

Channels transporting dominant army relations to civil society

Imagine that you are 19-20 years old but already wield unlimited power in your mini-society. Your word sets the surrounding human mass in motion. You inspire fear and awe. Nobody dares to say "no" to you, least of all offer resistance. And

then you, great and almighty, are demobilized and find yourself in a new social environment where, the moment you enter it, you are nothing, and which is governed by other principles of winning authority, long-forgotten by you, so you have to start it all over again. You have to drop those simple and clear methods of self-assertion that enabled you to savor the sweet taste of power over people. And as you don't feel like dropping them, you start thinking how to use them.

There are three ways:

1. A civil society is miscellaneous, so you are looking for a suitable niche where your dominant ways would fit in. First, this is militia or police where military service is compulsory for getting a job ; second, these are private security firms, lots and lots of them, for the transitional period can be interpreted as disintegration of the totalitarian model, in the course of which violence stops being an exclusive prerogative of the state but remains a significant social factor. Demand for people with experience of violence is fairly high in transitional societies.

2. A civil society is labile, so you can transform some of its structures and instill the principles of organized violence acquired in the army. They will strike root there where people like you get together or in newly-formed closed sociums where time is a factor in social self-fulfillment as in hostels for students of higher schools oriented predominantly at young men with considerable enrollment privileges for demobs, for example, traditionally "male" departments of pedagogical institutes (departments training labor instructors for secondary schools) or the Moscow-based Mining Institute, etc.

3. Society reproduces itself in you, so you can build a new "cell" by creating a family of your own based on hazing-style relationship.

By its attitude to forcible conscription as a principle of manning the army, society is divided into two parts with largely homogeneous sex and age structures. “For” are predominantly people of older generations with a patriarchal way of thinking, who perceive dominant army relationship as a useful necessity. Their logic rests on the following arguments: “he who hasn’t served is not a real man”, “I served, so let others serve”, “I suffered, so let them suffer too”. The acceptance of violence as a life principle distorts the notion of normal social relations and spreads a belief that being fit for violence is a criterion of social success, while being a former victim justifies the violator in his own eyes, hence the brutal ambitions of all those “real” men living according to “real” concepts based on their knowledge of life they “spooned up” while “smelling powder” or “doing porridge”.

The majority of middle-aged and older men wish all young people to go through the army. Personal compensatory motives of their “well-wishing” clearly prevail over the idea of young men’s duty to defend their homeland. This idea appears only slightly or is totally absent. Social opinion polls conducted by VTsIOM⁵ in 1999 show that the majority of men of middle age and older support conscription, while the majority of women (except those who automatically share their husbands’ opinions) as well as draftees, first-year soldiers, junior officers inclined to retire from service, and especially students, who are given a deferment for a period of study, oppose compulsory recruitment.

This divergence of views has nothing to do with widespread beliefs that young people are afraid of difficulties or that women are the “weak” sex. On the contrary, here women emerge as the “strong” sex capable of consolidating against the state machinery and protect the rights of their men, often risking their own career, health and even life. As for the youth and students, they are driven by aversion to irrational actions that military service *de facto* consists of rather than by fear of problems. In civil life most young men have far more problems

and responsibilities than compulsory service soldiers exempted, at least for two years, from the main problem - making responsible decisions.

Young people are a social category whose energy and life position are crucial to society as a whole and their energy finds other applications, no less worthy than performing an “honorary duty”. They hate going to the army, not because they fear the “hardships and privations of military service”, but because irrationalized activity and interpersonal relations humiliate human dignity. Many young men challenge the recruiting machine by defending their right to alternative service despite the risk of being persecuted by the state, which signals a mature personality factor, a very important social indicator.

The sex and age distinctions inside the two groups – supporters and opponents of a voluntary army – stem from different vectors of life force expansion. A total rejection of compulsory military service in the female and youth strata shows that women attempt to preserve life forces in the biological taxon and young men seek to achieve maximum self-realization in the social-information taxon.

Demobs’ jargon abounds in associative parallels between hazing and patriarchal family relations and echoes the objectives of educational work in society and the army. “Regulations will stand you in good stead in civvy life! Think of how you will bring up your own children!” some officer admonished his subordinates. Back in civvy street demobs successfully practice hazing in their families.

Of course, none of them creates a disciplinary cell at home. The majority of demobs consciously try to drop barracks-style ways, seeing that they evoke a negative response in a civil society.

A large percentage of young men marry in the first few months after being demobilized, while still having to re-adapt themselves to civil life, create a proper material base and acquire a profession that would enable them to occupy their

place in society. Early post-demobilization marriages are motivated by an urge to set up a family as a means of self-preservation and of asserting one's authority over this world, which semiotically corresponds to fatherhood, a role 20-year-old "dedy"⁶ take too literally. That's the morals reigning in the so-called "difficult families" fall within extreme group psychology.

Every 6 months demobs with hazing-affected consciousness pour into civil institutions. Thanks to its powerful adaptive mechanism based on jargon and elements of collective subconsciousness, *dedovshchina* (hazing) successfully introduces itself into a civil society and imposes its own principles – systemic violence and aggression. Through diachronic transmission channels *dedovshchina* finds its way into teen-ager socializing. These channels are unlocked by many demob-oriented civil institutions as, for example, pedagogical schools offering enrollment privileges for demobs, especially in the 1980s. As a result, *dedovshchina* struck deep root at certain departments: future labor and sports training instructors reproduced the habitual hierarchy. Another example is police. You can't get a job their unless you served in the army. The conduct of rank-and-file "cops", even barely analyzed, shows how the force of law transforms into the law of force. In post-Soviet times legitimized aggression in mass consciousness became self-accomplished and malignant in character when the "law of force" equalized law-enforcement bodies and the criminal world in a perverted system of values, in which they equally control all spheres of social, economic and political life.

Extreme group values and big politics

The "law of force" successfully exploited by politicians and intriguers at all levels became a measure of social prestige and social values. Once on the political orbit, having passed through all stages in its climb from micro to macro levels, it ends the institutionalization of violence on a nationwide scale. National consolidation around the Chechen problem is not creative but destructive consolidation

operated by the same mechanisms that guide a crowd consolidating around the abuse of an outcast. When recruitment of volunteers for the Chechen front was announced, hosts of marginals flooded army registration and enlistment offices, a fact that is both indicative and symptomatic: when a regular army resorts to help from marginals, it's time to change the army.

The Chechen problem highlighted the state of consciousness and the system of values in the army. From a conversation at a remote frontier post on the Russian-Mongolian border at the beginning of the second Chechen war :

- What do your guys think about it?
- Many say they would like to go to Chechnya.
- Why?
- Because there is a war there and we are who, we are soldiers. Look, I've been here for two years and not a single incident has occurred... I fired 9 cartridges before the oath, - that's all. And there it's different, there you can shoot to your heart's content...
- Shoot? You mean at people?
- Sure, not at jars. But are Chechens people? They are bandits!
- How do you know? Have you been there?
- They say so on TV.
- You won't shoot at everyone they point at on TV, will you?
- You know we are soldiers. If we came to the army, let's serve and not paint that fence over there for the fifth time. Let commanders above decide who are people and who bandits. And we must defend Russia!
- At first you said you just wanted to shoot.
- And that too.
- Will your family be upset if you are killed?
- Well, most likely they will.

The dialogue reveals destructive energy seeking an outlet and eventually finding it. The soldier started with verbalizing his psychological discomfort (boring

routine, inconsistency between reality and status). Hoping that war will bring relief, he finds arguments to substantiate his destructive wishes but totally disregards the key factor of possible psychological discomfort – responsibility for killing other humans, leaving that to commanders. The dialogue with power embodying law and truth takes place in the soldier's head. The moment he relieves himself of responsibility, official ideology fills a lacuna in his consciousness with quasi-patriotic ideas. The discomfiting thought “to kill people” is replaced by a comforting slogan, “to defend Russia !”.

Patriotic ideas in diffused consciousness are stimulated by the expectation of an arch-foe as a negative factor of consolidation. As a result, aggression erupts through unlocked frustration channels into one's perception of foreign ethnicity.

The above episode would seem unimportant, had we not observed similar trends elsewhere before when young people volunteered to fight in Afghanistan and other “hot points” just to show off their courage rather than out of patriotism. The analysis of some youth groupings shows how patriotic moods transform into extremism⁷. The political elite is trying to exploit the passionate energy of the youth in its own interests, and very seldom - in the interests of the youth. Reading materials from the State Duma with its powerful military lobby, one begins to doubt that the law on a professional army will ever get passed.

Members of the Duma committee on defense believe that “a professional army is an anti-state affair”⁸.

Judging by the lawmaking activity of Duma “defense hawks”, chances of anti-militarist organizations' initiatives winning approval are bleak. Commander of the North-Eastern military force, State Duma deputy Vice Admiral V.F. Dorogin drafted a “code of deputy's honor” he thinks all deputies should comply with. “My code is based on Disciplinary Regulations of the Russian Armed Forces, which sounds logical as the majority of our deputies are servicemen, yes, they wear civil clothes but they are reservist officers and therefore must follow disciplinary

rules”, he said in an interview published in the 30 May, 2000 issue of the *Komsomolskaia Pravda* by Olga Gerasimenko⁹. Incidentally, military units in the force he commands are notorious for exceptionally brutal hazing with a high percentage of death cases. These facts were reported by the press and are cited in the present research¹⁰. It’s hard to expect deputy Dorogin to back any lawmaking initiatives clashing with Civil Service Regulations into which he put his whole heart.

“It’s been already the third consecutive State Duma trying unsuccessfully to change the commander’s “investigative” status because the army brass apparently hates to let go of its “legal sovereignty,” argues *Novaia Gazeta* observer Anna Politkovskaia¹¹. Unit commanders see this “legal sovereignty” as a guarantor of their independence from prosecutors when investigating crimes committed by their subordinates. Prosecutors play more of an advisory role here¹². “This partially answers the question the soldiers’ mothers keep asking all the time, that is when all this hazing is going to stop. Well, as long as the unit commander retains his role of a “body of investigation” ... this sadistic practice will continue unabated! ... *Dedovshchina* is a powerful tool for keeping people under control and no one wants to let go of this tool. No one, except the privates.”¹³

This organized violence as a “management tool” is finding its way from the army into big politics simply because there are people who want this happening. Marginalized political parties like, for example, the Liberal Democrats, are seeking freedom for military criminals such as Colonel Budanov who raped and killed a young Chechen woman. We can hear noisy demands coming from just about everywhere to let the Colonel go or else...

Barkashov’s neo-Nazis¹⁴ have formally applied to supply the Russian armed forces with a well-trained cadre of their own. Add to this a wealth of similar

developments and you will see how attractive the system of organized violence is to marginalized groups and how much support they are getting in the upper echelons of Russian power.

Petty officers often fall victim to this systemic irrational violence too. All this, plus the disproportionate and ineffective use of force in Chechnya, experts say, is changing the “cultural genotype” of the previously “people’s” Russian military that is now quickly turning into a “Czar’s” own army. As a result, many opposition-minded officers are now being phased out and the armed forces are gradually turning into a police force meant to stamp out internal dissent. Another possibility is the army quickly morphing into a third political force poised to join in the political power struggle.¹⁵

The Ethnic Aspect

There is every reason to see the ethnic side of violence that has gripped the Russian armed forces as stemming from domestic aggression being taken out on people of different ethnicity. The Russian society that, throughout the 20th century, went through a spate of ethnic and social metamorphoses in search for identity and unity, regularly seeks all sorts of metaphysical antipodes represented by a socio-ethnic cross section, from “enemies of the people” to the “enemies of the human race”. No other socio-professional group has so painstakingly been divided into “*churbany*”, “*uryuki*”, “*khokhly*”, “*zhidy*”, “*ary*”, “*dagl*”¹⁶, “*katsapy*”¹⁷ and other “*talabaity*”¹⁸ than the army however. Even convicts appear to be totally “ethnic-blind”¹⁹. Outbursts of social frustrations within one ethnic group degenerating into chauvinistic outrages normally peak out at the start of military campaigns sparked by ethnic conflicts.

In a peacetime conflict-ridden society the lack of an unconditional external enemy encourages the search for a conditional internal one and multiple ethnicity and the quick personnel rotation is the only thing that prevents a steady

domination by members of a certain nationality. The principle of social supremacy is even more important here. Therefore, even in the case of ethnic hierarchies (the so-called “*zemliachestvo*”²⁰), it is still reproducing the existing social structure. Each time you have a numerically prevailing and closely knit ethnic group they will invariably be the bosses and all others – the underdogs. Not all nationalities have such ethnic mafias though. East Europeans, unlike Caucasians and Central Asians, rarely form such “mafias”. Dagestanis or “dags” as they are normally called in the army, are particularly consolidated and aggressive²¹.

This phenomenon speaks of certain peculiarities of a national temperament, outlook etc. One should also bear in mind that the originally compensatory functions of both these *zemliachestva* and *dedovshchina* in a vastly exaggerated form reflect the innate problems dogging the Soviet society. In many mono-ethnic units, for example, there is an *a priori* feeling of animosity towards Muscovites that eventually degenerates into a strong desire to humiliate one by hazing him. “*CHMO*”²² for example, may stand for “*Chelovek Moskovskoi Oblasti*” (Moscow Region resident). This does not mean a certain trait of a Muscovite’s character, of course, but rather the socio-psychological imbalance resulting from Moscow’s traditional political, economic and informational preponderance in a multicultural Russia, let alone the USSR.

The very same compensatory mechanism is at work within an ethnic community, but it works more on the socio-regional plane than along purely ethnic lines. Ethnic groups, which have actually suffered from metropolitan oppression, are particularly aware of their ethnic identity. Domestic xenophobia on the part of the Russian majority is perceived equally acutely as deportations and other acts of political repression. We know many cases of the so-called “reverse” racism. During my army days I served with a multiethnic unit and was occasionally derided as “*churka*” (Asian mug) by my non-Slavic colleagues. “*Churka*” in the

army means a member of *any* ethnic minority. If, for example, your company is largely made up of ethnic Russians, all non-Russians will be called “*churkas*”, if, say, Dagestanis are in a majority, then the term will apply to all non-Dagestanis, above all Slavs, etc.

Here is an example of such harassment as taken from letters sent home by members of an ethnic majority.

“...Today we helped a “*churka*” clean up the quarters. We poured some water, then grabbed him by his arms and hands and used him as a mop. We then took him into the office. The whole idea belonged to our company commander. It was the first such experiment...”

And so on and so forth... I personally know the authors of such racist slur and you may rest assured that in their own cultural milieu they are nice and well-educated people all. Moreover, some of their close friends belong to the very same ethnic groups they so viciously derided in their letters. A real paradox, isn't it?

To my mind, this paradox stems from the classless environment the military system is holding out for in its eternal quest for faceless uniformity. The human mind, however, rejects everything that is nondescript, just like Order rejects Chaos.

The factor of different ethnicity is meant to concretize the chaos of alienation, to personify the sense of uncomfortably by defining the habitat as the immediate surroundings, which is off limits to aliens. The ego is placed inside a circle the boundaries of which are equally blurred and depend only on one's ability to more or less clearly define his ethnic origin.

Ethnic negativism is the product of the collective subliminal that is not affected by positive personal relations. The negative is the opposite of the positive construed in the field of the unknown through negative presentation of one's own image. Therefore positive and negative ethnic identities form different mindsets. That's why a decent Russian who has Chechen, Jewish and Kazakh friends, may, in a situation of an ethnic identity crisis, easily start using all sorts of racial slurs irrespective of his personal friendships. Similarly, any Russian serviceman who finds himself within, say, a Caucasian environment, may suffer for his "Big Brother" status. In a different situation, say, during a vacation trip to the Caucasus, he would be welcomed by the very same people who once abused him in the army. This meaning that even though ethnicity may be of little relevance in personal relationships, it may come to the fore within the cultural vacuum of extreme group acquiring the features of a metaphysical archetype of "friend" and "foe" which might even lose its cultural properties.

Public perception of the military and the problem of a transition to a professional army

The mere fact that most of the men who have served in the army have been talking about this all their life reflects the effect the so-called "dominance relationship" may have on the human mind. The more so since this experience represents a phase of socialization and is extrapolated to other areas of human activity.

In socially controlled societies (totalitarian and certain traditionalist societies too) people take a generally favorable view of the armed forces. Just like a marginalized mind regards military service as a good thing because it gives a marginalized person a much-wanted chance to integrate into the rest of the society.

The militarization of the Soviet society started at an early age with the social and educational systems preparing the growing generations for war. Therefore,

military service was seen as the culmination of the socialization process, a sort of an initiation and access to the world of “real”, adult men. This continued until clashes of the real and ideal eventually transformed the system of public values in the late 1960s which has since been drifting away from the “state-always-comes-first” priority towards the preponderance of the individual over the state. While in the West the need for a switch to a new-type armed force was realized in the early 1970s, the Russians’ perception of the draft army started changing in the early 1990s. The reasons for this change of wind are as follows:

- publication of systemic abuses and crimes against humanity in the military ;
- the democratic process changed the individual’s role in the society and with regard to the state. It was probably the first time in Russian history that society realized that the state owes as much to the individual as the individual owes the state, and that if the state fails to meet its obligations to the individual, the latter has every right to respond in kind ;
- the wars in the Caucasus laid bare the inefficiency of the “cheap”, nonprofessional army ;
- the human rights groups were instilling in people the all importance of human right and liberties ;
- that one’s right to alternative military service is guaranteed by the Constitution.

The high degree of psychological and institutional openness in Russia, the people’s increasing involvement in the global educational and productive process and the liberalization of the mobile and global telecommunications system ushered in a wealth of new social values. While in the 1950s and 60s military service was a matter of prestige, draft dodging in the 1970s and 80s was increasingly losing its immoral connotation while in the 1990s draft evasion was overwhelmingly seen as a matter of prestige (especially in the cities), a chance to challenge the society which is so characteristic of the young people’s

mentality as a whole. It's not because young people are so bad these days, it is because youngsters are now taking a very different look at the society they live in and have to adjust to the modern lifestyles which are so different from what existed back in the 1950s and 80s.

These days Success and Prestige depend more on one's education and personal initiative, one's openness to the outside world. Therefore, two years of forced exclusion from normal life are hard to make up for. Each new generation is more integrated into the global process of information integration than the previous one, and is less constrained by all kinds of social clichés and biases. Hence the changing emphasis from fulfilling one's duty to society to the prestige of choosing one's own priorities. A person with a competitive educational background is thus creating his or her own system of "unsinkability" irrespective of how "unsinkable" or "sinkable" the surrounding society may be.

The armed forces provide a tale-telling picture of the growing social stratification of the Russian society where rural dwellers with secondary education account for the lion's share of those being drafted.

Whereas in a militarized society the armed forces are a centerpiece of the public attention, in an open, democratic society, the army is just one of many channels of social fulfillment. The continuously encouraged pragmatism of the young people's mentality, along with a raft of socio-psychological changes happening in post-industrial societies have created new principles of building modern-day armed forces²³. In Russia the past decade also witnessed a whole range of socio-psychological factors causing and resulting from the general downfall in both the role and prestige of the military. "The hushing up of the causes behind the mass-scale loss of military and civilian life, a desire not to look for the culprits purportedly not to traumatize the society may only heighten the temperature of

public wrath and indignation which, in turn, could trigger powerful social upheavals.”²⁴.

Such obvious problems eventually changed the public’s perception of the military as a whole. According to a February 2001 survey conducted by the VTsIOM pollsters, 69% of Russians would hate to have their close relatives drafted into the army, including due to the high death and injury rate in Chechnya – 38%, hazing and violence – 30%, poor living conditions, inadequate food and health hazards - 18%, moral degradation, alcoholism and drug use - 10%, useless loss of time – 6%, crime enhancing environment – 5%, etc...²⁵ Considering the fact the Russian military’s traditional image of a people’s army, it is clear that such dramatic changes would be impossible without a fundamental transformation of the public mindset in favor of a leaner but meaner professional army. The need is dictated by a change in the very idea of war and peace, which originated with the start of the global spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The public mind responds to reality faster than the political mind does with the society pressing the government to speed up the switch to a voluntary, professional army. According to a February 2001 VTsIOM poll, 84 percent of respondents opted for a professional, volunteer-based armed force.

This pressing need for an effective military, however, goes ignored by the powers that be and openly rejected by the powerful military lobby. Even competent analysts like V. Serebriannikov and Iu. Deriugin who fully realizes the objective need for a professional army admit this may not sit very well with certain moral principles of the so-called “enigmatic Russian soul.” These questionable argumentation calls for a more detailed comment.

“Unlike the Western armies where military service based on the liberal idea, legal norms and a clear-cut “patron-client” contract,” V. Serebriannikov and Iu. Deriugin write, “the Russian army has traditionally hinged on moral principles and

collective psychology.” Add to this the so-called “patriarchal” tradition and you will get a complete list of principles that govern the Soviet/Russian army, a list that boils down to just one word – *dedovshchina*.

The history of the Russian army so idealized by our respected analysts is replete with cases when the “conciliarism and collectivism, these two cornerstones of the old Russian army²⁶ did not prevent it from “firing at its fellow citizens fighting for their rights”²⁷. Neither conciliarism nor collectivism or any other pillars constituting the “moral basis” of the Old Russian army ever prevent it from effectively crushing the sprouts of separatism across the Russian Empire. Furthermore, was it not the Red Army whose high morals the authors are so sure of, that the Soviet government leaned on purging its own people ? And can we call *any* army (except a people’s militia) an army of the people, especially one that is run by a political party ?

The authors believe that *dedovshchina* is actually a thing of the past decade and resulting from a clash between “the alien idea of individualism and the inherently collectivist nature of the Russian military community”²⁸. Right ? Wrong ! The first official acknowledgement of “barracks-floor hooliganism” came from the Soviet Defense Minister way back in 1962. But even before that, in the late 1950s, there already were witness accounts of old timers taking the newcomers’ uniforms and things like that. The closed systems of total control are bound to destroy themselves by their own energy, which has no other way of releasing itself. Therefore, it was Mikhail Gorbachev’s *peterstroika* that precipitated the end of this system but just the other way round: *peterstroika* was an attempt to hoist the armed forces and the whole society out of the systemic crisis that was fraught with irreversible consequences. The problem is that reforms started when these consequences were already very much visible.

The above inconsistencies are enough to question the expediency of appealing to speculative layers of ethnic morality when analyzing the prospects of a transition to a professional army. In politics, the fine moral categories are better suited for making camouflage, rather than load-carrying structures.

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Asterisks :

* This article is an edited chapter of K. Bannikov's book, *Antropologiya ekstremal'nykh grupp. Dominantnye otnosheniya sredi voennosluzhashchikh srochnoi sluzhby Rossiiskoi Armii*, RAN, Moskva, 2002, published with the author's authorization. Bannikov's book is reviewed in this issue by Françoise Daucé.

Endnotes :

1 *Dukhi* : new recruits that have just been conscripted (literally “ghosts”, “souls”) [Editors' note].

2 Demob for demobees, in Russian *dembelia* (from *demobilizatsiia*) : conscripts nearing the end of their two years' service and already included in the demobilization order [Editors' note].

3 Demob's album, in Russian *dembel'skii al'bom* : a self-made album, a chronicle illustrated with comics and photographs [Editors' note].

4 S. Frank, *Popular Justice, “Community and Culture Among the Russian Peasantry 1870-1890”*, in *The World of the Russian Peasant: Post-Emancipation Culture and Society*. Boston: Boston University Press, 1990

5 VTsIOM, Vserossiiskii Tsentr Izucheniia Obshchestvennogo Mneniia, www.wciom-a.ru [Editors' note].

6 « *Dedy* » (seniors, grandfathers) : soldiers of the « forth period of service » (from the 18th to the 24th months), enjoying all possible privileges [Editors' note].

7 *Molodezhnyi ekstremizm*. Otv. red. A.A. Kozlov, SPb. 1996, p. 112.

8 *Inostranets*, 10 November 1999, #44(304), p. 5.

9 O. Gerasimenko, “Gosduma ukhodit v zaviazku”, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 30 May 2000, p.7.

10 V. Iakovlev, “Komandir skazal “net” ”, *Novaia Kamchatskaia Pravda*, #19 (183), 27 May 1999, pp. 1 & 4 ; V. Iakovlev, “Na kontrakt cherez kontakt” *Rassledovanie NKP, Novaia Kamchatskaia Pravda*, # 23 (187), 24 June 1999, pp. 1 & 3 ; V. Iakovlev, “Tikhaia obitel' dedovshchiny”, *Novaia Kamchatskaia Pravda*, #37, 7 October 1999 ; V.

Iakovlev, “Na myse Zheltyi ochen’ skuchno...”, *Novaia Kamchatskaia Pravda*, # 42, 11 November 1999 ; I. Sergeiev, “Oruzhie na zakusku...Kazarmy tankogo batal’ona mogli stat’ kamchatskoi “goriachei tochkoj” ”, *Novaia Kamchatskaia Pravda*, #5, 10 February 2000.

11 A. Politkovskaia, « Dedskie igry », *Novaia Gazeta*, #23, 15-18 June 2000, p.3.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 A. Barkashov is the leader of the extreme nationalist Russian Nationalist Union (RNE) movement [Editors’ note].

15 V. Serebriannikov & Iu. Deriugin, *Sotsiologiiia armii*, Moskva, 1996, p. 204.

16 Derogatives for Asians and Caucasians, Central Asians, Ukrainians, Jews, Azeris and Dagestanis [translator’s note].

17 Ukrainian derogative for Russians [translator’s note].

18 Derogatory ethnic nickname for non-Europeans [translator’s note].

19 L.S. Klein, “Etnografiia lageria”, *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, #1, 1990 ; V.R. Kabo, “Struktura lageriia I arkhetypy soznaniia”, *Sovetskaia Etnografiia*, #1, 1990.

20 *Zemliachestvo* : groups formed on loyalties derived from common regional origins [Editors’ note].

21 See I. Sergeiev, “Oruzhie na zakusku...Kazarmy tankogo batal’ona mogli stat’ kamchatskoi “goriachei tochkoj””, *Novaia Kamchatskaia Pravda*, #5, 10 February 2000.

22 *Chmo* : army pariah belonging to the lowest stratum in the army hierarchy [Editors’ note].

23 V. Serebriannikov & Iu. Deriugin, *op.cit.* p. 207.

24 *Ibid.* p. 204.

25 The sum of the answers exceeds 100% as respondents were allowed to give more than one answer. (see www.polit.ru)

26 V. Serebriannikov & Iu. Deriugin, *op. cit.*, p. 226

27 *Ibid.* p. 222.

28 *Ibid.* p. 211 & p. 226.

Anton Oleynik

***Dedovshchina* as an Element of the «Small Society» : Evidence From Russia and Other Countries.**

Abstract

Dedovshchina is considered as a by-product of a particular institutional organization, the «small» society. Non differentiation of the spheres of everyday life, personalized relationships, imperfect control of violence, duality of norms and the imposed authority characterize the «small» society. *Dedovshchina* consists in orienting the violence generated on everyday basis towards replacement victims or the victims that can be sacrificed. The «small» society produces phenomena similar to *dedovshchina* everywhere where it exists, in Russia as well as in the West. In the context of the Russian army, first-year soldiers transforms into replacement victims of the violence resulting from learning obedience as a centerpiece of the military service.

In modern western writings on the post-Soviet Russia the idea that market and political reforms have not led yet to the expected results, i.e. the emergence of democracy and free market, is not welcome. Few are those western scientists who admit the unintended or undesigned results of intentional human actions in the context of former socialist countries¹. They expect there the emergence of a «corrupted and partly mafia-type economic system»² instead of cherishing the illusions about perfect competition and open economy.

The refusal to accept the post-Soviet reality can be explained in different manners. Western advisors played during the 1990s an active role in blueprinting the programs of reforms for Russia as well as for most other former socialist countries. These programs have been based on the know-how accumulated in the West; they reflected an ideal type of the western political and economic

systems. According to B. Badie's term, reforms in post-Soviet countries have got many features of the importation of western models. The act of importation is the «transfer to a given society of a model or a political, economic and social practice invented in the other historical context; this model or practice derives from a completely different social order»³. The longer the distance between the current and the original institutional contexts, the more there are chances that the importation will lead to unexpected results. A model, that has proved its efficiency in one society, can create a disorder in the other society⁴. The institutions promoting the exportation of western models (like the IMF or the World Bank) and their advisors are partly responsible for not taking seriously into consideration the limits and the possible perverse effects of such transfers.

Another explanation of the prolonged silence in respect of post-Soviet transformations consists in economic considerations. Russia is one of the largest producers of oil and gas in the world, and the leading industrialized countries, especially its neighbor the European Union, must take this fact into consideration while evaluating the current situation in this country. The price of telling the truth might be too high: the exclusion from taking opportunities on the emerged market, whatever corrupted and imperfect it is.

The next consideration concerns methodological issues. One can wonder whether the analytical tools available to western scholars fit well the problems observed in post-Soviet countries. The history of social sciences in Russia has been characterized by a long debate between the two camps: the «westernizers», those who believe in applicability of western theories in the Russian context, and the «slaviophiles» (or the «romanticists» called by analogy with the romantic school in Germany) arguing that western theories are of no help in understanding the Russian history⁵. The controversy between the advocates of the two camps is still going on. The «romanticists» argue that the Russian culture have a number of particular features which makes standard

western theories irrelevant. For example, they emphasize that the assumption of the utility maximization does not correctly depict the sense of economic activity in the Russian culture. In Russian, the «*khozaistvo*» (a special term for business) «includes not only a business side, i.e. the search for profit; it has a social, public dimension as well. The economic activity has to satisfy public demands and social needs». Consequently, according to the «romanticists», the model of rational choice tells us very little about the Russian economy.

The opposition between universalistic and particularistic points of view prevents social scientists from speaking about the particular problems of post-Soviet transformations in a language comprehensible for both Russians and Westerners. There exist two extreme cases: either one applies a standard model and, consequently, misses particular aspects in understanding the current situation, or the researcher puts a too heavy emphasis on particular features and, as a result, his or her voice is not heard by fellow colleagues in the West. The last case occurs even if the researcher speaks English or another western language: it is necessary but yet insufficient condition for being heard and correctly understood. Without finding a compromise between universalistic and particularistic models (formulated in whatever language) the correct comprehension of the problems arising in the post-Soviet Russia seems to be very problematic indeed.

One of the possible ways for searching the compromise implies that one perceives the particularities of the Russian (or any other) culture through the lens of the institutional analysis. Culture is then thought as a particular configuration of the institutions, both formal and informal, that can be found everywhere. The list of such omnipresent institutions includes family, the State, trust in different forms (generalized, personalized and institutional), authority relationships (including property rights as power over material objects), contracts, and so on.

Two approaches within the institutional theory should be particularly emphasized. The first is called «old institutional economics». All models and categories of the old institutional economics derive from the process of grounded theorizing, i.e. they are empirically constructed. «Direct application of the grounded theory methodology to economic realities produces context embedded theories»¹. Otherwise stated, the old institutionalism allows rewording the arguments of the «romanticists» in the terms of the institutional analysis. The second approach, the new institutional economics² lies more closely to the universalistic way of thinking. With the help of the new institutionalism the «westernizers» give an institutional meaning to their ideas.

Once the common language is found, there is a need for finding a solution of the following problem: how to put universal institutional categories (family, the State, and others) into a particular, country-specific context ? The methodology of «descending» from the abstract (universal models) to the concrete (particular phenomena), that has been developed in the Marxist philosophy, seems very promising in this respect³. The researcher takes a general category or model and then puts it in a context. To fit well the new context, the category needs modifying. For example, instead of studying the role of trust in structuring everyday interactions in general, one can compare a particular configuration of the trust in the different forms in Russia with that in a western country.

Let us consider a particular configuration of the universal institutions called «small» society⁴. It fits well the case of post-Soviet transformations and, more surprisingly, the situation in some spheres of everyday life in the West. In what follows we will briefly discuss the notion of «small» society (Part 1). Then it will be shown how the «small» society produces the phenomenon of «*dedovshchina*» (Part 2). Finally, we will discuss empirical evidence from Russia and other countries. Everywhere where the «small» society exists, it gives rise to *dedovshchina*: in Russian army, in prison, even in western universities (Part 3).

1 - «Small» society as an Institutional Construction

Constructing an ideal type of society that is characterized by the lack of differentiation of spheres, the personalization of relations, the imperfect mastery of violence, the duality of norms and the domination of imposed authority serves to qualify the situation in which the «small» society is found as a result of incomplete modernization. In other words, the transformation of the «small» society, which is both localized and personalized, into a «large» society, has not been completed. This observation bears no value judgement; it merely reflects a particular structural and functional organization of society. As a result, we need to avoid using adjectives such as primitive or less civilized to describe it.

Non differentiation of spheres

The structural definition of modernization implies the transformation of the simple society, without means for separating the various spheres of daily activity, into a complex society, including several normative sub-systems. Each sub-system has a degree of autonomy that is not negligible with respect to the others, and interference is reduced to nothing within the framework of the ideal type of modernization. «The functional differentiation of sub-systems, particularly the separation of politics and religion or economics and politics, the formation of a universe devoted to science, art, private life, are all conditions of modernization»¹¹. The theory of conventions speaks of the following spheres of activity (les cités): merchant, industrial, civic, domestic, opinion, inspiration. The ecological city and the city by projects were added to this list more recently¹². In a similar manner, M. Walzer constructs seven spheres of justice (each of them has its own criteria of justice and «rules of the game»): money, kinship and love, political power, security and welfare, office, recognition, divine grace and education¹³.

Personalized relationships

One of the aspects of the interpenetration of fields of activity lies in the fact that the choice of a partner during the course of social interaction is not free. This

choice depends on the membership of the potential partner in a chain of personal relationships. All interactions take place within this chain and it is not possible to have one partner for commercial activity, another for civic activity and so on. The need to have a personal knowledge in order to organize any social activity makes each member in a local community the universal partner. As a result, the local community, regardless of its form – family, traditional community, friendships, «friends of friends», the Mafia – closes in on itself. The family represents the ideal type of personalized relationships that are closed with respect to the outside world. The analysis of the domestic city described by the advocates of the theory of conventions illustrates the manner in which a «large» society is built without taking leave of the «small» society. In the domestic city, all social relations reproduce domestic relations. In this case, «the greatness of individuals depends on their hierarchical position in a chain of personal dependencies»¹⁴.

The domestic order allows for relationships of a different nature (merchant, civic, industrial, etc.) as long as they fit in with the logic of personalized relationships. Let us take a close look at the construction of merchant relationships within the domestic city. There are several examples of this anchoring in societies that are in the process of modernizing as well as in certain segments of modernized societies. An American anthropologist, Jane Ensminger, studied how the Orma, an African tribe, organized economic activity. It appeared that «The Orma still place an exceedingly high premium on having at least one close relative of the family in the cattle camp», making it easier to control the conditions for handling herds and reducing the opportunism of shepherds¹⁵. Also, the development of commerce in the regions in which the trader has no family or relatives often involves the marriage of his daughter with someone residing in the region in question. Domestic rooting also serves as a trade device in certain Latin-American countries where «the «extended family» has been transformed into a network of commercial or productive relationships»¹⁶. As in the case of the Orma, domestic anchoring helps to reduce transaction costs within a local community.

In particular, the involvement of relatives in commercial activities reduces the costs incurred by the businessman to control and prevent the opportunistic behaviour of his agents. Personal dependence transforms into a guarantee that the contract will be fulfilled¹⁷. This same logic accounts for the willingness of bankers, diamond brokers and stock brokers to form relatively closed societies that support them in their commercial activities. The New York Stock Exchange, the London bankers, the international network of diamond merchants can all be considered as examples of business that is built on the basis of personalized relationships¹⁸.

Imperfect control of violence

The third marker on the path to modernization concerns the manner in which violence is controlled on a daily basis. There are several ways in which to manage the conflicts that arise in daily life. Institutionalized violence, which implies a State monopoly of violence, is only one method among others. Moreover, institutionalized violence is the only means for managing conflicts that is accepted in a modernized society. In order to provide a brief overview of the entire range of means, we will refer to an anthropological study made by René Girard. He looked at the steps involved in controlling violence that preceded the institutionalization of violence. According to Girard, the first step involves the search for a replacement victim. «Unappeased violence strives and always manages to find a spare victim. In place of the creature that excited its fury, it will suddenly substitute another that has no specific reason for attracting the lightning of violence, other than the fact that it is both vulnerable and within reach»¹⁹.

It should be noted that, as a general rule, the replacement victim does not belong to the local community within which the violence was born. It is individuals from outside the domestic world who are transformed into the targets of violent acts – strangers as well as the King –if their actions do not fit in with the logic of the other members of the community. As the border between the «small» and the

«large» societies starts to erode, the nature of violence changes. If there is no longer any difference between those who are in and those who are out (crisis of differences), such differences must be recreated through the mythic development of a scapegoat victim. «In place of widespread reciprocal violence, myth substitutes the formidable transgression of a unique individual»²⁰. According to Girard, the Oedipus myth can be explained by the logic of creating a scapegoat victim rather than through psychoanalytical reasoning. The third step that precedes the institutionalization of violence supposes the construction of a victim that can be sacrifice. Unlike the scapegoat victim, whose strangeness was artificially constructed, the sacrificial victim is not found either inside or outside the community. The sacrificial victim takes the form of monstrous doubles that are potentially incarnate in each member of the «small» society. «The [monstrous] doubles provide, between difference and identity, the equivocal median that is essential for sacrificial substitution, for the polarization of violence focussed on a unique victim»²¹. The community no longer needs to search for an external enemy or expel «scapegoats» in order to channel violence, they simply need to progressively unveil the doubles hidden behind the appearances of people who are personally well-known.

Duality of norms

The opposite behaviour, on the one hand, with respect to the members of the community who really are in and with those, on the other hand, who are others, strangers who are really out, raises the idea of the duality of standards as criteria that encompass incomplete modernization. This duality of standards goes against the movement modernization and the major consequence of modernization is to erase the differences between individuals belonging to various communities. «A certain dynamism draws first the West and then all of humanity towards a state of relative lack of differentiation never encountered previously»²². In other words, the degree of the duality of norms can serve to measure the progress made by a given society towards modernization. The

greater the duality, the greater the distance from modernization and vice versa. The idea of degree is important to us since it helps to avoid simplistic, black and white judgements as to the nature of the society in question. Instead of qualifying a society as modern or not modern, it would be preferable to evaluate the degree of its proximity to the ideal type of modern society.

We would like to stress the fact that the situation of dependence, the imposition of norms on a society, creates conditions that are particularly favourable to the duality of norms. The norms imposed are associated with an external enemy that provokes hostility, hate, violence whereas the native norms are associated with the community itself and promote voluntary submission, solidarity and non-violence. «This is especially clear in the case of Goffman's «total institutions». These organizations manifest the principle of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility [as a consequence of generated ambivalence]»²³. As the dependence becomes increasingly obvious, the norms are increasingly dual in nature.

When speaking about the duality of norms, there is no term that is unequivocally imposed. The list of alternatives includes such couples of terms as us/them, actor/adversary, friend/enemy, insider/outsider. The constitutive principle of the Mafia, the opposition of «one's own people» to all the others merits being discussed in more details. The Mafia fits in with the logic of the network, with the exception of its openness to the outside world. The Mafia structure, as a symbiosis of the clan, a traditional structure, and the network found in modern society, highlights the elements that constitute the ideal type of a «small» society valid for our study: the non-differentiation of fields of activity, personalized relationships, non-institutionalized violence, the duality of norms. In practice, each operating principle of the Mafia has a double nature: traditional and modern at the same time. For example, relationships of friendship are given a new meaning in the Mafia organization. «The friendship of the Mafioso is virtually deprived of the qualities usually associated with that term. It places a veil over

what was simply a prosaic exchange»²⁴. It is not possible to either reduce the Mafia to the traditional society or associate it with modernization since it provides us with an image of incomplete modernization. Therefore, the qualification of Mafia proposed by Pino Arlacchi appears to be the most pertinent to us: it is «strange mixture of the traditional and the modern»²⁵.

In order to reduce the cultural connotations of the Mafia for the time being, we will attempt to expose its structure using the grammar of the institutional economics. From this point of view, the mafia organization presupposes an amalgamation between the domestic city and the city by projects. On the one hand, it is a world marked by a profound division between the interior and the exterior. «Composed of a series of personal dependencies, the world is ordered by the opposition of the interior and the exterior between which passages are either arranged or closed»²⁶. On the other hand, personalized relationships are mobilized to attain a goal, a project chosen to bypass a traditional constraint. Mobilization by projects is positioned in the heart of the city by projects. «The project temporarily brings very disparate individuals together and is presented as a very active segment of the network for a relatively short period of time, enabling the individuals to develop more lasting relationships that are then put on hold while remaining available»²⁷. In both cases, relationships are founded on a personal knowledge. In both cases, social interactions take place primarily within the chain of personal acquaintances. The only pertinent difference concerns the dynamic aspect of the personalized relationships. In the first case, the relationships are established in advance and not likely to change over time; in the second, they are «elective» and likely to take on a new structure as often as necessary in order to attain an objective. The relative homology of these two cities lead Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello to develop «the hypothesis of a substitution or rather an absorption of the domestic logic by the connectionist logic» in order to trace the main lines of the evolution of western societies²⁸. As for the «small» society, we would prefer to speak of an amalgamation of two

cities: neither domestic logic nor logic «by projects» enjoys absolute domination over the other. Furthermore, there is no compromise, no reconciliation of the two logics: each action excludes neither the domestic interpretation nor its interpretation «by projects».

Imposed authority

There is a misleading similarity between the «small» society and the traditional society. The last one is usually described with the help of very similar terms: little, small, local, and so on. For example, the little community of the Mexican village Chan Kom has four distinctive qualities: distinctiveness (where the community begins and where it ends is apparent), smallness, homogeneousness and self-sufficiency²⁹. However, traditional societies exist without any reference to the State. Even if the State's institutions like a school function within the traditional society, they play a marginal role. A theory of the traditional society can be developed without any special emphasis on the relations with the State and its representatives. By contrast, the study of the «small» society necessitates comprehension of the nature of authority relationships, both formal and informal. The «small» society derives from a particular type of the formal authority, i.e. the imposed authority.

In keeping with the usual definition, the authority of an individual (or an institution) over others translates into the possession of the right to control their actions. The concept of authority does not inevitably evoke the imposition of the will or the arbitrary power of the holder. Authority has a voluntary character «only if the individual holds the right of control over a particular class of his own actions and holds the right to transfer that right to another»³⁰. In other words, the individual voluntarily submits to the authority as long as he is not able to fulfil his interests better by maintaining control of that authority and as long as the scope of the authority is limited. James Coleman refers to this type of authority as conjoined, as opposed to disjoined for which the sole purpose is the

compensation that the individual receives for transferring the right to control his actions³¹. To this latter, we can add the authority that is imposed through coercion that denies the individual compensation. Imposed authority does not necessarily appear illegitimate. However, its legitimacy may be based on grounds other than rational considerations.

2 - *Dedovshchina* as a By-Product of the «Small» Society

Let us turn now to the phenomenon of *dedovshchina* and its assumed connection with the «small» society. According to our hypothesis, the institutional structure of the «small» society creates favorable conditions for social practices called by the Russian term non translatable into Western languages, *dedovshchina*. *Dedovshchina* consists in harassing young soldiers by the elders. Military service in Russia takes two years (in the Navy – three years). This two-year term is divided in four six-month periods. A soldier who just starts his military service (during first six months) is called «spirit» (*dukh*), or «young» (*molodoi*). The reference to a ghost is not accidental: the beginners have the minimal rights in a military city; they must simply obey to all others. The hardest and the least pleasant work (like cleaning public toilets) is in reserve for them. An initiation rite marks the passage from the lowest rank to the next, the status of «pheasant» (*fasan, sekach*). It usually consists in an act of symbolic and/or physical violence (like beating the rear as much times as the number of months that the soldier has spent in the army). Like the «spirits», the «pheasants» hardly have any rights, however they must fulfill many obligations. The principal one concerns learning obedience. The next informal rank, that of «salabon», or «scoop» (*cherpak*), for the first time gives an opportunity to direct youngest soldiers. The terminal rank, the status of «old» (*starik*), or «grandfather» (*ded*) allows the soldier to enjoy full rights in the military city. All others are compelled to respect and even serve them. The «olds» have disproportionately more rights than obligations. They are free to do virtually everything what they want.

First argument for looking at the military in Russian society from a perspective of the «small» society consists in a very particular type of authority relationships. The army lies very close to E. Goffman's ideal type of total institution. «A total institution – a link between residence and work, where a large number of individuals, placed in the same situation, cut off from the outside world for a relatively lengthy period of time, lead a cloistered life, for which the terms are explicitly and painstakingly regulated»³². The last part of the sentence merits being particularly emphasized. The formal authority tends to regulate all aspects of everyday life, despite the eventual resistance from the part of rank-an-file members. The army teaches to obey even if the individual does not see any rational reason for the transfer of rights to control his actions: sanctions against non obedient behavior might be very severe and sometimes even humiliating.

Compulsory character of the military service in Russia allows finding additional arguments about the imposed nature of authority. The projects of substituting the voluntary service for the compulsory service, actively debated in the end of the 1990s³, have recently been abandoned. The idea that every young man, including students at the universities, must get military experience becomes dominating in the political discourse. Probably the underlying argument is that the individual must learn obedience in everyday life (i.e. in the army) before accepting obedience as a key feature of the political system. Otherwise stated, the logic of a democratic system based on everyday democratic practices appears reversed: «the common individual must have experience of democratic self-government in his everyday life if he is to learn to participate meaningfully in the democratic governance of civil society»³³.

The army, like any other total institutions, excludes differentiation of the spheres of everyday life. The omnipresent control is one of the facets of this non differentiation: the superior has a legitimate right to control every aspect of the everyday life of his subordinates, by day and at night. Instead of a plurality of

rules of the game, there is only one coordination mechanism, – through flats³⁴. The other aspect of non differentiation of the spheres of everyday life concerns the conditions of permanent co-presence: life in casernes and the exercises promoting team-spirit erase the border between the privacy and the public life. Soldiers live and do exercises together; they have no chance of getting separate partners for professional activities, leisure, intimate connections and so on.

The mixture of norms resulting from, on the one hand, the compulsory submission to the formal authority, and, on the other hand, non differentiation of the rules of the game corresponding to different spheres of everyday life varies from one local context to another. Its parameters depend on the particular persons, officers, sergeants and soldiers, involved in interactions. There are no universal and context-free norms structuring everyday life in the army. For example, the system of informal grades (ghosts, pheasants, grandfathers and others) is not the same in different regions and forces, the ranks and the initiation rites can take various forms. This fact confirms the thesis about the importance of personalized relationships in the military city. The lack of common normative frameworks becomes especially evident when one compares the Russian army with the other total institution, the post-Soviet prison. The people, who got experience of life in both total institutions, argue that informal norms in the army, if they do exist at all, are more contextual and personalized. A young man convicted of a crime shortly after his military service in the elite paratroops witnesses: «Everything is based on physical force. I was at Kursk, Briansk, Tver. It's easier to live here (in prison, – A.O.). There, there was *dedovshchina*... Pure physical force, humiliation... physical and moral pressure»³⁵.

Localized and personified relationships within the «small» society produce violence on everyday basis. Due to the lack of clear borders between different spheres of everyday life, conflicts arisen in one of them spread quickly to all the others. A quarrel among two mates damages their co-operation required in the

course of exercises and, vice versa, a professional conflict inevitably acquires a personal dimension^{36, b}. It is important to note that the imposed character of authority relationships makes undesirable and even impossible the resolution of everyday conflicts through addressing to the superior. Whatever are the intentions of officers and other members of the formal hierarchy, the institutionalization of violence progresses very slowly in the context of the imposed authority.

In the «small» society control of violence implies other mechanisms than its institutionalization. In R. Girard's terms, the military city produces replacement victims: negative emotions and violence are channeled toward first-year soldiers (the «spirits» and the «pheasants») holding the lowest ranks in the informal hierarchy. Violence generated in everyday conflicts makes its path toward young soldiers: in the quality of replacement victims, they play an important role in ensuring a relative stability of the military city. The «roosters», these pariahs of the prisoners» community, perform a very similar role of «lighting-rod» for the violence generated in prison on a daily basis³⁷. The only difference consists in the fact that the «roosters» have no chance of changing their status: they were converted by force into passive homosexuals for major crimes against the prisoners» community, whereas first-year soldiers can hope to get a more respectable and safe rank. However, their promotion does not automatically depend on the length of the military service. The respect of the dual norms counts much more: one must agree that he, as a first-year soldier, has no rights but manifold duties, although his older fellows enjoy full rights without being bounded by any obligation.

Taking into consideration the functional role of *dedovshchina*, the fight against it has a very small chance of success without reforming the institutional organization of the army as a whole. As long as the «small» society continues to

exist in the armed forces, the practices of *dedovshchina* will remain one of its inner vices.

3 - Phenomena Similar to *Dedovshchina* in Other Contexts

The «small» society gives rise to the phenomena similar to *dedovshchina* not only in the army, but everywhere. One can postulate the following heuristic regularity: the more similar an institutional context to the «small» society, the higher the probability that there exist practices of harassment comparable with *dedovshchina*. Generally speaking, these practices of social harassment have in common several elements: sharp discrimination of newcomers and outsiders (*dedovshchina* itself implies age discrimination); channeling violence towards newcomers and outsiders; initiation through transforming the newcomer into an object of violence.

According to Yuri Levada and his fellow colleagues from the VTsIOM, the army has become one of the basic mechanisms of socialization during the Soviet rule. At that time the absolute majority (45-60%) of young Russians passed through casernes. There young men get accustomed to the rules of the «small» society that they start to reproduce once the military service has finished. For young men, «*dedovshchina* is a system for re-socializing, transforming the individual. [...] The soldier, who has finished his military service, leaves the caserne with a double moral (one, universal, was learned at school, the second, «virile», in the army, – A.O). Physical violence and a hierarchical perception of the society are mixed up with the institutionalized violence of the army»³⁸. Due to the fact that girls are usually socialized by the young men that accomplished military service, *dedovshchina*, as Levada claims, became for the Soviets a kind of initiation rite. Thanks to *dedovshchina*, they learned the principle of «unconditional submission to an eldest person»³⁹. More recent studies show that the post-Soviet army continues to be the major institute of socialization. «The army and the police

remain central institutions symbolically representing the terminal values of the «collective whole» and the priority of common interests over private ones»⁴⁰.

The explanatory model developed by Yuri Levada and his fellow colleagues has been criticized for reducing all problems of the «small» society in the (post-)Soviet Russia only to *dedovshchina*, i.e. socialization through the army⁴¹. However, it helps to shed light on two very important aspects: first, the congruency, or the «selective affinity», between the military city and the Russian society; second, the construction of an enemy as a result of the *dedovshchina*-type socialization. As far as the first aspect is concerned, the «selective affinity» can be explained by supposing that both societies, the military city and the post-Soviet Russia, lie more or less closely to the ideal type of the «small» society. *Dedovshchina* constitutes a «natural» link between these societies because imposed authority, non differentiation of spheres, personalized relationships, imperfect control of violence and duality of norms exist in both of them, although in a varying degree.

Who are the homologues of the newcomers and the olds in the framework of the post-Soviet Russia ? Violence generated on an everyday basis is channeled towards strangers (newcomers in the Russian culture) who transforms into enemies. Russia has a long history of constructing enemies in the popular mentality, i.e. searching for replacement victims and victims that can be sacrificed. Now Chechens in particular and the natives of Caucasus in general take the place of the «internal» enemies⁴². It seems that Chechens have much less rights than the «native» Russians even from an official point of view: at least, the selective checks of papers performed by the police (only the people who look like Chechens, the natives of Caucasus or Asiatics are checked) became a common practice. As far as the «external» enemies are concerned, the public hostility to the NATO (40% of Russians think that the recent enlargement of this organization represents a credible threat for Russia⁴³) proves that such category has not disappeared from the Russian mentality.

In order to verify whether the model of the «small» society can pass the test of universality, we need to apply it to some similar to *dedovshchina* phenomena that exist in the western context. In his analysis of the ambulance service at an hospital located in the Southern France, Jean Peneff argues that there is a «relative exploitation of the beginners (interns); the hospital and the medical staff as a whole profit from delegating the least prestigious tasks to the neophytes»⁴⁴. Some elements of the «small» society are easily recognizable in the everyday life of the hospital described on the basis of a participant observation. For example, the privacy can be hardly respected in the hospital, this concerns not only the patients⁴⁵, but the medical staff too⁴⁶. The professional efficiency in a non negligible degree depends on the personalized relationships maintained within a team. There is an «obligation to cultivate intensive interpersonal relationships within a team because its members spent a great deal of time together»⁴⁷. One can wonder whether the type of authority relationships structuring the everyday life in hospital lies close to the imposed authority. Due to the asymmetry of information, the physician sometimes acquire power over the patient (i.e. he or she loses the right to revoke the authority once voluntarily transferred to the physician). However, the disjoint or even conjoint authority usually structures the relationships between the physicians. So, the «selective affinity» between hospital and the «small» society is far from being perfect, consequently, the local analog of «*dedovshchina*» (at least in the form observed by J. Peneff) seems much less violent and oriented to learning obedience.

The same considerations can be applied to the case of the French *bizutage* or the American ragging (the jokes addressed to the newcomers at the school and the series of initiation rites through which the newcomers receive citizenship in the city). Non differentiation of spheres and personalized relationships do exist at school. Nevertheless, the issue of the authority relationships at school merits being predominantly discussed. According to the advocates of the critical sociology, school has always been a place of symbolic violence. Symbolic

violence means substitution of more subtle methods of imposition for brutal and explicit methods⁴⁸. The teacher has in this context power over the pupil, i.e. the imposed, although in a subtle manner, authority structures the relationships between them. School, like the army, teaches obedience. The imposed authority as a centerpiece of the «small» society produces *dedovshchina* in a form adapted to the context of school. It should be noted that the organization of science in schools of thought give rise to the elements of the imposed authority too. Consequently, violence in the university and academic milieu (sometimes it takes the most explicit forms) can be interpreted as a by-product of the «small» scientific society⁴⁹. It is the price to pay for incapacity of scientists to modernize their milieu, to transform the «small» society into a modern one.

Probably here one should find an explanation of the prolonged silence in respect of the post-Soviet transformations mentioned in the Introduction. The «smaller» the scientific community, both in the West and in Russia, the less chances of getting a critical assessment of post-Soviet transformations we have. So, the only way to go out of this situation consists in modernizing science as a source of the advices related to policy-making and, after this, in modernizing the post-Soviet Russia. Such reforms will lead to the disappearance of *dedovshchina*, whatever form it takes.

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Footnotes :

^a 84% of Russians were in favor of the professional army in 2001 (see L. Gudkov, «Mass Identity and Institutional Violence. Article Two. Particularism and the «Enemy» factor: the Army and the Post-Soviet Russia», p. 44, *The Russian Public Opinion Herald: Data, Analysis, Discussions*, No. 2 (68), 2003, pp. 35-51 (in Russian).p. 49).

b This problem exists as long as the army remains the total institution. A solution found and applied in the Antique Greece can be emphasized: promotion of emotional, affective and even sexual bounds between soldiers was seen as a guarantee against spreading personal conflicts to the battlefield (see M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, Paris : Gallimard, 1984).

Endnotes :

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2 W. Andreff, *Ibid.* p. 348.

3 B. Badie, *L'Etat importé. Essai sur l'occidentalisation de l'ordre politique*, Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 126.

4 B. Badie, *Ibid.* ; A. Oleinik, «The Costs and Prospects of Reforms in Russia: An Institutional Approach», *Theme* (University of Niš, Serbia), Vol. XXVI, No.4, 2002 (<http://facta.junis.ni.ac.yu/teme/teme4-2002/teme4-2002-01.pdf>).

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14 L. Boltanski, L. Thévenot, *Ibid.*, p. 116.

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- [25](#) P. Arlacchi Pino, *Mafia et compagnies. L'éthique mafiosa et l'esprit du capitalisme*, Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1986, p. 225.
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- [30](#) J. Coleman James, *Foundations of Social Theory*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990, pp. 69-70.
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- [33](#) L. Putterman, «The Firm as Association versus the Firm as Commodity. Efficiency, Rights and Ownership», *Economics and Philosophy*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1988, p. 260.
- [34](#) For a brief overview of bureaucratic coordination, see J. Kornai János, *The Socialist System. The Political Economy of Communism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
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- [39](#) *Ibid.*, p. 144
- [40](#) L. Gudkov, «Mass Identity and Institutional Violence. Article Two. Particularism and the «Enemy» factor: the Army and the Post-Soviet Russia», p. 44, *The Russian Public Opinion Herald: Data, Analysis, Discussions*, No. 2 (68), 2003, pp. 35-51 (in Russian).
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Vadim Mikhailin

Russian Army *Mat* as a Code System Controlling Behaviour in the Russian army

Abstract

This text is to be a shortened, restructured and based on somewhat another factological foundation version of my article “Russkii mat kak muzhskoi obstsennyi kod: problema proiskhozhdeniia i evoliutsiia statusa”, published in # 43 of *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*. Tracing the genesis of mat to the specific modes of behaviour, peculiar to the archaic male warrior bands, I’m going to show that the military milieu (and some other, structurally close to it social strata), has always been – and remain – absolutely adequate for the mat speaking. Moreover, mat has always carried on within these strata rather specific function connected with creating of one’s identity as a military, and its use offers various and sometimes the only possible means of impact at one’s equal or subordinate (or even superior). As a matter of fact, mat is a basis for a whole code system, controlling different military behaviour practices. The problems of the freshers’ adaptation and of the national specificities in the late Soviet and modern Russian army are to be considered with special respect.

This text is a shortened (and based on somewhat different material) version of my article “Russkii mat kak muzhskoi obstsennyi kod: problema proiskhozhdeniia i evoliutsiia statusa”, published in # 43 of *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*. The aim is to show that the military milieu (and some other social strata structurally close to it), has always been – and remains – absolutely adequate for the ‘mat-speaking’. Moreover, within these strata, *mat* has always carried on a rather specific function connected with creating a man’s identity as a ‘military’, i.e. a member of the armed forces. The adequate use of *mat* offers various and sometimes the only possible means of imposing oneself on an equal, a subordinate (or even a superior). As a matter of fact, *mat* is a basis for a whole code system that *de facto* controls different military behavioural practices.

I begin the discussion of Russian *mat* in its modern form and function by discussing its origins. The initial form of the key formula in modern Russian *mat* key (*eb tvoiu mat'* from *pes eb tvoiu mat'* (*fucked your mother* from *dog fucked your mother*)) seems to meet no objections among modern scholars studying Russian obscene speech practices. After the basic articles by B. A. Uspensky later published as a whole fundamental chapter in his *Selected Works*, nobody has really tried to call it into question. Nevertheless, from my point of view, the very logic of Uspensky's argument, leading in its turn to the author's basic hypothesis concerning the genesis of Russian *mat* and the stages of its formation, needs rather serious adjustment.

For example, Uspensky derives the basic formula from the "widely spread motif" of a marriage between the Sky Deity (or the Thunderer) and Mother Earth; with the subsequent travesty of the replacement of the Thunderer by its eternal enemy, a chthonic deity in a form of a dog, and then the second replacement of the Mother Earth with the interlocutor's own mother. Then the acting subject is re-comprehended, due to the reduction of an initial formula, and since the verb form *eb* corresponds to any person singular, the third person (*pes; dog*) is replaced by the first one.

The total of the author's argumentation in support of each one of the above mentioned initial formula evolution stages is very impressive. But it is possible to ask: for what reason the Thunderer's eternal enemy whose traditional iconography connotes not dog but serpent, invariably takes the form of a dog in this particular context? Evidently trying to forestall the questions of the kind, Uspensky produced a special appendix – one of the two following his main text – to show the numerous serpent-dog parallels as reflected in very different mythological systems. Whilst not objecting to the bulk of the data, it proves nothing. Dogs seems to be the main figurative referent in all the Indoeuropean invective practices without exception (Uspensky even bases the etymological

closeness of Russian words *pes* (*dog*) and *pizda* (*cunt*) tracing them back to the Pre-Slavonic verb **pisti* with a meaning *ebat'* (*to fuck*)), and it is the author's view that such an exclusive attention only to one same animal has to be based on more solid grounds, particularly as the serpent itself is represented in the obscene vocabulary in rather a humble way.

Evolving the “dog theme”, Uspensky says: “We put no objective here to clearly find out more or less the reasons why the dog is perceived this way; the detailed discussion of this question would lead us too far astray. We only shall point out the possibility of serpent to dog associations, and to wolf also; the serpent, as well as the wolf, represent the incarnations of a “ferocious beast”, i.e. the Thunderer's mythological enemy... and also embody a cruel and dangerous creature, inimical to a man. What is essential to us in this case is the idea of dog's uncleanness, the idea that goes deep into history and far beyond the limits of Slavonic mythology”³.

That very question of the obscene speech practices associated with a dog, associations so clear that even the respective speech behaviour forms in some Slavonic language traditions have the distinct “dog” etymologies, is, for the author, crucial. The following objectives – to look for a basis to the dog's magical uncleanness and to the tabooing of the corresponding speech and other behaviour practices within the limits of a “human” territory, to examine the peculiarities of the obscene speech practices functioning in different social contexts – are logically bound to this.

1 - “Dogs' barking”. Russian *mat* as a spatially (magistically) based male speech code.

The key to the problem of Russian obscene speech practices system genesis is to be found through one of the most sufficient characteristics of Russian *mat*, that makes it related to perhaps little but all the similar phenomenae existent in other Indoeuropean languages and cultures. I mean here the strict – in its initial state

and status – gender-conditioned character of the appropriate speech behaviour forms. Russian *mat* is an indispensable attribute of any group consisting solely of males, only recently beginning to get into the females-only groups, and the practices of *mat* speaking in the mixed groups are to be reduced to the last twenty or thirty years (if to exclude certain practices seen as the ritual ones). In fact, every scholar who has raised this problem has mentioned this peculiarity, but up to now nobody has tried to make a following step, namely to link fundamentally the genesis of Russian *mat* as well as its semantic peculiarities with the specific gender conditions of its social existence.

The majority of researchers are so much taken with, from one side, the idea of *mat* as connected to the archaic fertility cults, and on the other, the carnival mythology created by Mikhail Bakhtin, that in the majority of cases any material conflicting with this point of view is simply being cut off the main trend of research. Thus we read in the Uspensky's paper: "...they think at Polessye, that the *mat* is especially banned for women: *mat*-speak coming from a woman is considered as a sin from which the land suffers...; whereas it is hold as a more or less common everyday male behaviour pattern, taking in itself no sin at all"⁴; wherefrom the author comes right to *mat*'s connection to the cult of the earth, while dropping the question of it being a gender-determined phenomenon. And, to mention Vladimir Zhelvis' argument⁵ basing the exceptionally male status of *mat* on the exclusion of women from some vague "strictly male" fertility cult rituals in antiquity, the only comment would be that this hypothesis is quite typical for the book's general standard.

Now, *mat* in domestic tradition is (or, rather, used to be) sharply defined by the speaker's sex; it is a kind of a male code, the usage of which till recently was conditioned by a set of rather strict rules. The changes that happened to *mat*'s status in the course of the 20th century are discussed elsewhere, so here mention of *mat*-ruling taboos refers to the traditionally prevalent speech situations.

Nobody seems to question the fact that *mat* (as a social phenomenon as well as a set of stable speech constructions and “forms of speech”) bears relation to some magic-based practices. The problem seems to lie in other field: a) what magical practices exactly it goes back to and b) if we could try to reconstruct the practices in question, starting from the situation with modern *mat*.

What do we have? *Mat* is a prerogative of the male part of Russian (and Russian-speaking) population of the former Soviet Union. Therefore from the very beginning we can limit our search for the hypothetical ritual models to a sphere of male only rituals. The second essential premise is that any taboo-based magic is always strictly territorially conditioned (mention that the “territory” here is seen not so much in its topographic but in its magically significant connotations⁶). The things you can do in the woods are often subject to strict taboos in the village, not to mention the space where home magic is dominant.

Hence, the sphere of our search is to be limited not only with the *mat* speakers’ gender characteristics but also with the territorio-magistical conditions these practices exist in.

What magistical (the term meaning the readiness of a human consciousness to see any item as burdened by the additional meanings, magic by origin) territories might and could be seen as the purely male ones, being opposed by this feature to the territories both “female” and “common” and thus producing the basis for the tabooistic systems? Agricultural ritual and the fertility magic linked with it are strictly bound to specific territories. Agricultural magic – due to its procreative character – supposes that both sexes are to be included into the magic rites. More than that, in a number of rather archaic agricultural traditions there are labours seen as strictly female ones (in the traditional Russian culture – cropping and any other harvesting). Agricultural magic is mainly female, connected with the “Mother Earth” cults beginning from the late Stone age. Thus if any strictly tabooistic speech or behaviour practices were to appear as based on the

agricultural magic ritual, then in no way they could be oriented onto the exclusively male part of the population. Rather the opposite, gynaeco-centric situation seems possible on these grounds. And if obscene male speech patterns are really used during some rituals having to do with the fertility cults (season rites, weddings), this usage seems to be of a relatively late origin, to be based on already existent taboo codes which one can use to emphasize the masculine status of the participants within the “exterritorial” situation of the festivity.

If to look for the strictly male zones, then the hunters’ and the warriors’ territory would answer these in the majority of known cultures – that is the territories of nature either not mastered but known, where the relations between the man and the land are based on the “agreement” and “parity” grounds (hunting), or those alien to the man, chthonic and magically inimical (war). These territories were always seen as marginal ones from the point of view of the (magistically understood) cultural centre, surrounded by the “female” territories of a mastered land. This “frontier” originally was a male food territory, entering which a man was to drop automatically all his “family” magic roles, crucial for the “common” territories (those of a father, son, husband, head of a family), and instead to take upon oneself the strictly masculine roles, characteristic of the aggressive and unified from the gender point of view group (hunter, warrior, raider, hunter or war chieftain).

Supposing that the basic magistical territory for the rise of the male tabooistic code (that was seen thus as “obscene” at all the other territories in all the possible situations, except the strictly ritual ones) was the hunter/warrior territory, peripheral in respect of a cultural centre. The next question is – could we find any grounds for some special role played namely by the dog (or by the wolf, magically compatible with the dog) and namely within the limits of this territory –

the grounds that would enable us to trace modern *mat's* "masculinity" back to ancient male rites?

The fact is that the existence of male warrior unions, the members of which not only called themselves dogs/wolves, but actually felt so, is long ago proven for all the Indoeuropean habitat, from Celts to Indo-Iranians, and from Germans to Greeks and Romans (as well as for many other, non-Indoeuropean peoples). A. I. Ivanchik says in his article, provided with rather a good bibliography and significantly entitled "Dog Warriors. Male Unions and the Scythian Incursions into Asia Minor"² :

The male unions and those rites and myths connected to them are well studied for Germanic, Indo-iranian, Greek, Latin, Celtic and, also, Balto-Slavonic traditions. One of the results of this research was the ascertainment of that major role that was ascribed within these unions to the image of dog-wolf. The warrior god, the patron for the union was honored in this very image, but what's much more significant in our case is that all the members of the union was also considered as dog-wolves. Young warriors' initiation consisted of their becoming wolves (the narcotic or intoxicant matters were used during the rites), who had to live for some period outside the human settlements with a life of the "wolves". i.e. plundering and making war. In Spartan cryptia we see this custom especially well preserved; young Sinnfjotli in the Voelsung saga passes the equal initiation as a wolf, murderer and plunderer, for to become a full value warrior. Irish hero Cuchulain's initiation resulting with his new name, meaning "the Culain's Dog" (the usual change of name during the initiation), consisted of his service as a dog for Culain the godly blacksmith, i.e. he actually had to become a dog. This could be compared with the Ossetin Nart story about Ourzymag turning into the dog and about the heavenly blacksmith who took part in Nart heroes tempering. Evidently the same idea gives birth to the Indoeuropean legal formula, according to which any murderer "becomes" a wolf, with the subsequent development of

the notions like “outlaw” or “criminal” characteristic of this word and imparting a pejorative shade to it⁸.

The examples of the kind could be cited *ad infinitum*, to begin with Romulus who founded⁹ the strictly male (juvenile) and predatory town of Rome, and to finish with the Irish epic tradition, where, for one thing, Cuchulain is in no way the only hero bearing the root *cu* (*dog*) in his warrior’s name, and, for the other, practices of different warrior (and juvenile warrior!) unions, initiations and peculiar tabooistic systems (*geis*) are abundant¹⁰. It seems appropriate to remind ourselves here about the statistical abundance of “wolf” names in Europe and in Russia. Indeed, there are many more (times and times) Volkovs in Russia than Medvedevs¹¹, while the bear is traditionally looked at as a national symbol.¹² And if we sum Volkovs to Biriukovs and Odintsovs¹³, the statistic would become even more indicative. The traditional Indoeuropean plots based on the idea of lycanthropia are also of interest therein – especially as superstition accords that only the men tend to turn into werwolves.

2 - Dog/wolf status as an age-conditioned phenomenon

In the vast majority of the above mentioned cases the matter concerns not just the warrior unions, but namely the juvenile warrior unions. Cuchulain passes his initiation at seven years old, makes his main feats of arms¹⁴ at seventeen (i.e. at the year he have to prove his right to count as a rightful man) during the war of the Bull from Cualnge¹⁵ and is killed at twenty seven due to breaking taboos.

Sinnfjotli turns into the wolf for a time only before he becomes a full value man and warrior. Spartan *cryptia* precede the proper man’s initiation, being in fact its first preliminary stage. Romulus becomes a city founder after killing his own brother who declined to refuse from the “wolf” total destructiveness. The “seasonal” attachment of certain activities in a number of cultures seems to be significant too. Thus the Irish fenians spent 1 May till 1 November (from Beltain to Samhain) “in the field”, while living in peasant cottages during the remainder of

the year¹⁶. There was also an institution of “summer” and “winter” chieftains in some North American tribes. As a matter of fact, the wolves live according to a similar pattern, half a year living as mated pairs and the other half “in pack”. The difference is that the “natural” wolves pack period fall on the winter half of a year. Could it be so, in this case, that the respective human practices are a kind of magical “spheres of influence division” with the wild confraternities? Winter being a season of chthonic magic prevalence, the “neutral” marginal territory is given to the “natural” wolves; while in summer, when the “cultural” magic gets stronger, it is occupied by the human “pack”, living in accordance to the same territorio-magistically conditioned rules.

Within the tradition of male upbringing and class-to-class transition common to all the Indo-Europeans, every man had to pass through a peculiar “wolf” or “dog” stage. This stage was of an openly initiational character and the radical increase in social status is to be seen as a result of passing it – supposing, evidently, the right for marriage, for self-standing household activities (i.e. creative and procreative ones), and, which is particularly important in our case, the right to carry arms within the precincts of a settlement. The franchise of all the men having right to bear arms within the precincts of a settlement is a basis for all the types of a primitive democracy. At the same time, the actions incompatible with the status of a grown-up man who must subdue and control his aggressive instincts (within the zone of a common, “family” rule), lead to the return to the “wolf” status, which in this aspect couldn’t but to be seen as anti-social and infamous one. For all the period of their lycanthropic metamorphoses, the wolf-warriors live at the periphery of a culture space, i.e. within the borders of a strictly male magistical zone, disturbing no “human” borders, but protecting them from any outer perils. As a matter of fact, in accordance to the archaic model of the world, they are ousted into a chthonic zone, the zone of death: hence the particular importance of werewolf motifs. In this respect, any attempt of an unauthorised and ritually “uncovered” intrusion to the “human” territory is to be

seen as a contamination, as breaking of all existent human and cosmic norms, as a violence over the “home-land”, “mother-earth” etc. A “dog” can acquire his right to the “normal” life only by passing the initiation rites’ final stage, equivalent to an act of purification. In Sparta, the ex-wolves had to pass through the painful flagellation while being spread on the altar of Aphrodite (!) – and only after shedding their blood over it they could get their right to a first manly status, opening way to the regular set of arms and to a place in phalanx. The place Spartans reserved for their “wolves” in their battle orders was before the phalanx, and the latter were armed (apart from “the wolves’ rage” and lack of necessity to follow certain set of rules) with light and throwing weapons only. The age structure remained also the main principle of a phalanx formation: the first, the most dangerous ranks were occupied by the “recruits”, the middle ones – by men “in their prime”, and the rear ones, the closest to “home and temple” – by veterans, having the highest possible warrior status.

This kind of differentiation making a strict correspondence between the male/warrior status and the “time of service” is general to the Indo-European military and paramilitary structures – right up to the home army institution of “*dedovshchina*”, where during the first half a year of service (of two years in total, as a rule), being in a status of a “*dukh*” (“spirit”¹⁷), the recruit in fact has no rights at all and is looked at as somebody less than human, while the last half-year, burdened with no duties at all (if not to take in view the ritual “upbringing” of the younger ranks) is dedicated to the hypertrophied idea of “*dembel*” (demobilisation), namely the distorted in a peculiar way idea of “home and temple”.

Here it is worth remembering that the steady tradition that binds the warrior’s valour with youth and pays special attention to a young warrior’s death – regardless of how death is interpreted in different cultural and historical contexts. Within the modern European cultural tradition the motif of a young warrior’s death

becomes more and more bombastic, at the same time losing its “heroic” constituent and acquiring mournful features, for the motif of senseless sacrifice. A marked tendency towards the evolution of a young hero fearing neither pain nor death to the no less formula image of a boy-soldier, a miserable and innocent victim of war, is to be seen in the European culture of the last 200 years. But the very fact that the theme itself remains actual and active for the myth-creating lets us interpret these “emotional modifications” namely as modifications of a settled cultural schema.

3 - The initial ambivalence of the wolf/dog status

Thus, the wolf/dog status is to be seen as an initially ambivalent one – from the point of view of its subjects as well as from the point of view of a community as a whole, whose marginal part the named age/gender group constitute. On the one hand, within the archaic IE cultures, any man has to pass through this stage if he wants and if he is able to acquire a “rightful”, “mature” age status. From this point of view the wolf/dog stage, framing and forestalling the initiation rites and, in a sense, being an initiation complex in itself, have certain positive connotations, connected above all with the notions of youth, strength, aggressiveness and permanent combat readiness (and also with a specific “divine irradiation”, the capacity to “run amok”, contempt and readiness for death and pain). These qualities are characteristic of the very notion of masculinity, positive markers of a cultural tradition and seen as fitting – to some extent – for any possible male behaviour pattern.

On the other hand, for grown-up men these modes of behaviour are territorially and magistically conditioned, and appear as unambiguously positive only within the limits of a strictly defined warrior/hunting territory of a “Wild Field”; displaying the same attitudes to those “foreign” to their territory of “home and temple” is fraught with the risk of breaking rules, with “hybris” that in some cases may lead to the deprivation of the higher male status.

Hence, the features of a “wolf” behaviour – speech patterns making no exception – can impart to their subjects some totally opposite characteristics. Within the limits of a “Wild Field” territorio-magistical situation, any demonstration of a “wolf manners” or a “wolf-speech” is, undoubtedly, aimed at elevating the subject’s situational status. Army culture being traditionally a male-only one (and marginal, from the point of view of the basic status culture zones) quite naturally is subject to the like behaviour models – as well as criminal and some other marginal cultures. This thesis is so obvious for anyone living in modern Russia that it needs nothing more than being just stated.

Of course, these forms of behaviour can take place not only at the “wolf territory” in a strict sense. The territory of a feast, being magically “fenced off” the common culture space, also permits – and sometimes even implies – the usually unacceptable modes of behaviour; being conditioned and constrained by ritual, any demonstration of an openly, “beyond the borders” masculine attitude, tabooed in “normal” life, can play a positive, beneficial, and even sacral role. Also in a conflict situation (male-to-male), when the subject is in sharp need of adequate ways and means enabling him to suppress his opponent, the “everyday” norms can recede to the background, giving way to the habitual forms of aggressive demonstration in their “barefaced”, “wolf” forms. The usual tendency to exclude from the conflict situation all the participants and circumstances “magically incompatible” with it becomes apparent in the search for an adequate place where the conflict could be developed and settled (from the common “let’s get out of here and have a talk” and up to the common and strictly observed ban on indoor duels, especially in respect of any kind of living quarters), as well as in the selection of the “adequate” participants (quantitative restrictions (tête-à-tête), the instituting of seconds in a traditional duel situation; qualitative restrictions – the equal by age and status participants are favored, while women and children are virtually excluded from the process). Thus conflict itself is ritualised, “played” according to certain rules and – just like a feast –

“fenced off” from the everyday culture space to prevent damage, creating no peril for the “peaceful” magistics so crucial here.

On the other hand, the “dog” status is inadequate from the point of view of those norms active within the everyday culture space. “Wolves” and “dogs” lack a place of their own inside the “human” territory, which can be contaminated by the very fact of their presence: all the respective forms and norms of behaviour are strictly tabooed, and their subjects, if not passing through the purification rites and thus transforming from wolves back into men, lack elementary “civil rights”. They are – by definition – the bearers of chthonic characteristics, they are “dead” from the magistical point of view and, as such, simply do not “exist”. (Hence the practice of “excluding” members of warrior bands from the common law. Thus, an Irish youth wanting to become a fenian had to obtain his clan consent on that he would not revenge for his relatives even if they would be killed up to the last living soul. At the same time, if a fenian caused any kind of damage to anybody, his kin were unaccountable.) In this case, arrogating the “dog’s” attributes to somebody appears to be rather a strong act from the magistical point of view – being equal to the an opponent’s obliteration, as having no right for existence.

The formula of Russian *mat*

Let’s return now to the key formula of Russian *mat*. The phrase “*pes eb tvoiu mat*” seems to be a perfect formula of the opponent’s social self magic annihilation, for from the point of view of the territorio-magistical connotations, its meaning can be described as follows. The opponent’s mother was defiled by a dog, the difference between a “wild” warrior and an actual animal in this context being insufficient. Therefore, the opponent is unclean, damned and – in fact – simultaneously dead in three senses: 1) because his father was inhuman (and so he is inhuman himself), 2) because his mother loses her right to be a woman by the very fact of her coitus with a dog, that makes her a bitch, and her son – a son of a bitch, and 3) because the territory where the coitus of the kind is possible

cannot be “normal” and thus adequate for a human child conception – it is a “Wild Field” and as such opposed to any human space.

4 - *Mat*-speech practices’ specificity, functions and status in the context of their territorio-magistical attachment and the peculiarities of the Russian army *mat*.

I suppose that initially the “*maternaia laia*” (“*mat* barking”) was a kind of territorially attached code, having no obligatory invective connotations but strictly tabooed within the limits of foreign to it, strictly “human” territories. Because of this not only really strong *mat* invectives, but the very “out of place” speech practices acquire openly invective connotations within these zones – owing to the destructive “dog” magistics’ becoming even more destructive by being foreign outside the “prescribed” zone (in the earlier, magic-oriented societies) or at least to the fact that they simply “insult one’s ear” (in the later societies, oriented sometimes on the same but losing their initial magical meaning sets of social taboos).

In this case the denominations of those parts of a human body, that have to do with fertility and as such cannot be tabooed in (ideal) agricultural or pastoral societies whose welfare is based on the procreative magic procedures, are to acquire tabooistic status only in the case when they are associated with the key formula situation. In other words, *khui* in this case is in no way a *membrum virile*, but *pesii*, the dog’s *khui*, *pizda* is a bitch’s, *such’ia pizda*, and the verb *iebat’* denotes not a coitus between a man and a woman, but between a dog and a bitch (let me remind that the ‘dog-warriors’ not only named themselves so, but were the dogs from the magistical point of view). Hence, the corresponding terms applied to the “human” reality won’t be denominative by character – they’d be a part of an encoding practice, conveying quite a specific “wolf” attitude.

Indeed, nobody just ‘cusses’ using *mat*; up to the present moment people just speak it. Among the great quantity of lexical and grammatic forms derived from the three main and some more “auxiliary” productive roots, only insignificant

number of words (nouns, mainly) could be determined as invectives. The verbs *iebat'*, *v'iebyvat'*, *vyiebyvat'sia*, *iebnut'*, *naiebnut'*, *naiebat'*, *ostoiebenit'*, *uiebyvat'*, *pízdít'*, *pízdít'*, *opizdenet'*, *okhuiet'*; nouns *khui*, *khuin'a*, *khuieten'*, *pizda*, *pizdiulei* (Gen., pl.), *pizdets*, *bliad'*, *iebar'*, *iebenia* (pl.); adjectives *okhuiennyi*, *okhuitel'nyi*, *kherovyi*, *pizdetskii*, *pizdanutyi*, *iebnutyi*, *iebanutyi*; adverbs *okhuienno*, *khuiervo* etc. are extremely emphatic as compared to their non-mat synonyms, sometimes to the extent where they lack any adequate “translation” into “normative” Russian – but they are not invectives¹⁸.

The everyday, “normative” speech is totally transparent for a *mat*-speaker; contrarily, the lack of corresponding speech practices makes *mat* absolutely obscure for a – hypothetical – “pure” Russian language speaker. Any attempt to speak in *mat* using the same rules that organize the usual “human” speech inevitably gives the experimentalist away. Here we come to the main problem of the Russian army *dukh*, a fresher, a newcomer – but before switching to it we have to specify the main characteristics of the army *mat* that make it different from the same patterns in the everyday speech practices of the majority of the modern Russian-speaking males (and more and more females also).

The first of the army *mat* basic characteristics is its totality. No “closed zones” where *mat* would be more or less tabooed exist within the army culture – with the possible exception of the officers’ flats in “military towns” when the wives or the daughters are present: but recently even this narrow zone gets more and more eroded.

The second is the universality of army *mat*. No such situation exists in army culture that could not be “covered by *mat*” (*pokryt' matom = oblozhit' matom = vymaterit'*) (to cover by *mat* = to berate).

And the third one is the primacy of army *mat*, for it is the basis for all the behaviour and code practices existing in the Russian army. The necessity for any

dukh "vsasyvan'ie sluzhby" ("suction of service") comes only through mastering the *mat* 'army code', emphatic usage of which serves as one of the main markers for successful adaptation. Any – purely hypothetical – attempt to cling to "normative" Russian speech will inevitably lead only to the experimenter being transferred to the pariah class of *chmo*¹⁹. At the same time, any other form of passive or active resistance to the system of the traditional self-organization of the levy soldiers²⁰ (the system of *neustavnyie otnosheniia* ("out-of-regulations interrelations") or *dedovshchina*) are due to "correction" within the limits of the system itself. This kind "defensive" reaction on the part of the system is the best evidence for the *mat* encoding being primary for any practices existing within its limits.

The first thing that the recruits from non-Slavonic peoples learned in the Soviet army (and learn now in the Russian one) was *mat*. Mastering *mat* emphasizes the high situative status of a speaker, and in the case of *inorodcheskii* ("other-peoples") staff-sergeant substitutes, in fact, the mastering of the "due-to-regulations" Russian language. Pronounced with a strong Uzbek (Azerbaijani, Lezghin etc.) accent, the phrase *Vas ne pizdishch – vi khuieiete* is well-known to anybody, who used to be closely acquainted with the former Soviet army. After then, the *mat* encoding becomes the basis for the non-status male communication on the native languages – and for the communication with the representatives of the other nations – and goes hand in hand with permissibility of other behaviour practices, tabooed within the "native" cultural context, like eating pork by the demobilized Moslems.

- Poslushai, Ruslan, a iz chego ty shashlyk delaiesh?
- Iz svininy. Iz svininy shashlyk – samyi, bliad', vkusnyi.
- Ruslan, no ty zhe musul'manin. Razve tebe mozhno svininu iest'?
- Kakoi, na khui, mozhno – ne mozhno? Ia, bliad', v russkoi armii sluzhil.

(Saratov, 1996)

(- Listen, Russlan, what meat do you take for shashlyk?

- Pork. The pork shashlyk is the most, bliad', tasty one.
- But Russlan, you are a Moslem. Does it mean that you may eat pork?
- What, na khui, may – not may? The Russian army is where I, bliad', did serve.)

The self-organized levy soldiers milieu, just as any other marginal milieu, needs a rigid system of the behaviour encoding, openly manifested through a system of no less rigid code markers. Only the system of the kind, strictly ranged and marked, allows the hierarchical relations, immanent to this milieu, to be instantaneously established and maintained. Any group of soldiers, consisting of any number of people coming from any different units, if being left on one's own, will organize itself in the course of a day or two into an hierarchical system with strictly established status positions and gradations. The garrison hospitals could serve as the best example of the like self-organization – the privates and sergeants usually come here one by one and from different units, but at once fit in the pattern. *Srok sluzhby* (the length of being in service) and the potential status of the future “bedmates” are instantly defined by those soldiers already being given the hospital treatment, through the system of markers, conveyed in the behaviour patterns and in the peculiarities of treating one's uniform, absolutely transparent for all the participants of the situation. Nevertheless, sometimes the complicated situations are possible :

A student of the Saratov State university taking part in the summer military training, is brought late in the evening to the garrison hospital in Shikhany with a minor trauma. His clothing is rather specific: after coming to the unit location, the “cadets” were produced with the dingy (next to white) uniforms of the 1936 standard (knee-long soldier's blouses to be gird by belt and galifé breeches). As he is sitting in the casualty ward, two patient “dukhs”, obviously sent by the “deds” for the reconnaissance, watch him from the dark corridor through the half-opened side door. The whisper comes:

- Vrode, dembel'. A vrode, i net.

- A khui iego zneiет. Poidiom, Demida sprosим.

- Pizdy dast.

- Oshibems'a, khuzhe budet.

- Nu, na khui, poshli.

Dukhs are away. A few minutes later a loud voice comes from behind the door.

- Vy cho, mudaki, bliad', okhuieli? Da ia vas, bliad', na khui, vyiebu I vysushu! Kakoi, na khui, dembel', eto zhe, suka-bliad', salaga letniaia.

(Privolsk, Sartatov region, 1985)

(- Seems to be a ded. But who knows.

- Khui knows. Let's go and ask Demid.

- Pizdy dast (He'll beat us blue).

- Make a mistake and get worse.

- Well, na khui, let's go.

- You, mudaki, bliad', okhuieli? I'll, bliad', na khui, vyiebu I vysushu you (I'll fuck and squeeze you dry)! What, na khui, kind of a dembel' is he, he's just a salaga letniaia (specific term for the students passing their summer military training)).

The *a priori* presence of a behaviour encoding and code markers system in a form of the army regulations distinguishes the army milieu from other marginal – say the criminal – ones. This primarily established system serves as basic for the army milieu self-organisation. On one hand, the knowledge of the regulations is necessary for mastering the inner code systems. On the other, the regulations serve as a kind of foundation, on which the whole structure of the army “out-of-regulations” self-organisation erects itself, and the degree to which this or that person is free to treat the regulations is the best marker for his place within the “out-of-regulations” hierarchy. *Vsosat' sluzhbu* means to master the fundamentals of such re-coding, giving one an opportunity to manoeuvre between the “up to regulations” and “out of regulations” codes.

The recruits' behaviour transformation, necessary for the army mechanisms' adequate functioning goes first of all through the regulations-bound speech practice system (e.g. the specific "normal", "free from *mat*" officers' speech, that M.M. Bakhtin would call a sociolect). The re-coding of this system also goes through the speech practice system – the *mat* one. Thus, one of the constitutive elements in the "education of the young" is a peculiar re-coding training, where any "wrong" from the point of view of the official army regulations phrase pronounced by a *dukh*, produces a *mat* rhyme on the side of a *ded* – or even an officer.

- Saveliev!

- A?

- Khui na!

- Dneval'nyi!

- Cho?

- Khui cherez plecho! Tashchi stanok ieval'nyi!

- Mozhno voiti?

- Mozhno Mashku, bliad', za liazhku! A v armii – "razreshite"!

- A kak!

- Da khuiem ob kosiak!

The communicative act of the kind carries out several functions at once. Apart from "teaching the regulations", it naturally demonstrates the difference in the warrior status that exists between the participants – through the demonstration of difference in level, to which they master the codes and are free in treating them. Violation of the regulated communication through ignorance at once provokes an openly out-of-regulations speech act, putting the interlocutors "on different sides of the regulations".

At the same time, among those servicemen mastering the codes, any demonstration of a strictly up-to-regulations behaviour may be interpreted as a

sign of refusing communication. The usual threat of a senior by rank to the inferior ones: *Ne khotite zhit' po-khoroshemu, budem zhit' po ustavu* (As you don't want to live well, we shall live according to the regulations) has this very meaning. Here, as it seems to me, the reasons for the famous dislike that field marshal Suvorov had to *nemoguznaiki* is to be found. The demonstration of a traditional warrior 'schweinbruderlei' which Suvorov used to exploit when dealing with inferior ranks, was not evidence of him wishing to demonstrate any real equality of status. It was only to flatter – and it flattered – the soldiers' self-esteem, as an act of acknowledgement of equal rights to master a code. In this case the up-to-regulations answer *Ne mogu znat'!* (I don't know!) to any, even the most provocative question of the *otets-komandir* (father-commander) was equal to breaking up the communication. On the contrary, any dashing and spirited answer, even absolutely absurd (even preferably, absurd), was an evidence for unanimity in the acceptance of the code, mastering it and readiness to “play according to the rules” – and keeping the hierarchical relations untouched²⁴. It's hard to doubt that the basis for Suvorov's code speaking could be nothing else but *mat*.

Lev Tolstoi, himself a former battle officer, made an excellent presentation of the like situation in the famous scene at the road, in the evening of 5th November, after the first day of the Krasnoie battle narrated in 'War & Peace'. Kutuzov begins his speech addressed to the soldiers of Preobrazhenski regiment as a commander-in-chief, then Tolstoi brings the reader's attention to the change in Kutuzov's manner: now he speaks like a “simple old man, wanting to inform his comrades of something important”. And after he ends his speech with a *mat* phrase, everybody who is present lets themselves go, 'buck-up' and become at once *a group of comrades*. In the Russian army code system of 1812 this speech act could have one meaning more: it emphasized the continuity of a “glorious” tradition, coming right from victorious Suvorov. The tradition of admiring with *krepkoe soldatskoie slovtso* (hard-boiled soldiers' little word), often without the

direct “citation” but with a mute implying of mutual (on the writer’s side, as well as on the reader’s) knowledge of the code, comes down in the “high” Russian literary tradition from Tolstoi, through the writers dealing with the wars of 1914 – 1920s, like Babel or Serafimovich, and 1939 – 1945, like Viktor Nekrasov, up to the modern texts dealing with modern Russian army and modern armed conflicts. But it seems that the traditions of *mat* functioning within the XVIII or XIX Russian army and those of the Soviet Army were somewhat different. The codes existing in the professional army of the Russian Empire offered a recruit some kind of a military initiation, having a life-long importance for him and providing him with an adequate set of behaviour patterns (seen as marginal by the rest of society, but nevertheless in this very quality fitting in the social interrelations net, for the quantity of those veterans coming back to their villages was insignificant if to compare it to the rest of male population)²². The same codes functioning in the Red (and later in the Soviet) Army in the lower ranks based on the short-term levy principle, had quite a different social impact. The task of marginalizing a recruit, making him forget the ways of his native village and fit into the “wolf/dog” behaviour patterns of a lower warrior rank was done no less successfully. But a recruit was no longer condemned to a life-long marginal role, and after spending his two or three years in the army, a *dembel* had to return to the “normal” life passing no real initiation to a grown-up status. All the initiational practices existing inside the self-organized army milieu are – by the tradition – aimed at acquiring a high marginal status. After returning home, all the code markers of *dembel* status become useless trinkets, and his real social status remains the lowest possible.

Here we come to the main task of the Soviet Army: to marginalize the male population of the former Russian Empire. The pre-revolution levy system left the vast majority of male population outside the army training – and thus outside the training in those marginal behaviour practices that were basic for the army culture. The new one reduced the term of service but became total, aimed at

instilling the new forms of behaviour in the vast majority of the most socially mobile age stratae of the traditionally rigid “country-side” population (peasants of different categories, mestechko Jews etc) that constituted up to 85% of the new USSR citizens. Peasant community, dictating the traditional life strategies to the majority of population, used to be the main stumbling block for any reforms and reformers of imperial Russia. Even Stolypin reforms, the most purposeful and pragmatic attempt to destroy the peasant community and to plant the new economic relations in the country-side, really failed.

Bolsheviks, being one of the weakest political forces at the Russian political scene in 1917, could succeed only by utterly slackening the situation, provoking the wave of violence – and then by saddling it. The four-million army of former peasants clad in the soldiers tunics, armed and supplied with totally new to them models of behaviour formed a necessary critical mass for the explosion. The success of the October revolution of 1917 in St. Petersburg was due to the number of reformed regiments quartered in the capital – having no itch to return to the trenches and at the same time acquiring the habit of the “soldiers’ self-rule”, the practice very much alike the primitive warrior band “armed democracy”. The three years showed the limits of this “cavalry attack at capitalism”, as Lenin phrased it – for these four millions were enough to change the situation “in the city”, but as compared to the mass of not-marginalised country-side population, they were too little. While the main enemy was the defenders of *ancien regime*, while the main campaigns of the Civil war were deployed along the railway lines, taking and losing the main junctions and towns with the warehouses, the success was on the bolsheviks’ side. The former peasants were ready to pass through this bloody initiation, and the phantom of total marginalisation seemed quite real. But when the Whites were beaten and the great numbers of mobilised peasants returned to their villages – and then the real Civil war began to unfold itself with Tambov uprising, with Kronshtadt revolt etc. For now the peasant community became aware of a real threat. And this

community showed inclination to defend itself against “the city”. So Bolsheviks had to change their politics radically, forgetting for a while about the immediate World Revolution and letting the New Economy Politics to re-create the very “proprietary” relations that were one of the main targets for the early Bolshevik propaganda.

The task changed also. The peasant community was to be destroyed not at once, by the “cavalry attack”. It was to be taken “by starvation”, by implanting the forms of behaviour alien to it – and by doing so totally. The collectivisation couldn’t begin just after the end of the Civil war. Any attempt to force the peasants into *kolkhoz* in 1922 would mean the immediate end of Bolshevik rule. It took six years more and about 6 millions of young peasants passing through the Red Army training – and massive recruiting the demobilized from the ranks to the new Soviet structures²³ – to begin the process. It worth remembering that it was not the literate urban intelligentsia that became the main victim of Stalin’s repressions. The majority of the former somehow managed to find their way to the new ways of living and new behaviour modes²⁴. The peasants proved to be much more rigid. And those who were not “reforged” in the ranks of the Red Army or killed by the same army during the neutralisation actions, formed the main contingent of the army-guarded concentration camps: the natural habitat for the third of the main Soviet *mat*-based cultures, the camp/criminal one.

Thus the task was successfully fulfilled. The two main bolshevik aims were being solved: destruction of any social structure able to resist to a new system and creating a bottomless reserve of living force for the “future fights for the World Revolution”. The second aim was forgotten in the 1940s, as a result of the Second World war. Then Soviet socialism tried to become creative and thus to forget the first aim – or at least not to mention it too openly. But the army has always been one of the most rigid social structures. And the principles, on which the Soviet army (and the code systems operating in it) were based bore little

difference from those of the Red Army. The marginal warrior *mat*-based code systems became “inborn” for the vast majority of the male population. *Dembelia* coming from the army taught their younger brothers up to the ways that could help them to pass through the army initiational practices – and quite naturally *mat* was the basis for such a knowledge (compare the fatalistic proverb, concerning the “inevitableness” going to prison: *ran’she siadesh’ – ran’she vyidesh’* (the earlier you get there, the earlier you get out) – taking in view that the code systems of the criminal milieu are also *mat*-based).

Within the modern cultural situation in Russia, when the marginalization of the speech practices (and, naturally, not only the speech ones) becomes total, army *mat* in some aspects loses its specific character, preserving some peculiarities which are to be looked at rather as the features of a professional argot. This process might seem equal to the process of the post-war liberalizing the speech practices within the English-speaking communities, but it seems to me that the reasons for taking down the taboos for the obscene speech are common only in some aspects. Although these very aspects seem to have to do with the army inner code practices.

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Endnotes :

[1](#) Mikhailin V.Iu., “Russkii mat kak muzhskoi obstsennyi kod: problema proiskhozhdeniia i evoliutsiia statusa», *Novoie Literaturnoie Obozreniie*, # 43, 2000, pp. 347–393.

[2](#) Uspenskii B.A., *Mifologicheskii aspekt russkoi ekspressivnoi leksiki*, Izbrannyye trudy. T. 2. M., 1997, pp. 67–161.

[3](#) Upensky, *Ibid.* p.117.

[4](#) *Ibid.* p. 71.

[5](#) Zhelvis V.I., *Pole brani. Skvernosloviie kak sotsial’naia problema*, M., 1997.

[6](#) See also : Mikhailin V.Iu., “Izbytochnost’: iskhodnyi sotsiokul’turnyi smysl», *Kul’tura, vlast’, identichnost’: novyye podkhody v sotsial’nykh naukakh*, Saratov, 1999, pp. 229–235.

[7](#) Ivanchik A.I., « Voiny-psy. Muzhskie soiuzy I skifskie vtorzheniia v Peredniuiu Aziiu », *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, 1988, #5, pp.38–48.

[8](#) *Ibid.* pp.40-41.

[9](#) It's worth remembering in this context about the most particular, magistically meaningful conditions of Rome foundation – about the fratricide, passing the furrow (i.e., in fact, both putting the magic border line and no less magic marking the act of ploughing – compare the traditional for many cultures figure of a ploughman warrior) etc. Besides, different ritual practices during the feast of Lupercalia could be also significant from this point of view.

[10](#) See also McCone K.R., “Werevolves, cyclopes, diberga, and fianna: juvenile delinquency in early Ireland”, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, #12 (Winter, 1986).

[11](#) *Volk = Wolf; Medved' = Bear.*

[12](#) Incidentally, “*volk*” and “*medved'*” are nicknames given to Fall conscripts in the Russian army [Editors' note].

[13](#) Both terms (*biriuk; odinets*) meaning a lone wolf with the specific accent on the animal living outside its pack.

[14](#) Protecting the grown-up Ulad warriors fallen into the ritual state of feebleness.

[15](#) See also the pack of teenage Ulad youths holding the position for few days while recovering of the wounded Cuchulain, falling everyone of them on the border of their land not to let the enemy across it.

[16](#) Hence the decoding of an enigmatic phrase cited by Lady Gregory in her “Gods and Fighting Men»: that every fenian along with the other privileges has right to “the fostering of a pup or a whelp in any (peasant – V.M) house from Samhaine to Beltain», i.e. any household has to upkeep one fenian (“dog») from November till May.

[17](#) Also translated “ghost” or “soul” [Editors' note].

[18](#) The peculiarities of the mat encoding and of the mat usage are discussed at length in the article mentioned in footnote 1.

[19](#) A complex notion, meaning a pitiful, obnoxious and foolish person of the lowest possible status, untidy in his clothes and habits and subject to «everybody's» disdain and ordering about. Possibly, going up to the Yiddish «*schmok*» passing usual rather way through the criminal argot, where we meet «*chmo*» and “*chmyr*” in the meanings close to the army ones, and «*shmu*» («cunt») and «*shmokha*» («whore»).

[20](#) Any attempts to attribute the appearance of *dedovshchina*-like relations only to the late-Soviet army (See: Bannikov K.L., *Antropologiya ekstremal'nykh grupp. Dominantnyie otnosheniia sredi voennoslužhashchikh strochnoi služby Rossiiskoi Armii*, M., 2002, p. 41) are but the evidence of a certain “research naivity» (peculiar to the Bannikov's book as a whole – in spite of abundance of rather interesting field material). Not to mention the other national and historical traditions, which any researcher calling himself anthropologist just must be acquainted with, a lot of suitable data could be found in respect of the Russian army tradition: giving a striking resemblance to the ones existing in the late Soviet or modern Russian army. Comp. e.g. the abundantly described (See: Kozhevnikov V.L., *Neformal'nyie traditsii rossiiskoi voennoi shkoly kontsa XIX – nachala XX vv. Voienno-istoricheskaiia antropologiya. Iezhegodnik*, 2002. *Predmet, zadachi, perspektivy razvitiia*. M., 2002. pp. 216 – 229 ; Komarovskii E.A., *Vospitatel'nyie aspekty kadetskikh traditsii v rossiiskikh imperatorskikh kadetskikh korpusakh XIX – nachala XX vv. Voienno-istoricheskaiia*

*antropologiya. Iezhegodnik, 2002. Predmet, zadachi, perspektivy razvitiia. M., 2002. pp. 195 – 215 ; N.K.M., Tsuk. Pedagogicheskii sbornik. 1908. Kn. 501. pp. 200 – 212; Kekushev N.L., Zveriada. M., 1991; Giatsintov E., Zapiski belogo ofitsera. SPb., 1992; Ignat'ev A.A, Piat'desiat let v stroiu. M., 1989) pre-revolutionary practice of so-called “*tsuk*” in the military schools (the reasons of this very military milieu being the best-described seems quite evident).*

[21](#) On the combination of the “brotherly», “comrade» terminology and feeling with the strict hierarchical relations as an inborn characteristics of a male warrior band, see a very strong in some aspects Enright’s book : Enright M.J., Lady with a mead cup. Ritual, prophecy and lordship in the European warband from La Tène to the Viking Age, Chippenham, 1996.

[22](#) Situation hardly changed after Miliutin’s army reform of 1870. Although the general levy system was proclaimed the main principle of army completion, in fact, hardly 20 to 25 per cent of recruits really went to the ranks – and the whole social stratae were totally excluded from the conscription system. Thus, in 1914, Russian Empire, having on paper the hugest army in the world, could promise to its allies to mobilize “at once» only about 800 000 soldiers, of which, actually, only 400 000 were in time to begin the war activities against the German and Austro-Hungarian forces. In 1941, the Red Army units, concentrated at the USSR western borders had ten times more men, while there was no growth of population.

[23](#) Not to mention the massive ideological pressing, the propagation of literacy that made it easier to create the unified educational and cultural space, etc.

[24](#) Including the Party codes “for the inner use» – also *mat*-based. *Mat* was strictly censored from the everyday official usage and from “Soviet culture» that tried to appear a stable and a status one. But any first secretary of the regional party committee who wanted to control his subordinates and – at the same time – to create a “comrade» atmosphere, had to master *mat*.

Julie Elkner

***Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers under Gorbachev**

Abstract

This article provides an historical account of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers' role in breaking the taboo on *dedovshchina* in the Soviet military in the late 1980s. I argue that soldiers' mothers' activism on this issue played a crucial role in opening up the military to public scrutiny and in influencing public perceptions of military service. The article also traces the military's unsuccessful attempts to counteract the soldiers' mothers' exposure of barracks violence and to reinstate the old boundaries of acceptable public debates on military issues. It also examines the ways in which protesting soldiers' mothers made use of public representations of maternal grief over peacetime deaths. This outpouring of grief is contrasted with the repression of maternal grief during the early years of the war in Afghanistan. I argue that the military's failure to formulate an appropriate response to soldiers' mothers' grief was particularly damaging for the military's public image under Gorbachev.

Hundreds, thousands of lead coffins are soldered annually in every large army—a phenomenon so normal that in America at least, the press is silent about it, and the chatterbox-orators, who do nothing but wait for sensations, are silent. — Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil, November 1990¹

[Military service] is a compulsory state service. And [*dedovshchina*] is in actual fact a crime against the individual ... It's exactly the same as if someone were attacked on the street, or beaten up, or tortured. So there is no such thing as a separate crime of 'non-statutory relations.'² That's a mask, a lie. And for long

decades this lie concealed the fact that mass crimes were being committed. —
Valentina D. Mel'nikova, Committee of Soldiers' Mothers³

For the military establishment, which is unquestionably implicated in the crimes committed behind the impenetrable green fences, the movement of soldiers' mothers represents no small danger. The fact is that ... the overwhelming majority of the country's citizens are in solidarity with the movement ... This means that the movement's potential strength is huge. And, realising this, the USSR Defence Ministry and the Military Procurator's Office dependent upon it ... have organised a mighty counter-action against the soldiers' mothers. —
Rossiiskaia gazeta, August 1991⁴

The culture of the Soviet military was imbued with and sustained by a distinctive sentimentalism. Nowhere was this more evident than in the official rhetoric surrounding universal military service. Read the Soviet military press, or the Soviet mainstream conservative press for that matter, from the spring or autumn of any year, when the twice-yearly call-up of new conscripts was conducted, and you will find a series of standard articles containing a set of standard images: the romance of the young conscript serving in far-flung sections of the country, fulfilling his sacred duty to the Motherland, attaining manhood by facing hardship, sustained by the memory of his home and most importantly his mother. A key moment in such narratives was the conscript's separation from his mother. Such separations paid tribute to the sublimation of maternal instincts and the poignancy of the mixed feelings of the mother, sad but proud to see her son become a man and fulfil his mission of defending the Soviet state, and ultimately happy to entrust him to the care of the Soviet military.

Cracks in this idealised image of military service were already beginning to become visible by the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985; by the end of his rule, the image was on the point of shattering altogether. In the erosion of the

legitimacy of the universal military service and of the Soviet military itself, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers [henceforth the CSM]⁵ played a crucial role. Under Gorbachev, the Committee emerged as a mass movement aimed at exposing and eradicating the violence endemic in Soviet military barracks, violence which had hitherto been masked by sentimentalism and taboo.⁶ In particular, the Committee played an important role in drawing public attention to *dedovshchina* — the widespread systems of informal power hierarchies that operated in Soviet barracks, and the associated violence in which senior conscripts bullied and victimised new recruits.⁷

Controversy over *dedovshchina* played a significant role in eroding the Soviet military's authority from 1988 onwards.⁸ Claims that the military was incapable of maintaining order in its own barracks in peacetime cast doubt on its overall defence-capability and efficiency. At the same time, revelations about *dedovshchina* ushered in a dramatic shift in public perceptions of military service. Official rhetoric on the beneficial nature of military service for young men's physical and moral development was displaced by the widespread acknowledgement that for many conscripts, military service was in fact a profoundly damaging and traumatic experience. By the same token, the validity of the hitherto unquestioned notion that it was every male Soviet citizen's 'sacred duty' to undergo military service was eroded, as the controversy over *dedovshchina* brought into question the legitimacy of the state's claim to exact military service from its male citizens. For many, in fact, *dedovshchina* provided a reasonable justification for draft evasion, and was one of the causes of the conscription crisis of the late 1980s-early 1990s.

The Soviet military put up staunch resistance to what the prominent pro-military conservative writer Prokhanov described as 'the myth of the degradation of the individual in the army.'⁹ This article traces the military's attempts to control and to

set limits upon debate over barracks violence in the face of the CSM's campaign to increase public scrutiny of the previously hidden sides of military life.

Soldiers' Mothers' Strategies

There isn't anybody who knows this problem better than the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. Because we come into contact with this problem every day. We live and breathe these military units, we know their routines, we know what goes on there behind the fence, because the boys tell us much more than they tell their own parents. — CSM member Liudmila N. Zinchenko¹⁰

One of the CSM's main objectives was to raise public awareness of violence and peacetime deaths in the barracks. Soldiers' mothers' press conferences and demonstrations were an important counterweight to military attempts to deny or downplay barracks violence. In particular, the participation in these demonstrations of grieving mothers whose sons had been killed in peacetime provided eloquent proof of the problem's existence, greatly weakening the military's position. Grieving mothers threw into relief the disjuncture between the mothers' pain over the deaths of their sons on the one hand, and the regime's treatment of conscripts as so much expendable manpower on the other. Public representations of maternal grief were a key aspect of soldiers' mothers' demonstrations during this period, and will be examined in more detail below.

Organised soldiers' mothers' activism on barracks violence took on mass proportions in the spring and summer of 1990, after the CSM widely publicised claims that fifteen thousand peacetime or non-combat deaths had occurred in the Soviet armed forces during the preceding four-year period, and that the military was actively engaged in covering up these deaths.¹¹ Mass soldiers' mothers' demonstrations over this issue were held in Moscow and elsewhere in early summer 1990.¹²

The fifteen thousand figure would mean that non-combat deaths over the preceding four years exceeded the official number of Soviet deaths in almost a decade of fighting in Afghanistan, an irony which was not lost on democratic commentators.¹³ In August 1990 a spokesman for the General Staff declared that the widely cited fifteen thousand figure did not 'correspond to reality'; he refused, however, to provide alternative figures, on the grounds that this was classified information.¹⁴ By the same token, the military refuted claims that 75-80 per cent of peacetime deaths were attributable to *dedovshchina*, maintaining that only just over 1 per cent of deaths in the army fell into this category.¹⁵ Accidents arising out of conscripts' lack of discipline, carelessness, and drunkenness were cited as by far the most common cause of peacetime deaths.¹⁶

Whatever the real figures may have been, for my purposes it is public perceptions of barracks violence that are of interest. Public opinion was obviously a matter of great concern to the military, too, whose attempts to shape perceptions of barracks life will be examined below.

In addition to raising public awareness of the plight of victimised conscripts, the CSM lobbied for various concrete mechanisms to be put in place to protect conscripts and to prevent barracks violence. These demands were summarised in the Committee's official address to the USSR Supreme Soviet in April 1990, in which the mothers called for a number of measures to be taken with a view to improving the procedures governing investigation and prosecution of cases of barracks violence. In particular, they proposed that the Military Procurator's Office be abolished and replaced by an independent civilian body,¹⁷ and that an independent commission on peacetime deaths be established. The mothers also insisted that the practice of drafting ex-criminals be discontinued¹⁸ and that statistics on peacetime deaths be de-classified.¹⁹

Later that year the Committee addressed the Supreme Soviet again, expanding its list of demands to include public access to barracks, compulsory state insurance for servicemen, legislation decriminalising desertion on self-defence grounds, abolition of the *stroibat*²⁰, and new medical examination regulations and procedures preventing the drafting of conscripts in poor health.²¹

Meanwhile, pending the institution of legislative measures “from above” to remedy the situation, the Committee developed practical strategies aimed at preventing and counteracting barracks violence from below.

Knocking Down the Military’s Potemkin Villages

In the late 1980s, the Soviet military came under growing pressure to open up its barracks to public scrutiny. The Defence Ministry responded by stepping up construction of “show military settlements”, Potemkin villages which bore little resemblance to the overcrowded and delapidated military barracks in which most conscripts were housed²². As of 1989, as the Committee’s criticism over *dedovshchina* mounted, the focus of this public relations campaign shifted to target soldiers’ mothers in particular. A series of ‘gatherings’ of soldiers’ mothers were organised by the Defence Ministry, whereby soldiers’ mothers from across the country were invited to visit individual units.²³

Such events lasted several days at a time amidst a frenzy of highly-orchestrated Soviet-style hospitality and gallantry. The mothers were greeted at the stations and airports with bouquets of crimson carnations and military bands. They would then witness training displays and be taken on guided tours of the units, and in the evenings concerts and banquets were held in their honour.²⁴

In spring 1989, one such attempt to woo the mothers backfired disastrously. The Moscow Military District’s Political Administration had invited soldiers’ mothers to view training demonstrations by the famous Taman Guards Division, followed by

a concert and a special banquet honouring the mothers. Subsequent anonymous tip-offs informed the media that several soldiers had been killed during the training display when a shell exploded. The organisers had made no mention of these deaths, and next day the soldiers' mothers' programme had continued in a festive atmosphere.²⁵ Obviously this debacle only reinforced the impression of the military's callous attitude towards conscripts which such events were designed to dispel.

Even when these events ran smoothly, however, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers remained unconvinced that the model units which the mothers were permitted to visit were in any way representative. Indeed, most Soviet citizens would surely have been familiar with this sort of window-dressing (*pokazukha*). *Krasnaia zvezda*, however, went to considerable effort to advertise the relief experienced by concerned soldiers' mothers after such visits. Throughout the late Gorbachev period, *Krasnaia zvezda* published numerous letters from soldiers' mothers in this vein. These letters were remarkably consistent in format and content. They all began by describing the mothers' initial anxieties over the media reports on *dedovshchina*, which were subsequently allayed upon visiting the units in person. The letters invariably ended with glowing descriptions of the barracks and the commanders, often with a word of advice to other mothers not to listen to those spreading rumours about the state of affairs in the barracks.²⁶

The Committee was not satisfied by the formal soldiers' mothers' visits organised and controlled by the military. It demanded genuinely open access to military units, and developed tactics aimed at breaking through the façade of the military's Potemkin villages. Committee member Liudmila Zinchenko relates:

The first time we went to a military unit, we were told 'Oh, now we'll show you this, and we'll show you that...' And then we started to implement 'dispersion' tactics—that is, we would arrive at the unit, two or three of us would engage the

commander in conversation, and the rest would scatter throughout the unit. And then when we came together again, we'd ask one another 'What did you see? And what did you see? I saw a bruise. I saw a boy crying. I saw such and such.' And this general information, as it happened, gave us a complete picture of what was going on in the unit. Because otherwise, previously, all this was veiled, it was concealed from outside view.[27](#)

Such practices enabled the Committee to build up profiles on individual units, instituting an alternative monitoring system and sharing this information with other Committee branches. The physical presence of the mothers in the units also combated the isolation of conscripts and acted as a deterrent against violence.

The Dangers of *Glasnost*'

Her eyes were burning with rage. She rose up above the crowd and hurled down ... scathing, merciless words, exposing the army: 'They're carving tridents on our sons' chests! They're burning the words "Glory to Ukraine!" on our sons' backs with cigarettes![28](#) They're mocking our sons!'

And she also spoke of how the soldiers should go home, and mothers should take their sons away from the army, and should picket the *voenkomaty* [military commissariats] ... Ah, how appealing Natal'ia Nikolaevna Kovalenko found herself at that moment.[29](#)

'Give us facts, concrete names, addresses,' the military men from the Ivano-Frankovskii garrison rejoindered.

But what do names have to do with it? The most important thing is the rush of the rally, the roar of the crowd and the tears of the mothers... — from a 1991 *Krasnaia zvezda* article 'If Your Son is a Deserter...'[30](#)

The military was unhappy about mothers intruding into the barracks, and argued that this often led to problems, undermining discipline and thwarting commanders' efforts to transform the conscripts into men.³¹ It was difficult, however, to ban the mothers from entering the barracks without creating the impression that the military had something to hide.

The mothers' spontaneous inspections of military units were just one aspect of their incursion into the military sphere. Even more alarmingly for the military, the mothers were transgressing other boundaries governing the acceptable limits of public debate on military affairs by commenting on barracks violence in the media. In its struggle to reinforce the old boundaries cordoning off the military from the civilian world, the military employed a number of methods aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the mothers' commentary on the military.

One favoured line was to depict protesting soldiers' mothers as fuelled by female hysteria.³² Women's propensity to hysteria and over-reaction was cited as necessitating restrictions on *glasnost*' in media coverage of military affairs. In 1990 the prominent military figure Colonel General Rodionov asserted that media coverage of *dedovshchina* was 'sowing panic amongst mothers whose sons are going to the army.'³³ Military spokesmen frequently argued that issues like *dedovshchina* should not be discussed publicly, and that information on such internal military problems should be restricted to the military itself. For example, one officer conceded that *dedovshchina* should be discussed, but argued that 'only military people should read this, they understand it and are in a position to draw the correct conclusions; but there's no need to frighten the mammas and grandmothers.'³⁴

The idea of women presuming to comment on military affairs was viewed as particularly disturbing, and was ridiculed by many commentators.³⁵ One broadside on non-specialist meddling in military affairs referred contemptuously

to 'unbalanced ladies [*baryshni*],' who demanded the abolition of conscription on the 'democratic' model but who were uninformed and failed to realise that so-called democratic armies in the west also contained 'baseness'.³⁶ Media representations of the soldiers' mothers generally portrayed them as ignorant, politically illiterate and concerned only with their personal, emotional interests.³⁷ The potential dangers of *glasnost*' in introducing new concepts and sensitive material to the public were illustrated by a November 1989 *Krasnaia zvezda* article entitled 'The Boomerang: How a Mother Got Her Son out of Military Service.'³⁸ The article recounts a mother's cynical attempt to exploit the *dedovshchina* controversy in order to obtain her son's discharge, by attributing wounds sustained by her son in an accident to beatings by his fellow servicemen, thereby casting a slur on an innocent commander's reputation.³⁹

'The Boomerang' typified the general slant put on the issue of barracks violence by the military press. Numerous articles recounting cases of "fake" *dedovshchina* charges laid by soldiers' mothers were published in *Krasnaia zvezda* in the late Gorbachev period.⁴⁰ Such narratives reinforced ideas of women's emotions, particularly maternal instincts, as 'out of control' and having no place in a military environment. Furthermore, 'The Boomerang' demonstrated that mothers should not be exposed to information on barracks violence and other internal military problems. Finally, *Krasnaia zvezda's* repeated publication of such stories cast doubt on the integrity of the CSM's claims regarding barracks violence.

What the author of 'The Boomerang' finds most reprehensible is the fact that in her attempt to keep her son at home, the mother took shelter behind 'the eternal trust in sacred maternal feelings'.⁴¹ This comment highlights the difficulties faced by the military in responding to protesting soldiers' mothers. In its campaign, the Committee played on the Soviet cult of motherhood. The semi-sacred status of the soldier's mother ruled out open attacks on the Committee, since this would undermine the foundations of the Soviet military ethos.

There were also more strictly pragmatic reasons why it made sense for women rather than men to organise such a movement. As Karklins points out with regard to the Latvian equivalent of the CSM, the League of Women,

« men were seen as being more vulnerable to retaliation. Most men in Latvia had served in the Soviet armed forces and could be recalled to active service or otherwise harassed more easily than women. The women activists also felt that they had the psychological and moral upper hand when dealing with Soviet military authorities. Many officers did not know how to react to assertive women confronting them in such unexpected ways »[42](#).

For the most part, then, the military press avoided direct criticism of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. As we might expect, it was also conspicuously silent with regard to the concrete services offered by the Committee. The sole occasion on which *Krasnaia Zvezda* mentioned the Committee's provision of assistance and advice to conscripts and their parents appears to have been the January 1991 article 'Fantasies on the Theme of "*Dedovshchina*".'[43](#)

The article recounts the story of a mother who was anxious about *dedovshchina* and visited her local Committee branch seeking advice on obtaining her son's transfer to a unit closer to home. The author asserts that the Committee pressured the mother into falsely declaring that all sorts of horrific tortures were being inflicted on the conscripts in her son's unit. A Committee member is cited as having told the mother,

"Here's a sample [declaration] for you, write a declaration ! ... This never happened ? No matter. Your situation is different? Never mind. Write it. That's how it's done »[44](#).

On such an account, the Committee was motivated not by a genuine concern for truth and legality, but by an irrational and vindictive anti-army bias which led its members to seek out and if necessary fabricate negative phenomena in the military.⁴⁵

Another tack was to hint that more sinister political forces were at work, suggesting that the soldiers' mothers movement were part of a wider conspiracy to destroy the military. It was frequently argued that soldiers' mothers' emotionality made them particularly vulnerable to 'certain forces,' who were hinted at here and there in dark tones. In the non-Russian republics, soldiers' mothers' activism was generally presented as being masterminded by nationalist-separatist extremists,⁴⁶ while in Russia, it was the democrats, or, as they were commonly referred to in the military press, the 'loudmouths,' who were seen as the main culprits. Conservative military writer Prokhanov later claimed, for example, that the soldiers' mothers' movement had been 'created by the "democrats"' who were intent on 'setting the [soldiers' mothers] against the army.'⁴⁷

The positing of a democratic/nationalist conspiracy to destroy the Soviet Union by attacking the army's reputation meant that criticism of *dedovshchina* could be dismissed as nothing more than a ploy in this campaign.⁴⁸ Thus one 1990 *Krasnaia zvezda* article described the military's enemies as 'hiding behind the screen of "dedovshchina".'⁴⁹ Soviet Defence Minister Yazov also argued that the issue of *dedovshchina* was being used 'to conceal both unlawful actions and far-reaching political goals.'⁵⁰

The 'Feminisation' of Soviet Society

Another method commonly employed to undermine the legitimacy of the claims of soldiers' mothers protesting barracks violence was to present these women as 'bad' mothers who were unwilling to separate from their sons. This strategy

allowed the military press to shift the blame for *dedovshchina* onto overprotective mothers who had raised infantilised sons incapable of meeting the demands of military service and of attaining manhood.

In 1988 military sociologist Deriugin claimed somewhat enigmatically that *dedovshchina* should be attributed at least in part to 'the feminisation of men' in contemporary Soviet society.⁵¹ Precisely how or why the 'feminisation' of conscripts should lead to barracks violence remains unclear; in any event, questioning the masculinity of conscripts who reported instances of *dedovshchina* conveniently enabled the military to sidestep the issue of the violence itself.

After the first fictional account of *dedovshchina* was published in late 1987, the military press dismissed it as 'the flight of imagination of a mamma's boy.'⁵² The epithet 'mama's boy' (*mamen'kii synok*) was to become a catchphrase in military commentary on *dedovshchina*. Yazov himself stated in 1989 that many conscripts were 'mama's boys,' who 'don't know how to do anything.'⁵³ Similarly, a letter published on the front page of *Krasnaia zvezda* in 1990 entitled 'I Don't Understand Those Parents,' asserted that young men complaining about the hardships of military service had been raised as 'mama's boys'.⁵⁴ The prevalence of this phrase in military accounts of *dedovshchina* takes on added significance in light of the Committee's campaign with its focus on the protective function of the mother.

Mothers were heavily implicated in the process of 'feminisation' of Soviet men.⁵⁵ The dominant role played by mothers in raising sons had, it was commonly argued, rendered many young men ill-equipped to adjust to life away from home.⁵⁶ In 1989 Colonel Soluianov, Hero of the Soviet Union and veteran of Afghanistan, noted that 'no few young men come to the army today with a

“lady’s” upbringing.⁵⁷ These sentiments were echoed a month later by Kovalev who argued that:

Among conscripts there are more and more youths who have received ... as we say, a ‘lady’s’ upbringing, who are not accustomed to labour and physical loads ... To an infantile young man [who is] not prepared for all this, the unavoidable and generally ordinary difficulties of [military] service seem perfectly intolerable, and he, forgetting about duty and honour, rushes to flee from this ‘penal servitude,’ from this ‘horror,’ to under the warm parental wing.⁵⁸

This juxtaposition of ‘duty’ and ‘honour’ to weakness and self-interest was a recurring motif in attempts to defend the principle of universal military service as the draft system moved into crisis. Contemptuous references to conscripts who hid behind their mothers’ skirts can be read as oblique responses to the growing power of the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers.

Glasnost’ and Grief

They brandished photographs of their sons and [their] black headscarves, saying ‘Here is our mandate!’⁵⁹

This was the response of a group of soldiers’ mothers asked for their credentials by doormen at the October 1991 Congress of Servicemen’s Parents in Moscow. In a sense, their grief, as signified by their black headscarves and the photographs of their dead sons, can also be viewed as their license to enter the public sphere. Maternal grief was the source of the mothers’ legitimacy—their right to speak and to be heard; it was also arguably their most powerful weapon. A mother who refused to give up her son for military service was one thing; a mother who had trustingly fulfilled her duty only to be betrayed was quite another. Portraits of their dead sons in black mourning-frames provided the main visual focus of this and other soldiers’ mothers’ protests under Gorbachev. The public

display of maternal grief and loss was a method that had been used very effectively by other mothers' activists groups, most notably by Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.⁶⁰ These public performances of mourning were not only symbolically powerful, but disarming—there could be no justifiable response to this grief other than respect and sympathy. The discussion below examines the ways in which maternal grief escaped state strictures under Gorbachev and came to acquire new political valency.

Soldiers' Mothers' Grief and the War in Afghanistan

The immensity and significance of the outpouring of soldiers' mothers' grief under Gorbachev becomes clear if we compare it to the experience of mothers whose sons were killed in Afghanistan before *glasnost*, at a time when public expressions of maternal grief were repressed and controlled by the state.

Consider for example the case of Zinaida Chivileva, a Russian mother whose son was killed in Afghanistan in 1982. After receiving notification of her son's death, Chivileva visited the local military authorities to obtain further information. Chivileva says that the commander told her briefly the date and location of her son's death, and then attempted to cut the meeting short, asking, 'Now, is there anything else I can help you with?' At this point Chivileva became angry, and retorted, 'Give me back my son!' The commander responded by committing Chivileva to a psychiatric hospital, a place where, he informed her, ways would be found to 'moderate [her] ardour'.⁶¹

Nor was this attitude restricted to the military—Chivileva's subsequent experience in her workplace, where she was subjected to a disciplinary campaign by colleagues who declared her too-visible mourning to be selfish, abnormal and detrimental to the collective, indicates that entrenched social mechanisms of controlling inappropriate responses to Afghan war losses operated in wider civilian society, too.⁶²

Chivileva's case would appear to be an extreme example of the way that the Soviet regime dealt with maternal grief during the Afghan War. The underlying principle of rendering invisible the losses incurred in Afghanistan, however, also governed more widespread practices during that war. Bereaved mothers were frequently bullied into keeping silent about their sons' deaths. For example, one mother has recounted how, like Chivileva, she visited the local *voenkomat* and asked for information on the circumstances of her son's death only to be shouted at by the military commandant: 'That [information] cannot be divulged. And you're going around and telling everyone that your son has been killed. You must not advertise this.'⁶³

Other aspects of grieving and remembrance were also tightly controlled. In the early years of the war, for example, the headstones of the graves of soldiers killed in Afghanistan bore only the dates of birth and death.⁶⁴ As of 1984 the inscriptions read 'Died heroically in the performance of his internationalist duty,' but still did not state the place of death.⁶⁵

Harnessing Maternal Grief: The Regime Changes Tack

Clearly, the grief of soldiers' mothers was viewed by the late Soviet regime as something dangerous, which needed to be hidden and contained. This was in stark contrast to the official veneration of maternal sacrifice and loss that was so central to the Soviet World War Two iconography.

But there were limits to the extent to which deaths in Afghanistan could be concealed. Attempts to do so ran the obvious risk of alienating the relatives and friends of the dead. Furthermore, official security-related reasons for censoring information on the war notwithstanding, this silence could be interpreted as an admission of the illegitimacy of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. This was particularly so after Gorbachev came to power, as grieving mothers sought out and received the attention of the democratic media. Eventually, the

military press appears to have arrived at the realisation that if it did not mention the grieving mothers, the democratic press certainly would, and that the plight of these mothers was a potentially damaging weapon able to be used to discredit the regime.

The first sign of the change in the official line on maternal opposition to the Afghan war was handed down by Gorbachev in 1985. According to Cherniaev, a 'flood' of letters (mostly from women) opposing the use of conscripts in Afghanistan had come into the Central Committee and to *Pravda* as soon as Gorbachev became General Secretary.⁶⁶ At a Politburo session in October 1985 when Gorbachev declared that a decision had to be taken on Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, he illustrated his point by reading aloud from a number of bereaved soldiers' mothers' letters which questioned the validity of 'internationalist duty' and criticised the Soviet leadership harshly for using untrained new recruits in the conflict.⁶⁷

As Afghanistan came to be discussed more openly in the late 1980s, the regime made attempts to control and harness maternal grief for official state propaganda purposes. Expressions of concern for the plight of mothers whose sons had been killed, wounded or were missing in Afghanistan became a commonplace in the military press.⁶⁸ In October 1989 the USSR Defence Ministry officially endorsed the new Council of Mothers and Widows and Warrior-Internationalists Killed while Fulfilling their Military Duty in Afghanistan, thanking them publicly for their sacrifices and for 'raising worthy sons of the fatherland.'⁶⁹

The regime manipulated the mothers' desire to keep their sons' memories alive and to make sense of their deaths by mobilising bereaved mothers to give lectures on their sons' heroism at local schools and other institutions. These ritualised public performances aimed to reactivate the figure of the stoic soldier's mother of World War Two, transforming maternal grief and despair into pride.

One Afghan mother has told of her initial collusion in such a scheme and subsequent realisation of her own complicity and blindness:

“What did he die for ? Why him ? ... I force myself to be with people, I take Sasha with me, I talk about him. Once I gave a talk at the Polytechnic and afterwards a student came up to me. ‘If you’d stuffed less patriotism into him he’d be alive today,’ she told me. When I heard that I felt ill and fainted. I gave that talk for Sasha’s sake. He can’t be allowed to just disappear like that ... Now they say it was all a dreadful mistake—for us and for the Afghan people. I used to hate Sasha’s killers ... now I hate the State which sent him there. Don’t mention my son’s name. He belongs to us now. I won’t give him, even his name, to anyone”.[70](#)

This woman’s response was to retreat into private grief again; many others opted instead to bring their grief into the public sphere on their own terms.

The Afghan war was not an easy war to sell. The World War Two iconography of the soldier’s mother bearing her grief stoically was clearly not applicable, primarily because the main rationale for the mother’s sacrifice (the need to protect the homeland from an external invader) was absent.

The contrast between the two wars was articulated by one mother whose son was killed in Afghanistan:

When my son was taken, it was particularly difficult for me because I had nothing to lean on emotionally. I couldn’t say to myself: this is essential, the country needs it, the people [need it]. The Afghan War is not the Great Patriotic War, such as it was for our fathers. That was a people’s war, everyone understood it. But in this war I didn’t find any logic, [or] commonsense, and so it was doubly hard.[71](#)

Peacetime Deaths under Gorbachev

'Internationalism' had been shaky enough as a justification for soldiers' deaths in Afghanistan, but it goes without saying that no even remotely plausible 'meaning' could be found in peacetime deaths. As we have seen, the military press attempted to make sense of this phenomenon by presenting it as a symptom of social decay and the erosion of Soviet values in wider civilian society. But even were this interpretation accepted, it could bring no solace.

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers' widely publicised claims that fifteen thousand conscripts had been killed in peacetime during the past four years lent fresh impetus to the movement. The previous taboo on peacetime deaths had served to isolate mothers in their grief; now they became aware that their situation was part of a large-scale phenomenon, and that they were not alone. The peacetime deaths issue also mobilised many mothers of conscripts currently undergoing military service.

The Soviet military, which had felt so threatened by angry outbursts from isolated individual mothers during the Afghanistan war, now found itself faced with a mass outpouring of maternal grief, as thousands of mothers of soldiers took their anger and grief to the streets for the first time in Soviet history—an outpouring which the regime was no longer able to contain. Mass soldiers' mothers' rallies over peacetime deaths were held in Moscow's Gorky Park in early June 1990, with bereaved mothers demanding Yazov's dismissal and the abolition of conscription.⁷² A series of hunger strikes and other protests by grieving soldiers' mothers to draw attention to peacetime deaths continued throughout 1990 and 1991.⁷³ The impact of these public representations of maternal suffering was compounded by the military's ineptitude in managing and responding to the peacetime deaths issue.

Military Responses to Maternal Grief

The military proved highly resistant to demands for more *glasnost*' in the reporting of peacetime deaths, and revelations of military cover-ups added to public outrage over the deaths themselves. Isolated calls from within the military for de-classification of statistics on peacetime deaths as a means of rebuilding relations with the community appear to have fallen upon deaf ears.⁷⁴

An important point of contention was the non-transparency of procedures governing the investigation of peacetime deaths. The CSM expressed its lack of confidence in the Military Procurator's Office on numerous occasions,⁷⁵ and one of its central demands was that this body be replaced by independent civilian investigators.⁷⁶ Many soldiers' mothers were politicised precisely by their exposure to the military procurators' incompetence and sometimes clear corruption, to which they were alerted by discrepancies in the documentation related to their sons' deaths.⁷⁷ Bereaved parents had very few rights when it came to obtaining access to information about their sons' deaths, which was classified, or to their sons' remains, which were usually buried at their place of service.⁷⁸

The Military Procurator's Office was generally obstructive, and at times resorted to outright intimidation of troublesome soldiers' mothers, most notoriously in the case of Liubov' Lymar'.⁷⁹ After Lymar' demanded that her son's body be exhumed in order to ascertain the cause of death, the Military Procurator's Office had her son's corpse decapitated before returning it to her for burial. Upon demanding that the head be returned to her, Lymar' was reportedly told, 'You yourself wanted an exhumation, and the head has been added to the criminal case as material evidence.'⁸⁰

Publicly grieving mothers were a loud reminder to the military of something that it would much rather forget. Public sympathies were clearly on the side of the

mothers and there was no way in which the old methods of idealising the soldiers' deaths or suppressing the protests could comfortably be employed.

The military thus found itself backed into a corner, and occasions inevitably arose in which it came into open conflict with the protesting mothers. In September 1990, for example, troops were sent in to disperse a soldiers' mothers' picket at the Defence Ministry building in Moscow. Moscow Military Commandant Major General Smirnov, who led the operation, reportedly tore up one of the dead soldiers' portraits, saying: 'You yourselves brought up such mongrels, [that's why] they get killed.'⁸¹ Obviously, occasional outbursts and retaliations in this vein could not be reconciled with the military's traditional image as a benevolent and paternal force.

Such cases were rare, however; for the most part the military appeared to follow a course of avoiding direct mention of these protests.⁸² Instead, the military press aimed to discredit publicly grieving mothers obliquely, challenging their claim to moral authority by running profiles of exemplary bereaved soldiers' mothers. Such mothers kept their grief private, and were not seduced by what was generally presented as a 'fashion' for showy protests and general troublemaking.⁸³

As we have seen, one of the military's standard moves was to deflect responsibility for the mothers' suffering by attributing peacetime deaths to the 'poor quality' of the conscripts (who were undisciplined, foolish, drunken, and so on). Occasionally the military press blamed peacetime deaths on the soldiers' mothers themselves. For example, one article related the case of a soldier's mother who had publicly implicated the military in the suicide of her son. The article maintained that the soldier's suicide had in fact been prompted by his receiving a letter from his mother in which she threatened suicide herself. The mother was said to be 'speculating' on her son's death, and salving her conscience by shifting the blame onto the military.⁸⁴

Furthermore, it was often implied that the 'real' victims of peacetime deaths in the barracks were the military commanders implicated in these deaths and the reputation of the military in general. Rather than focusing on developing mechanisms to prevent peacetime deaths, military debate on the issue tended to focus on the fact that commanders were being 'persecuted' and 'indiscriminately punished' for crimes committed by their subordinates.⁸⁵

Finally, the military press attempted to take the sting out of the mounting corruption charges levelled against the military and the Military Procurator's Office by the CSM. Responding to allegations of cover-ups of violent peacetime deaths, the military press argued that the lack of openness regarding the details of conscripts' deaths was in fact motivated by a desire to protect the feelings of bereaved mothers. One article on peacetime deaths thus emphasised that it was a common and accepted practice of commanders to bend the truth in conveying circumstances of soldiers' deaths to their loved ones. The author drew an analogy to the World War Two practice whereby commanders would comfort parents by recasting their sons' deaths as heroic, even if they had in fact died cowardly deaths—missing the point that the current wave of soldiers' deaths was shocking precisely because the deaths had occurred not in the course of a war, but during peacetime.⁸⁶

In general, the military seems to have failed to appreciate the fact that what was required was an attempt at an honest appraisal of the situation and an acknowledgement of the military's own responsibility for the welfare of conscripts in its care, followed by a clear undertaking to increase accountability. Instead, military responses showed greater concern for saving face than anything else. Occasional expressions of sympathy extended to the mothers by military spokesmen were always heavily qualified and outweighed by the defensiveness which characterised discussion of this issue.

Conclusion

There were good reasons for the late Soviet regime's nervousness regarding the political potential of grieving soldiers' mothers. The deaths of conscripts, both in Afghanistan and at home, was an issue that galvanised anti-military and anti-regime public opinion. Ultimately, by attempting to keep these deaths quiet, the regime succeeded only in alienating further a large sector of the population and unwittingly creating a new class of martyrs with considerable moral and symbolic authority.

Grieving soldiers' mothers symbolised the growing rift between the 'people' and the Soviet army, giving the lie to the often repeated slogan that, in contrast to the situation in bourgeois states, 'the Soviet army and the people are one'. In 1988 a screening of the controversial documentary 'Pain' which focused particularly on the suffering of mothers of soldiers killed in Afghanistan, was held at a cinema in Moscow. When speakers in the post-film discussion session praised the film for showing 'the people's truth about the Afghan war,' a general in the audience rose to his feet, declaring, 'Mothers are not the people.'⁸⁷ The general's response seems to me to encapsulate something of the tone colouring military responses to the soldier's mothers' criticism. The military's stubborn refusal to accept or adapt to the changing climate of public opinion under Gorbachev made the prospect of reconciliation between the militarist and maternalist camps a slight one.

The military's attempts to deny and downplay the existence of barracks violence were largely counterproductive, only reinforcing the impression of conscripts' vulnerability. For the most part, the Soviet public appears to have been unconvinced by the military's counterattacks on the CSM. A survey of 1,898 people undertaken in early 1991, for example, found that 62 per cent of respondents believed that it was unfair to accuse critics of the army of "insufficient patriotism". Only 8 per cent of respondents accepted the notion that

the military's complaints about criticism of the army represented attempts 'to preserve ideals and traditions for young people.' Thirty-one per cent of respondents, on the other hand, viewed the military's attacks on its critics as motivated by the desire "to preserve [the military's] political influence in the country". Crucially, the survey indicated that 60 per cent of respondents believed that 'the army itself, commanders who allow and encourage violence amongst subordinates' were responsible for *dedovshchina*.⁸⁸

The ramifications of the *dedovshchina* controversy extended beyond the issue of conscripts' welfare—in a sense this debate was about breaking down the barriers which separated the military from the civilian world. The public outcry over barracks violence illustrates the ways in which the forces of *glasnost*, once unleashed, proved impossible to contain. Independent organisations like the CSM seized the opportunity provided by Gorbachev's reforms to take *glasnost* much further than was acceptable to conservative forces within the Soviet establishment. The military's ultimate failure to quash public debate over barracks violence was in large measure the result of the soldiers' mothers' dogged campaign to raise public awareness of this issue.

This article leaves the CSM at a high point. In the wake of the failed coup of August 1991, the CSM's dealings with the authorities took place in a climate of receptivity and sympathy to maternalist thinking. Yeltsin's regime seemed to offer the promise of genuine military reform, a new approach to military service that took the rights of conscripts into account, and renunciation of the use of coercion against Russian citizens.

This promise, however, was not fulfilled; indeed, Yeltsin's relations with the CSM would never be so good again. The period covered in this article was only the first stage in an ongoing struggle against human rights abuses in the Soviet, and now the Russian military. The post-Soviet Russian army has inherited most of

the problems which plagued the Soviet army, including *dedovshchina* and the problem of dealing with secessionist regions within the Russian Federation.⁸⁹ Soldiers' mothers continue to fight the same battles over the same issues. Meanwhile, the advances of the Gorbachev era continue to be eroded by the war in Chechnya. Overall, the resurgence of militarist discourses under Putin shows just how fragile the soldiers' mothers' achievements have been.

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Footnotes :

¹ Vladimir Uspenskii, 'Tainyi sovetnik vozhdia,' *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, no. 21, November 1990, p. 84.

² The euphemistic term for *dedovshchina* favoured by the military.

³ Valentina D. Mel'nikova, author's interview, Moscow, 21 October 1998.

⁴ Sergei Kornilov, 'Dvizhenie soldatskikh materei: ne v nogu, no soobshcha,' *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, no. 173, 17 August 1991, 3.

⁵ Currently the organisation's full title is the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia.

⁶ The initial impetus for the soldiers' mothers' movement was the issue of deferments from military service for tertiary students, which had been restricted in the early 1980s. After a group of mothers successfully lobbied the USSR Supreme Soviet and attained the re-institution of educational deferments in spring 1989, it was decided to give the movement a concrete organisation base, and the CSM was formally established in April 1989.

⁷ Strictly speaking *dedovshchina* is a quite specific term referring to the informal power hierarchies governing relations between conscripts based on their length of service. In this article I follow the practice widely adhered to in the Soviet media of using the term more loosely to refer to the associated violence in the barracks, and as shorthand for the tyranny inherent throughout the Soviet military hierarchy. It should be noted that barracks violence also often took the form of *zemliachestvo*, or *gruppovshchina*, whereby conscripts from particular regions or republics banded together and persecuted rival ethnic groups. Levinson makes a convincing case that these ethnic divisions amongst conscripts were drawn as a survival mechanism in response to *dedovshchina* and its associated violence, which indirectly created a sense of ethnic identity between people who may not have felt any commonality in civilian life; Aleksei Levinson, 'Ob estetike nasiliia. Armia i obshchestvo v SSSR/Rossii za poslednie 10 let,' *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1999).

⁸ The public controversy over *dedovshchina* can be traced to a July 1988 article in *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, describing an incident in which a conscript who had been the

victim of ongoing abuse in the barracks eventually snapped and turned his weapon against his fellow servicemen, killing eight; M. Mel'nik, 'Intsident v spetsvagine', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 20 July 1988, cited Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998, p. 185, and Aleksei Levinson, 'Ob estetike nasiliia. Armiia i obshchestvo v SSSR/Rossii za poslednie 10 let', *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1999. The taboo on mentioning *dedovshchina* had first been broken in works of fiction on the pages of the so-called 'thick' literary journals, despite attempts on the part of the military to prevent their publication. The first of these, a novella by Yurii Poliakov, was published in the journal *Yunost'* in November 1987; Y. Poliakov, 'Sto dnei do prikaza', *Yunost'*, no. 11, 1987, pp. 46-68. *Yunost'* received numerous readers' responses to the story, both positive and negative, a selection of which were published in 'Skol'ko dnei do prikaza?', *Yunost'*, no. 5, 1988, pp. 90-1. For an account of the debate over Poliakov's work see Sergei Zamascikov, 'Insiders' Views of the Soviet Army', *Problems of Communism*, vol. xxxvii, nos. 3-4, May-August 1988, pp. 110-16. Another highly controversial novella on this theme was Sergei Kaledin's 'Stroibat' which dealt with *dedovshchina* in the military-construction units; Sergei Kaledin, 'Stroibat', *Novyi mir*, no. 4, April 1989, pp. 59-89.

[9](#) A. Prokhanov, 'Zametki konservatora,' *Nash Sovremennik*, no. 5, 1990, reprinted in L. N. Dobrokhotov *et al*, *Nesokrushimaia i legendarnaia: V ogne politicheskikh batalii 1985-1993 gg.*, Terra, Moscow, 1994, p. 211.

[10](#) Liudmila N. Zinchenko, author's interview, Moscow, 20 October 1998.

[11](#) This figure appears to have originally been put forward by Vladimir Lopatin, USSR Supreme Soviet Deputy and one of the most high-profile young reformist officers, who was later to work closely with Yeltsin; see V. Marchenko, 'Pravoporiadok v armii—glazami pravozashchitnikov,' *Za mirnuuiu Rossiiu*, vol. 2, no. 20, March 1999.

[12](#) See Stephen Foye, 'Moscow TV: 15,000 Soldiers Dead over Last Four Years,' *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 5 June 1990. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers had a particularly high media profile in summer 1990. For other reports on their public campaign during this period see *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 5 June 1990; 2 July 1990; 17 July 1990; 20 July 1990; and 24 July 1990. See also Gennadii Zhavoronkov, "'Spasi i sokhrani!'"—shepchut soldatskie materi, provozhaia svoikh detei v armiiu,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 29, 22 July 1990, p. 11; Stephen Foye, 'Non-Combat Deaths: Latest Gorbachev Decree Reflects Army's Woes,' *RFE/RL Report on the USSR*, 13 September 1990; and Shreeves, 'Mothers against the Draft', pp. 3–8.

[13](#) In August 1989 the General Staff stated that 13,833 Soviet troops had died in Afghanistan from 25 December 1979 to 15 February 1989; cited A. Liakhovskii, 'Na afganskoi vyzhzhennoi zemle,' *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh sil*, no. 22, November 1990, p. 62. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers estimated that thirty-eight thousand noncombat deaths had occurred in the Soviet army during the same period; cited Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War*, Frank Cass, London, 1995, p. 97. For an example of democratic commentary highlighting the irony inherent in the fact that soldiers were more at risk in peacetime conditions at home than they had been in combat in Afghanistan see A. Demchenko, letter to editor, *Ogonek*, no. 29, July 1989, p. 5.

[14](#) 'Zhertvy dedovshchiny?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 199, 30 August 1990, p. 4.

[15](#) Ibid. The 75-80 per cent figure appeared in the newspaper *Kuranty* in 1990; cited Galeotti, *Afghanistan*, p. 97.

[16](#) See V. Kaushanskii, 'Osenie pikety,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 2, and I. Ivaniuk, '...I strakhovoi polis,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 5, 8 January 1991, p. 1. On occasion soldiers' mothers were directly implicated in such deaths by the military press; see Yu. Bychenkov, 'Dve sud'by,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 264, 16 November 1990, p. 4, which recounts the case of a conscript who died in an accident while drunk on vodka sent to him in a parcel by his mother.

[17](#) Formally the Military Procurator's Office was part of the Office of the Procurator-General. Financially, however, and in numerous informal ways, the Military Procurator's Office was dependent upon the Defence Ministry, and military procurators were reportedly frequently willing to register violent deaths as suicides or natural deaths in exchange for housing and other resources; see William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998, p. 366. On the relationship between the Defence Ministry and the Military Procurator's Office see further 'Konets revoliutsionnym tribunalam', *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 172, 10 September 1991, p. 1; 'Femida zhdet resheniia', *Trud*, no. 229, 2 October 1991, p. 3; and Valerii Vyzhutovich, 'V kakom zvanii zakon?', *Izvestiia*, no. 246, 15 October 1991, p. 3. *Krasnaia Zvezda* denied that the Military Procurator's Office was in any way compromised by its links to the Defence Ministry; see for example L. Zaika, 'Na prestupnost' – yediny frontom', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 217, 21 September 1989, p. 2.

[18](#) The practice of drafting youths with criminal records, partly to compensate for falling birth-rates in the Slavic republics and difficulties meeting the draft quotas, was one of several factors contributing to the singular scale and brutality of bullying and initiation rites in the Soviet military. Other such factors include structural features of the Soviet military (such as the principle of *yedinonachalie*; the entrenched culture of *krugovaia poruka* or 'collective responsibility' at the lower levels; the low number of non-commissioned officers); and other demographic factors.

[19](#) Gennadii Zhavoronkov, "'Spasi i sokhrani!'"—shepchut soldatskie materi, provozhaia svoikh detei v armiiu,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 29, 22 July 1990, p. 11.

[20](#) The popular term for the military-construction units (detachments) (VKOs) located within various Soviet civilian ministries and departments. Mortality and crime rates were especially high in the *stroibat*, which were notorious for their harsh conditions, poor safety record, corruption, and general neglect of the welfare of the conscripts.

[21](#) N. Nikolaev, untitled, *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 46, November 1990, p. 8.

[22](#) Mikhail Tsyarkin, 'The Soviet Military: *Glasnost*' against Secrecy,' *Problems of Communism*, vol. xl, no. 3, May–June 1991, p. 59.

[23](#) See N. Polianskaia, 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 230, 6 October 1989, p. 2; 'Mosty doveriia,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 237, 15 October 1989, pp. 1–2; V. Kaushanskii, 'Osenie pikety,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 2; 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 4; and N. Gusarov, 'Gotovnost' k dialogu,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 16, 20 January 1990, p. 2.

[24](#) See for example N. Polianskaia, 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 230, 6 October 1989, p. 2, and 'Slet soldatskikh materei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 4.

[25](#) I. Mamicheva, letter to the editor, *Ogonek*, no. 21, May 1989, p. 7. See also Deputy Military Procurator Nagibin's comments on this incident; V. Nagibin, letter to editor, *Ogonek*, no. 29, July 1989, p. 5.

[26](#) See for example letters to the editor, 'Teper' my spokojny za synovei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 202, 2 September 1989, p. 3; 'Opaseniia byli naprasny,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 270, 25 November 1989, p. 1; 'Yesli slushat' "znaiushchikh" liudei...,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 118, 24 May 1990, p. 5; and 'My spokojny za Andreiia,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 22, 29 January 1991, p. 2, all of which take the form described above. See also two articles summarising and paraphrasing similar letters received by soldiers' mothers; V. Yermolin, 'Diapazon pliuralizma,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 275, 1 December 1989, p. 1, and G. Barnev, 'Neizvestnaia armii?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 265, 20 November 1991, p. 3.

[27](#) Committee of Soldiers' Mothers member Liudmila N. Zinchenko, author's interview, Moscow, 20 October 1998.

[28](#) Whether such a slogan would have been used by or against Ukrainian conscripts is unclear. In general, the inclusion of this line seems odd in the given context; this may be a case of creative misquoting on the part of the military press.

[29](#) Protesting soldiers' mothers were frequently depicted as motivated primarily by vanity and exhibitionism; see for example the semi-fictional description of a mother whose son had been killed in Afghanistan and who publicly refused to receive a medal on his behalf. The mother is portrayed as acting purely out of self-interest (the author claims that she had made herself up specially for the TV cameras), seeking attention and 'cheap popularity'. The author berates her, 'so the glory of your hero-son is alien, incomprehensible to you—then return the medal without making a noisy spectacle under the floodlights, without insulting the honour of the dead soldier'; Vladimir Uspenskii, 'Tainyi sovetnik vozhdia,' *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, no. 21, November 1990, p. 84. The mother's action is also attributed to the democrats' campaign to 'whip up anti-Afghan [war] ecstasy'.

[30](#) V. Popov, 'Yesli syn—dezertir...,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, nos. 9–10, 12 January 1991, p. 3.

[31](#) On the dangerous effects of parental visits see for example V. Salmin, 'S etim nel'zia ne schitat'sia,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 252, 2 November 1989, p. 2, and the case of private Gelashvili described in V. Usol'tsev, 'Za gran'iu razumnogo,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 269, 24 November 1989, p. 2.

[32](#) See for example *Krasnaia zvezda's* coverage of the founding All-Union Congress of Servicemen's Parents which states that 'more than once, the fever pitch of emotions drowned out common sense' and describes the women speaking at the congress as 'tearing the microphones away from one another'; A. Vorob'ev, 'Po antiarmeiskomu tsenariiu?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 208, 9 September 1990, p. 1.

[33](#) I. Rodionov, 'Kogda perestanut glumit'sia nad armiei i derzhavoi?,' *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 9, 1990, reproduced in Dobrokhotov *et al*, *Nesokrushimaia i legendarnaia*, p. 63.

[34](#) S. Martynov, Soviet army officer, cited N. Andreev, V. Litovkin, 'Tri pis'ma iz armii. 3. Gotovy vypolnit' prikaz', *Izvestiia*, no. 40, 15 February 1991, p. 3.

[35](#) In a 1989 *Krasnaia Zvezda* interview with 'army sports master' Tiurin, for example, entitled 'How to Become a Real Man,' Turin complains about critics of the military, concluding 'But male journalists aren't so bad; I am less able to understand those ...

women who are attacking our army'; cited A. Goncharov, 'Kak stat' nastoiashchim muzhchinoi,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 191, 19 August 1989, p. 3. When reformist forces within the military later proposed appointing a woman as Russian Defence Minister, misogynist rhetoric reached new heights of emotional intensity; see Anatolii Lanshchikov, 'Shtrikhi,' *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 43, 23 October 1992, p. 11.

[36](#) A. Fomenko, 'Predannaia armiia,' *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 4, 26 January 1990, p. 9.

[37](#) For example, one article regarding a recent survey of women's attitudes towards military service and other related issues stated, 'It is significant that the number of [respondents] who had difficulty answering questions connected with the service of their own sons in the army was minimal ... although up to 50% of the women were unable to answer a series of current political questions'; Galina Sillaste, 'Zhenshchiny zashchishchaiut svoikh synovei,' *Narodnyi deputat*, no. 18, 1990, p. 56.

[38](#) V. Kaushanskii, 'Bumerang: kak mat' syna ot sluzhby izbavliala,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 259, 11 November 1989, p. 2.

[39](#) Ibid. The 'boomerang' in the title refers to the criminal charges faced by the mother after she was found out in her deception.

[40](#) See for example V. Kovalev, 'Za chto zh ty nas opozoril, synok... Pochemu daleko ne kazhdaia mat' skazhet eti slova sbezhavshemu iz armii soldatu?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 14 October 1989, p. 4; V. Yevgen'ev, 'Nespravedlivye upreki,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 258, 10 November 1989, p. 1; Yu. Gladkevich, 'Za shirmoi "dedovshchina",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 27, 2 February 1990, p. 2; A. Volk, "'Derzhis', my dobivaemsia...",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 38, 15 February 1990, p. 2; and 'Fantazii na temu "dedovshchina",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 12, 16 January 1991, p. 2.

[41](#) V. Kaushanskii, 'Bumerang: kak mat' syna ot sluzhby izbavliala,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 259, 11 November 1989, p. 2.

[42](#) Rasma Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and the Transition to Democracy: The Collapse of the USSR and Latvia*, The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D. C., 1994, p. 73. Parallels could be drawn here with the *bab'i bunty*, Russian and Ukrainian peasant women's protests during collectivisation. Viola's study of these protests argues that the women, conscious of the fact that the authorities were less likely to use force against them than against the men of the village, manipulated stereotypes of women as irrational and hysterical in order to further their own political ends; see Lynne Viola, 'Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization,' in Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola, eds., *Russian Peasant Women*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 189–205.

[43](#) 'Fantazii na temu "dedovshchina",' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 12, 16 January 1991, p. 2.

[44](#) Ibid. The mother in question had reportedly since recanted and begged pardon of her son's military collective for offending them.

[45](#) Protesting soldiers' mothers were also frequently represented as being so blinkered and hostile towards the military as to be gratified by any abuses that they uncovered. For example, one military commander was cited in November 1991 as saying that he had the impression that some of the parents visiting his units had in fact been disappointed to find that everything was in order; G. Barnev, 'Neizvestnaia armiia?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 265, 20 November 1991, p. 3. This suggestion that protesting soldiers' mothers were only interested in the negative side of army life was also made on other occasions. See for example Zieminysh's account of a demonstration of Latvian soldiers' mothers. He claims

that the mothers responded ‘with restraint, if not coldly’ to servicemen speaking at the rally who maintained that they had not come into any contact with *dedovshchina* during their military service, since ‘this was not what [the mothers] wanted to hear.’ Ziemysh contrasts this to the mothers’ enthusiastic applauding of two servicemen who spoke of their harsh treatment in the military and their eventual discharge for health reasons; M. Ziemysh, ‘Strannye prizyvy,’ *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 220, 24 September 1989, p. 3.

[46](#) For example, one article about a Latvian soldiers’ mothers’ demonstration asserted that the demonstration had been secretly organised by Latvian nationalists; *ibid.*

[47](#) Aleksandr Prokhanov, ‘Pod Argunom,’ *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, no. 26, 10 March 1995, p. 3. Publications like *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Moskovskii Komsomolets* and *Ogonek* came in for particular criticism, as the military accused them of printing vastly exaggerated and uninformed articles about army life designed to frighten soldiers’ mothers. *Ogonek* was seen by the military as the main villain in the *dedovshchina* controversy, or as one critic put it, the ‘guiding spirit’ in the campaign to weaken and destroy the Soviet army; I. Dynin, ‘Sviatoe delo i krivaia ten’, *Kommunist voozhennykh sil*, no. 22, November 1990, p. 6. *Ogonek*’s coverage of *dedovshchina* was the subject of frequent criticism from the military during this period; see for example N. Medvedev, ‘S poslednei nadezhdoi na pomoshch’, *Pravitel’stvennyi vestnik*, no. 39, September 1990, p. 12, and N. Medvedev, ‘Prizyvnik, piketchiki, otkazniki...’, *Pravitel’stvennyi vestnik*, no. 48, November 1990, p. 12. (Medvedev was a representative of the Defence Ministry’s press service.)

[48](#) See for example a 1989 *Pravda* article which stated that ‘anti-Army manifestations often feed parasitically on speculations concerning existing shortcomings in the Army, above all on “hazing” [i.e. *dedovshchina*]’; ‘The Defense of the Fatherland Permits no Regionalism, Selfishness, or Self-Seeking,’ *Pravda*, 13 November 1989, translation in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. xli, no. 6, 1989, p. 3.

[49](#) The author also dismisses talk of people ‘becoming aware of their rights’ as ‘abstract’ and all part of the wider plot; Yu. Gladkevich, ‘Za shirmoi “dedovshchina”’, *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 27, 2 February 1990, p. 2. In M. Ziemysh, ‘Skol’ko shansov pobedit’?’, *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 268, 23 November 1989, p. 1, the head of the *politotdel* of the Latvian military commissariat also describes the Latvian League of Women as playing a ‘dishonest and dirty game’ and ‘striving to further ideas alien to socialism under cover of slogans of democratisation [and] *glasnost*’.

[50](#) Cited ‘Vesennii prizyv,’ *Izvestiia*, no. 71, 12 March 1990, p. 3. One November 1990 article claimed that soldiers’ mothers picketing the Moscow *voenkomat* had been paid (the author does not specify by whom) to go there and ‘yell’; N. Krivomazov, ‘Voenno-polevoi sabotazh,’ *Pravda*, no. 321, 17 November 1990, p. 4.

[51](#) From an interview published in *Argumenty i fakty*, 27 August–2 September 1988, reproduced in Dobrokhov *et al.*, *Nesokrushimaia i legendarnaia*, p. 41. Here Deriugin was engaging in the ongoing public debates on the ‘feminisation’ of men and ‘masculinisation’ of women in Soviet society which dated to the 1970s. For more information on these debates see Lynne Attwood, ‘The New Soviet Man and Woman—Soviet Views on Psychological Sex Differences,’ in Barbara Holland, ed., *Soviet Sisterhood: British Feminists on Women in the USSR*, Fourth Estate, London, 1985, pp. 54–77, and Elizabeth Waters, ‘Sex and Semiotic Confusion: Report from Moscow,’ *Australian Feminist Studies*, no. 12, Summer 1990, pp. 1–14.

[52](#) Cited Sergei Zamascikov, 'Insiders' Views of the Soviet Army,' *Problems of Communism*, vol. xxxvii, nos. 3-4, May-August 1988, p. 114.

[53](#) Yelena Agapova, 'Vremia stavit voprosy. Kak ikh reshat?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 173, 28 July 1989, p. 2. See also Khorev's attack on 'spoilt and pampered' conscripts; Aleksei Khorev, 'Dolg i chest', *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 297, 27 December 1991, p. 2.

[54](#) The writer goes on to conclude that 'I do not understand those parents who strive, using truths and untruths, to protect their offspring from the difficulties of military service'; V. Pankov, 'Ne ponimaiu tekh roditelei,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 73, 29 March 1990, p. 1.

[55](#) Attwood writes that in the late Soviet period inadequate mothers increasingly served as scapegoats for a range of Soviet social problems such as hooliganism and alcoholism. She points out that 'It is easier to blame the mother for not bringing up her children properly than to examine the very fabric of Soviet life for clues to the genesis of antisocial behaviour'; Attwood, 'The New Soviet Man and Woman,' p. 72. The ways in which inadequate Soviet mothers served as scapegoats for Soviet social problems is also addressed in Annie Phizacklea, Hilary Pilkington and Shirin Rai, 'Introduction,' in Shirin Rai, Hilary Pilkington and Annie Phizacklea, eds., *Women in the Face of Change: The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 5-6. The predominance of female teachers in the Soviet education system was also seen as having a negative effect on the masculinity of young Soviet males; see Mary Buckley, 'The "Woman Question" in the Contemporary Soviet Union,' in Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp, and Marilyn B. Young, *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1989, p. 256.

[56](#) At the same time, the poor quality of conscripts was elsewhere blamed on the lack of maternal attention, as in the case of one soldier whose mother had deserted him at an early age; Aleksei Khorev, 'Chto s nami?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 276, 2 December 1989, p. 3.

[57](#) A. Soluianov, 'Ya protiv "damskogo" vospitaniia,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 214, 17 September 1989, p. 2, in which he argues that conscripts should be put through more rigorous physical training. He goes on: 'I foresee the objection: ... today's conscript is yesterday's schoolboy, often spoilt by excessive attention.' While Soluianov concedes that this is a problem, he argues that it is important to realise that men are not 'born' soldiers. He cites the case of Afghanistan where 'weaklings' were excluded from important missions: 'Cruel? But fair. We couldn't pay in blood for a "lady's" upbringing.'

[58](#) V. Kovalev, 'Za chto zh ty nas opozoril, synok ... Pochemu daleko ne kazhdaia mat' skazhet eti slova sbezhavshemu iz armii soldatu?,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 14 October 1989, p. 4.

[59](#) A. Vorob'ev, 'Materinskie nadezhdy,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 15 October 1991, p. 1.

[60](#) For discussion of the ways in which such portraits functioned in Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo's protests, see Andrea Malin, 'Mothers Who Won't Disappear,' *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1987, pp. 187-213, and Sara Ruddick, "'Woman of Peace": A Feminist Construction,' in Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin, eds., *The Women and War Reader*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1998, pp. 216-17.

[61](#) Sh. Zhaksybaeva, 'Mat' soldata', *Izvestiia*, no. 217, 4 August 1990, p. 6.

[62](#) Ibid.

[63](#) Cited Ales' Adamovich, 'Spriatannaia voina,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 33, 19 August 1990, p. 14. There are many stories of such cases; in a 1990 interview, for example, a mother whose son was killed in Afghanistan describes a 'shadow of secrecy' surrounding information about her son's death; see L. Ovchinnikova, "'Svet lampy vospalennoi...'", *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, no. 157, 11 July 1990, p. 2. Frequently parents were not informed when their sons were sent to Afghanistan; see for example Monakhov's account of an incident in 1980 when a female colleague whose son had been called up to the landing troops was worried because a parcel she had sent to her son had been returned. Monakhov rang his colleagues at the *Krasnaia Zvezda* editorial office to ask for information; they checked the son's details and then told Monakhov: "'You understand... He's THERE...'" "Where's 'there'?" I said, bewildered. "Well, where?..." — they coughed meaningfully into the receiver. "Where are the landing troops now? Got it?" — V. Monakhov, "'Afganistan v nashei sud'be",' *Narodnyi deputat*, no. 10, 1990, p. 114. Mothers whose sons were taken prisoner in Afghanistan were similarly kept in the dark; see the account of one mother who, upon making an inquiry to the Defence Ministry when her son's letters stopped arriving in the early 1980s, was told "'What POWs? What are you talking about? There is no war in Afghanistan.'" She received notification that he was officially missing only several years later; Irina Lagunina, 'Call from a Mother's Heart,' *New Times*, no. 30, 1989, pp. 36–8.

[64](#) See Galeotti, *Afghanistan*, pp. 85–6.

[65](#) See A. Simurov and P. Studenikin, 'Returning to what was Printed: "There is no Gratitude in their Hearts",' *Pravda*, 25 November 1987, translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. xxxix, no. 48, 1987, p. 7. The controversial documentary about the war in Afghanistan, 'Pain', released in 1988, included an interview with a mother who had lost two sons in Afghanistan and who lost a battle with local bureaucrats who refused to authorise the headstone she had selected for one of her son's graves; see V. Dashkevich, 'Careful! This was Paid for in Blood,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 21 October 1988, translation in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. xl, no. 44, 1988, p. 9. Moscow's first memorial to soldiers killed in Afghanistan was erected (by a group of veterans) as late as 1992; see A. Oliinik, 'Simvol skorbi i pamiati,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 39, 18 February 1992, p. 1.

[66](#) The unprecedented nature of this protest is indicated by Cherniaev's own admission of his amazement at the fact that almost all of the letters were signed rather than anonymous; see A. S. Cherniaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym. Po dnevnikovym zapisiam*, Izdatel'skaia gruppа 'Progress' – 'Kul'tura', Moscow, 1993, p. 37. At the 19th CPSU Conference in summer 1988 the writer Grigorii Baklanov also described the numerous letters he had received from mothers of sons killed in Afghanistan, citing the letters to support his argument that 'We must create a mechanism that will prevent such things happening again'; cited Alexander Pumpyskiy, 'Defeat or Victory?,' *New Times*, no. 30, July 1988, p. 13.

[67](#) Cherniaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, pp. 57–8.

[68](#) See for example one journalist's comment that 'Every Afghan bullet that killed a Soviet soldier struck in the heart of a mother'; V. Miasnikov, 'Dom na ulitse Sovetskoi,' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 159, 11 July 1989, p. 2. For similar articles in this vein see V.

Ziubin, “‘Zagorsk. Yevdokii Koriavinoi...’,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 191, 19 August 1989, p. 3; O. Bar-Biriukov, ‘Mozhno li prostit’ predatel’ia?,’ *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 20000 (special edition), 16 September 1989, p. 6; and ‘Zakon dolzhen “rabotat”’, *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, no. 20, October 1990, p. 40.

[69](#) See A. Oliinik, ‘V neoplatnom dolgu,’ *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 243, 22 October 1989, p. 1. According to Pinnick, who interviewed members of this group in 1994, many of these mothers and widows later came to ‘regret that they acted on requests to make a contribution to the state’s military socialisation programme, as they are now sceptical about the authorities’ objectives at the time and feel they were exploited in their grief’; Kathryn Pinnick, ‘When the Fighting is Over: The Soldiers’ Mothers and the Afghan Madonnas,’ in M. Buckley, ed., *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 149.

[70](#) Cited Svetlana Alexievich, *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from a Forgotten War*, trans. Julia and Robin Whitby, Chatto and Windus, London, 1992, p. 66. Alexievich’s book consists of a series of interviews conducted primarily with Soviet veterans of the Afghan war and their mothers. The interviews focus on the brutality of the war and its effects on participants and their loved ones. Extracts from Alexievich’s book were first published in the USSR in *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* and *Druzhba Narodov* in early 1990. Alexievich was subsequently excoriated in the military and conservative press and accused of having fabricated the interviews. Attacks on Alexievich made on the pages of *Krasnaia Zvezda* included the following letter from a soldier’s mother castigating Alexievich: ‘I, the mother of an internationalist-soldier ... am outraged to the depths of my soul by those attacks with which Aleksievich is trying to shame our sons ... Misanthropy [and] cruelty have never been inherent in our children ... I consider that those who are trying to shame our soldiers [and] our army, are shaming their own Motherland...’; ‘Kto otvetit za klevetu ?,’ *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 80, 7 April 1990, p. 2. Another critic described Alexievich as a ‘lady intellectual’ (*intelligentnaia damochka*) who had ‘made up stories’ about the war; see *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 103, 5 May 1990, p. 2.

[71](#) Cited V. Monakhov, “‘Afganistan v nashei sud’be’,” *Narodnyi deputat*, no. 10, 1990, pp. 114–15.

[72](#) *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 5 June 1990.

[73](#) See for example *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 22 April 1991, 6 May 1991 and 10 July 1991; ‘Kak khotel ya zhit’,” *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 130, 10 July 1991, p. 1; ‘Vopiiushchie ob otmshchenii,’ *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 134, 16 July 1991, p. 1; *Express-Chronicle*, no. 31, July 1991; Tamara Ivanova, “‘Svoi” i “chuzhie”,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 231, 9 October 1991, p. 1; and Yurii Iogov, ‘Soldatskie materi uzhe ne golodaiut, a “dedy” vse vyiasniaiut otnosheniia,’ *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 197, 16 October 1991, p. 1.

[74](#) In autumn 1989, for example, Zolotukhin pointed out how damaging repression of mortality rates among conscripts was for the army itself, given that this generated rumours regarding the number of deaths, and he argued that the only way to counter such rumours was to begin to publish the relevant statistics; cited V. Kosarev, ‘Domysly i real’nost’,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 241, 20 October 1989, p. 1.

[75](#) See for example ‘Kak khotel ya zhit’,” *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, no. 130, 10 July 1991, p. 1.

[76](#) See for example the CSM's April 1990 address to the USSR Supreme Soviet, cited Gennadii Zhavoronkov, "'Spasi i sokhrani!'"—shepchut soldatskie materi, provozhaia svoikh detei v armiiu,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 29, 22 July 1990, p. 11.

[77](#) See for example Valerii Vyzhutovich, 'V kakom zvaniu zakon?,' *Izvestiia*, no. 246, 15 October 1991, p. 3, and V. Zhitarenko, 'Vsego strashno teriat' syna,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 100, 6 May 1992, p. 4.

[78](#) On the withholding of inquest details from parents see Valerii Vyzhutovich, 'V kakom zvaniu zakon?,' *Izvestiia*, no. 246, 15 October 1991, p. 3. On burials, see P. Poloz, 'V garnizonakh i karaulakh,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 247, 27 October 1989, p. 2.

[79](#) Lymar' was the leader of the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia group which was established in July 1991.

[80](#) On the Lymar' case, see "'... And the Head will be Kept as Evidence",' *Express-Chronicle*, no. 23, 1991, and Sergei Kornilov, 'Dvizhenie soldatskikh materei: ne v nogu, no soobshcha,' *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, no. 173, 17 August 1991, p. 3. Note also that one 1991 *Krasnaia Zvezda* article expresses strong disapproval of another mother calling for exhumation of her son's corpse. The author urges the mother not to disturb her son's corpse, and to resist falling prey to those who were 'shamelessly' casting doubt upon the accidental nature of her son's death; V. Usol'tsev, 'Kogda nevmoch' peresilit' bedu,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 196, 29 August 1991, p. 2.

[81](#) *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 39, 23 September 1990, p. 2. Troops were also used to break up another soldiers' mothers' protest outside the Defence Ministry building in December 1990; see V. Zhitarenko, 'Na podnozhke "demokraticeskogo ekspressa",' *Krasnaia zvezda*, no. 35, 13 February 1991, p. 3.

[82](#) On the rare occasions when such protests were mentioned in *Krasnaia zvezda*, the articles in question focused on the infighting and scandals within the soldiers' mothers' movement; see Tamara Ivanova, "'Svoi" i "chuzhie",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 231, 9 October 1991, p. 1, and A. Vorob'ev, 'Materinskie nadezhdy,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 236, 15 October 1991, p. 1.

[83](#) See for example the portrait of archetypical 'good mother' Yevdokia Koriavina, mother of a Hero of the Soviet Union who was killed in Afghanistan, who is described as 'not one of those people who complain about their fate'; V. Ziubin, "'Zagorsk. Yevdokii Koriavinoi...",' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 191, 19 August 1989, p. 3. See also V. Zhitarenko, 'Vsegda strashno teriat' syna,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 100, 6 May 1992, p. 4, in which the author praises a mother whose son was killed in peacetime in suspicious circumstances but who, 'to her honour' is bearing her cross quietly, without organising demonstrations or taking her anger out on her son's commander. Similarly, see the case of a mother whose son was killed in a parachuting accident, but who cannot bear the idea of any of her son's fellow servicemen facing punishment for his death. She sends the following telegram to the fleet: 'I request and beg as a mother to lift the punishment (if any) arising from the death of my son from the unit'; V. Massal'skii, 'Osobym svetom,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 1, 3 January 1991, p. 2.

[84](#) V. Usol'tsev, 'Kogda nevmoch' peresilit' bedu,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 196, 29 August 1991, p. 2.

[85](#) See O. Vladykin, 'Tochku stavit' rano,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 265, 19 November 1989, pp. 1–2.

[86](#) V. Zhitarenko, 'Vsegda strashno teriat' syna,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, no. 100, 6 May 1992, p. 4.

[87](#) Cited Ales' Adamovich, 'Spriatannaia voina,' *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 33, 19 August 1990, p. 14.

[88](#) 'Otnoshenie naseleniia k armii,' *Narodnyi Deputat*, no. 3, 1991, p. 87.

[89](#) Indeed, CSM members frequently use the metaphor of the post-Soviet Russian army as the decomposing corpse of the Soviet army. Thus in October 1998 CSM member Ida Kuklina said of the post-Soviet Russian army: 'The situation with ... peacetime deaths has not changed, because the Russian army is the skeleton of the Soviet army in decay. All the processes are continuing'; Ida N. Kuklina, author's interview, Moscow, 29 October 1998. Similarly, CSM member Liudmila Zinchenko stated that, 'we always say that the Russian army is the fragments of the Soviet army, which was dismembered. And this corpse is stinking. That is, it has all the problems that the Soviet army had; it's stayed the same'; Liudmila N. Zinchenko, author's interview, Moscow, 20 October 1998.

Hana Cervinkova

Time to Waste

Notes on the Culture of the Enlisted in the Professionalizing Czech Military.

Abstract

This essay draws on the author's fieldwork research in the Czech Armed Forces (2002-2002) and focuses on the culture of the enlisted - the young Czech men who are drafted into the military for one year of compulsory service. The article argues that the culture of the enlisted is based on the opposition to the military and by extension the Czech state, which define the enlisted as neophytes - mutually equal and indistinguishable entities in transition to being full male citizens of the Czech state as well as transitory entities before the military is professionalized in 2006. The article analyses the various material and ritual elements of the conscripts' culture through which they resist the official efforts at their equalization.

1 - Introduction

This essay draws on interviews with fifty enlisted men with whom I worked during two months in the spring of 2001 on an Air Force Base in the Czech Republic. At the time, I was beginning my sixteen-month employment as a military researcher in the Czech Armed Forces (CAF), attempting to gain official access to Air Force officers whom I wanted interview about the changing concepts of the military profession in the new political and military system. Gaining access to the military professionals proved to be a formidable task not only because of the aura of secrecy surrounding this professional cast and all things in the post-Soviet military, but also because of the difficulty of explaining the reasons for such an undertaking by a practitioner of cultural anthropology – a field of social science largely unknown in the Czech Republic, let alone in the Czech military. Until my arrival, most Czech military research in the social sciences had been limited to

quantitative opinion and satisfaction surveys whose administration was tightly controlled by two other, mutually competing research units within CAF that employed mostly psychologists and sociologists. In order to convince the military leadership of the value of qualitative cultural analysis as I was proposing it, I suggested conducting a pilot study among the enlisted.

Contrary to the case of professional officers, getting the permission for my study among the enlisted was not very difficult. About six weeks after I had submitted my proposal and request, I received the order to carry out my research. Several mornings per week for the duration of two months, the Commander of the Air Base, based on the order of the Chief of the General Staff, sent me two to four enlisted men to be interviewed. In the Czech military institution, the roles of the anthropologist and her subject were defined by the chain of command – my research was an execution of an order from the Chief of the General Staff, who ordered the Commander of the Air Base to order the Captain in charge of the enlisted to order them to come to me for an interview. I could forget about what I had learned in my training about modern anthropological theory and its urge to deconstruct the power relations between the anthropologists and their cultural others¹. In the relationship between the enlisted as the anthropological subjects and me as the anthropologist, the power was clearly distributed – I was the one ordered to ask questions and they were the ones who were ordered to answer.

My one to two hour interviews followed the same script based on a questionnaire which has been approved by the Chief of the General Staff. The explicitly stated goal of the research for which I had gained the permission was to learn about the views of the enlisted of the military service, their motivation for serving in the military, the comparison between their expectations and the reality of the service, their opinion regarding the contribution of the year in service to their life and career and more general questions targeted at learning about the connection between the motivation of the men to serve in the military and their relationship to

the nation state. The findings of this research, which I duly presented to the military leadership as a readable report that included citations and Excel pies based on statistical data and content analysis² showed a grim portrait. Except for one interviewee who reported that he had established a nice friendship with another enlisted man, the conscripts felt that military service did not bring them anything. In the words of many interviewees, their service in the CAF was a “waste of time.”

The image of time as something being wasted during the military service reappeared throughout the interviews – both in the discourse and the material cultural practices demonstrated to me by my interviewees. In this article, I return to the material that I collected during my study among the conscripts. I will argue that “time” serves as a crucial trope for the Czech enlisted men. Through a particular definition of “time,” different from that shared by the majority society, the enlisted form a bond as a separate cultural group. The specialized knowledge of “time” of the enlisted is a source of their self-definition as a group – their intimate cultural knowledge. This cultural know-how allows them to assume social agency in a situation when they are turned into liminal personae, placed outside of society by others, temporarily deprived of the individual rights for self-direction, their work alienated. The conscripts’ agency, which draws on a unique concept of time, is especially important in the context of the process of military professionalization. This is because professionalization, based as it is on the elimination of general conscription, depreciates the value of the conscripts’ work for the military and the nation state. Because of the central role of the soldier in the Czech national imagination, this change in the role and character of the soldier’s work and position challenges traditional concepts of national identity. One of the most manifest aspects of this process centers on the symbolic role of the Good Soldier Švejk as the model symbolizing the ideal Czech soldier in the past times, which is currently being deemed unfit for the tasks of the future professionalized military.

2 - Professionalization as the Decorroding Treatment

Military professionalization has been the topic of discussion in the Czech political arena since the end of the socialist times. On the one hand, professionalization was seen as the most efficient way of the depoliticizing and restructuring of the Czech and Slovak military from totalitarian to democratic forces³. In addition, professionalization promised to abolish the very unpopular law of general conscription, which has been in existence in the Czech lands since the mid-1900.⁴ Despite much political talk, however, it took twelve years for professionalization to become the official program for the military sector of the state⁵.

This slow pace can be explained by the problematic position of the military sector in Czech politics and society. Highly discredited because of its subservience to the Soviet occupying forces since 1968, the Czech military was not perceived by most Czechs as an honorable institution dedicated to the defense of a national territory and Czech citizens, but on the contrary – an ally of the enemy⁶. Moreover, the Czechoslovak People's Army, the pawn of the Soviet colonial empire, has never fought a war in its history – first demobilized under the German and later under the Soviet occupation. Burdened by the history of acquiescence and passivity, the Czech Armed Forces presented a dilemma for the new leaders of the post-socialist state. This situation began to change when the Czech Republic prepared for its accession to NATO. In 1999, by gaining the NATO membership, ostensibly a political organization which nevertheless relies for its power and influence on military prowess, the Czech state (and the international community) placed an enormous weight of responsibility and importance on the Czech military. After a period of disinterest in military matters following the end of socialism, the military was now endowed with the task of bringing the Czech Republic into the fold of Western democratic states.

In 2001, the new charismatic leader of the military sector, Minister Jaroslav Tvrdik was the first one to realize the upcoming opportunity and to harness the 'war machine' for his party's political agenda. In 2001, replacing his discredited Social Democratic Party colleague, Tvrdik introduced an intensive campaign at military reform. Professionalization appeared as the main reorganizing principle, setting the year 2006 as the last year of general conscription⁷. In Tvrdik's campaign, professionalization is portrayed as the general remedy for the ills of the post-socialist military. One of the most visible forms of the campaign was a series of leaflets distributed with the main Czech daily, *Mlada Fronta Dnes*. The first leaflet, for example, was a large-size photo showing a detail of the Czech insignia on a rusting green metal background of military machinery. The rust was advancing into the center of the ensign and a warning note at the bottom of the page read, "Time to do something" ("*Čas něco udělat*"). On the other side of the flyer there were several captions set to the same background of a rusting metal.

The first piece of text asked: "What do we feel when hear the name of the Czech Armed Forces ? Self-confidence ? Strength ? Or even pride ?" Clearly the questions were rhetorical, because without providing an answer first, the next note said: "But that is how it should be. But that would mean to have a military always able to protect and to help where help is needed. Professional armed forces – less of a people's military, but a military more humane (*Profesionalni armadu – mene lidovou a vice lidskou*)." The concluding caption provided an explanation and information regarding the authorship of the surprising addition to the daily: "What are we doing to make this happen ? Everything. No facials, but a strict diet. A change in thinking, modernization. No ordering around (*Zádná buzerace*), but a lot of work. And the deadline ? The year 2006. The Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic." Signed – "The Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, www.army.cz"

In the next flyer that appeared in the paper a few days later, the message was the same, but the photo was different. It showed a military sapper in high-tech protective gear searching for mines on a desolate soccer field located in some remote war-torn place. A large caption at the bottom of the page read: “We are not playing at being soldiers (*Nehrajem si na vojaky*).” The other side contained a “short guide to coping with the military reform,” whose goals were: “A healthy, professional military. A military of full readiness, a military able to be in the right place at the right time. A military that is slim, modern and thinking. A military without rust. A military full of good and competent soldiers.” Signed “Jaroslav Tvrdik, the Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic.”

These newspaper inserts were accompanied by other propaganda materials such as the small recruitment brochure targeted at youth, *Tomorrow Belongs to the Professionals*⁸. The campaign, which coincided with the period of my fieldwork on the air force bases of the Czech Armed Forces (February 2001 – June 2002), initiated great upheavals in military matters, which were further intensified by international consequences of the September 11th attacks in the United States and the ensuing war on terrorism. Through it, the Czech state made a serious attempt, for the first time in its post-socialist history, to consolidate its own authority with that of its military institution. It was a peculiar moment in post-socialist modernity, when the strange space of power, which always exists between the state and its institution of legitimate violence, was being filled and organized according to the rules of a new rationality⁹. Professionalization appeared as the technology of this process, through which not only the military, but the larger apparatus of power that Deleuze and Guattari call *the war machine* began changing its position vis-à-vis the state and society¹⁰. Allegorically expressed as the decorroding treatment (the warning slogan “Time to Do Something” on a rusting background of military technology or the expressive call “new military without rust”), or as the end of the period of play with respect to things military (“We’re Not Playing at Being Soldiers”) and

summarized eloquently in the prediction “Tomorrow Belongs to the Professionals,” the professionalization campaign makes a clear break with the past. The history belongs to the conscription military, to the culture of the enlisted. Professionalization aims at placing the enlisted in the former times, while showing the future as that of the military professionals. As I will try to show and as I argued elsewhere¹¹, the process of professionalization, based as it is on the elimination of general conscription and technological and organizational modernization, however, involves deep changes both in the culture of the enlisted and the larger field of national cultural imagination and identity politics.

3 - Rambos vs. Švejk

In the Czech context, one of the largest tasks for professionalization has been to bring seriousness and importance to the discredited military institution, which has been a target of popular jokes rather than a source of pride and serious respect for the Czechs and Slovaks. The most pervasive symbol of the popular laughter at power has been the Good Soldier Švejk, the internationally famous hero of an antiwar novel by Jaroslav Hasek¹². Švejk, the literary anti-hero, spends much time professing his patriotism and devotion to the monarchy and its war campaign. Through his behavior, which his superiors name “idiotic” (and Švejk cheerfully endorses this classification), the Good Soldier Švejk literally and perfectly executes orders assigned to him. Nevertheless, he manages to never complete what his superiors want him to do and his actions are unfailingly disastrous for the war effort. Through his actions and stories of quotidian life, grotesque in their mixture of hilarity, cruelty and violence, Švejk disarms his superiors and by never as much as mentioning the war, let alone engaging in it, we are certain in our laughter that he is fully and at every moment victorious over the war machine. Since the inter-war period, the Good Soldier Švejk has been a symbol of the common soldier’s resistance to war, and by extension – the common citizen’s resistance to the absurdities of state bureaucratic power.

For many years, Švejk has functioned as a model for self-identification not only for the involuntary draftees – the enlisted in the Czech military - but was frequently extended to include the Czech nation as such: living under foreign military occupation and domestic totalitarianism, the Czechs identified with Švejk's passive resistance to oppression. Most often, Švejk has been evoked through discursive contraptions - “*Švejkárna*”, “*Švejkovat*“ or “*Švejkoviny*”. “*Švejkovat*“ (to do things like Švejk), “*Švejkoviny*” (activities reminiscent of those of Švejk) and “*Švejkárna*” (situation evocative of the grotesqueness of Švejk's legendary escapades) are usually spoken to mark situations of absurdity and contradiction. Most obviously, these are situations, in which the common sense of a smaller and less powerful entity confronts the irrational rationality of a larger and more powerful body. But in the resulting effect, the former wins over the latter against all odds by virtue of the comic principle - laughter is what defeats the adversary and brings victory to the powerless. The apparently self-critical identification of the Czechs with Švejk as the anti-hero, has thus always contained a subversive element: through the Good Soldier Švejk who ultimately wins over the war machine by subverting its seriousness through the comic principle, the Czechs have laughed and often won over oppressive power. Consistent with the logic of cultural intimacy¹³ Švejk has functioned as the Czechs' self-deprecating label for the outside world, while at the same time performing the role of a social bond among people on the home front.

The professionalization campaign directly challenges this national fantasy. The Czech government officials and the press, concerned with the poor reputation of the Czech military inside and outside of the country have repeatedly evoked the name of the Good Soldier to criticize the institution for its low preparedness and the slow pace of post-Soviet reforms. “Let's Put an End to Švejkism!,” screamed a title of a newspaper article published shortly before the Czech Republic joined NATO¹⁴. The author who subtitled his article, “NATO: We need to convince the public,” pleaded with the Czech public, at the time still lukewarm about the

upcoming accession to the Alliance, to become serious about military and security affairs and consider all the advantages of NATO membership. According to the author, a major obstacle to changing people's attitude toward the role of the military was of course nobody else but Švejk:

"[Š]vejkism, might have helped us survive through the bad times, which we have lived through in this century. But let us face the fact that Švejk is not a hero that should be followed, but a dog thief with the innocent face of a baby, who always took good care – of himself. Today, this kind of thinking will not bring us security." In a feature article published by a leading Czech weekly shortly after September 11th events in the United States, entitled, "Rambos versus Švejks: Why Do People Laugh at Our Military ?", the author describes the Czech military as composed of "handful of elite gunman and thousands of useless men to fill the ranks" - few elite Rambos among many Švejks¹⁵. In his reckoning, the Rambos are "professionals" in the use of military violence and "to them the future belongs." Their chief attributes are their superior technical and physical skills, which combined with the knowledge of English and personal qualities emphasizing self-confidence and professional detachment make them deployable in international operations, outside of the country borders.

The participation of these professionals in international operations brings a good name to the Czech military – a reputation that the country's leaders desperately desire. This is because through the good results of the elite soldiers, not only the Czech military, but the Czech state gain points on the precarious scale measuring the degree of redirected loyalty and Westernization of the Cold War adversary who has only so very recently become an ally. The Švejks are the bored and incapable conscripts who are bringing shame to the military with their negative attitude to service and the military institution in general (Illustration 1). It is understandable that for the achievement of the desired goal – a military full of NATO-compatible Rambos - the Švejks must be eliminated. The current efforts at

bringing seriousness to the military through its professionalization, therefore, rely simultaneously on the elimination of the enlisted from the military ranks and on the removal of Švejk from his place of prominence in the national imagination. Not surprisingly, therefore, the conscripts' identification with Švejk has been and continues to be strong. During my interviews with them, the conscripts would often interrupt their narrative during interviews with the expression, "That was *Švejkárna*, man!," to comment on a situation when they found themselves on the intersection of two mutually contradictory orders from their superiors. The conscript, by executing these conflicting commands literally, but with disastrous effects for the military institution would then be said to "*Švejkovat*" or to have been engaged in activities summarized under the term of "*Švejkoviny*".

A 22-year-old enlisted man, who had to leave his job as a mason when he was drafted, answered my standard question regarding his opinion of the readiness of the Czech military to engage in combat in the following way:

"This military? This military is that of Švejks and to send us to war would be a sure murder. Look at the equipment and the training we get! I have been here for three months and fired six shots at a training range using a thirty-year old rifle. Instead of teaching us how to fight, they use us to guard the hangars at the airport. But there is nothing inside the buildings that we are supposed to protect! They have no planes there or ammunition, and so we spend the whole draft-year guarding nothing. That's simply a *Švejkárna*!" ("*To je normální Švejkárna!*")

By commenting on their experience from serving in the Czech military as a situation of absurdity reminiscent of Švejk's adventures, the conscripts were reaffirming their connections to the figure of Švejk and his lasting power as an appropriate symbol for describing the Czech military. In stressing the emptiness of the military discipline and lack of the CAF's combat readiness, they were contradicting official efforts at bringing seriousness to the Czech military institution. By reaffirming Švejk's lasting relevance to describing things military

and by stressing their connection to the symbol, they were resisting the official efforts at turning the institution into a professional force and making the conscripts irrelevant to the new national military system.

4 - Time to Waste

In the turning of a negative image into a source of cultural identity and social agency, the Czech enlisted men resemble other disadvantaged cultural groups around the world¹⁶. The enlisted men in militaries across the globe share the experience of what Erving Goffman has called a “total institution” – a place which imposes a different set of rules, quite separate from those of society. But contrary to the generally assumed image of inmates as passive recipients of orders, inhabitants of total institutions develop various strategies that help them survive the institution in which they have been involuntarily placed¹⁷. Joris Van Bladel, for example, suggests that Russian *dedovshchina*, “the informal hierarchical structure installed among the group of soldiers that is primarily based on seniority,” is such a response of soldiers as active agents to the perverse effects created by total institutions¹⁸.

The application of an anthropological framework, I suggest, can help us further explain the potential of the enlisted to become agents in the conditions of an oppressive total institution that imposes discipline directed at the suppression of their individual and social identity. The enlisted seem to fit particularly well into the anthropological category of liminal beings, a term customarily applied to mark a person or a group in the middle period of the rites-of-passage, such as a neophyte during the puberty initiation rituals that bring him or her into adulthood¹⁹. Liminal entities are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law”²⁰. The enlisted men as liminal entities experience the transitory stage from becoming men from boys, from half to full citizens of their nation states. As Turner reminds us, liminal entities, suspended as they are in a stage of a “post” and a “pre” and excluded

from social life, are ambiguous and potentially disruptive, escaping classification and possessing of an openness that challenges harmony, hierarchy and structure. It is in this context that I propose to view the hierarchical system of authority among the Czech enlisted men and its disruptive potential on the formal system of discipline in the Czech military.

Time is a precious commodity in capitalism, which, unlike time in task-oriented societies that follow a nature-bound life rhythm, is strictly measured and can be sold, bought, used well or wasted²¹. As an instrument that measures labor, time in capitalism is also an instrument of control and discipline²². In the context of the professionalizing Czech military, which is a part of Czech society experiencing transition into the capitalist system, the liminal period of military service becomes strongly defined by the enlisted as time out of time, as time being lost from their lives. In their interviews with me, the men complained heavily about this aspect of the military service:

“Military service is a total waste of time and money. I think that it is fundamentally useless. Everybody just wants to finish the service and get to the end.” (22 years old, high-school graduate)

“I thought I would learn something here, but I am just wasting my time.” (20-year old, completed vocational training)

“While I am here, my colleagues from the university are getting their work experience. They are making money and I am just losing my time.” (23-year old, technical university graduate)

“Today, military service is a waste of time. I did not expect it. I thought it would be better. Here, the officers call you during your duty to come and clean their office. That is such a waste of time. I thought I would learn something about combat and things military. But all they do is that they use us as cheap labor – we are the cheapest cooks and cleaners of trash.” (25-year old, completed three years of technical university)

Because of the process of reform, many units in the military had to save money and the most obvious place to do so was the training of the enlisted. Instead of providing military training, the Czech military mostly turned the enlisted into what in their popular jargon the interviewees called *UBS*, when asked about their function in the unit. *UBS* stands for *univerzalni bouchac sluzeb* (universal duty doer) and consists in standing on guard at the assigned places of the base. Not surprisingly, in their complaints about time wasting, most men were expressing their disappointment when they compared the reality of service with their expectations prior to it. To my surprise, 64 percent of the men responded that they wanted to complete the military service and did not try to avoid it. Importantly, a majority (78%) of this number explained their attitude as: “military service is a part of life and without it, you are not a man.” The disenchantment of the enlisted was a result of the discrepancy between their traditional expectations of the military service as a rites-of-passage into manhood. The imagined military service was filled with physical training and hardship as a preparation for defending the nation. The real military service consisted in the passive duty system in an institution that clearly considered the conscripts unfit for any real military tasks. The frustration of the enlisted was further aggravated by the other most frequent activity assigned to them – cleaning and cooking. The traditional “femininity” of these tasks further contributed to the conscripts’ feeling of emasculation.

The system of *mazactvi*, I suggest, the hierarchical system of authority among the Czech conscripts based as it is on the length time spent in service, is their response to these totalizing effects of the military institution. The year of service is taken out of regular life of the individual and his social time. Life in the system of *mazactvi* starts with the beginning of service and is divided into four principle stages disrespectful of the actual physical age and/or social standing (based on class, profession or education) of the individual outside of the military. The person’s place in the hierarchy is fully determined by the time that he has spent

in the military. Each transition to the next stage is marked by the rites-of-passage, which involves psychological and physical violence perpetrated by the senior on the junior conscripts. Importantly, most violence is based on the humiliation of the neophyte by making him do activities traditionally associated with women, such as cleaning or by calling him by derogative names destined for female victims (pussy, whore, etc.).

Because of the dressing code associated with the system of *mazactvi*, the enlisted are easily able to identify the individual's position in the hierarchy. This cultural code works efficiently to determine seniority in social interactions. Because officially forbidden, the breaking of the dress code is also a typical example of "messing up" – a way of showing the senior's conscripts' lack of respect for officers and the military institution²³. For example, after each stage, the conscript was able to change the system of tying his boots to include more of the so called "bridges." He could also tie his belt lower and loosen the tie on his barrette. A particularly interesting set of hierarchical markings included the custom of weaving a special lash, called *mazacenka* preferably from the boot laces, which the senior enlisted would hang on their key chains. The custom of weaving *mazacenka*, closely resembles another Czech tradition of weaving *pomlazka* - a lash from willow branches made and used by men to lash women on Easter Monday. *Mazacenka* like *pomlazka* are material symbols of men's prowess and dominance over women; in the hierarchical system of *mazactvi*, they can only be woven and worn by *mazaci*, the senior conscripts in the system of *mazactvi*, the only real men among the emasculated and dominated enlisted. The cultural custom most explicitly connected to time as the basis for the hierarchical system of *mazactvi* and by extension the clearest expression of the reversal of the official military's concept of time, is a system of measurement of days left to the end of service. Once the conscript has 150 days left to the end, he starts counting the dead days, symbolized by a section of the taylor's measuring tape. The measuring tape is placed in an empty plastic container of

the Kinder Egg, which is hung on a key chain. Each cut off section of the measuring tape symbolizes a day and is termed “the dead” and placed in another Kinder Egg container on the key chain. The connection between two Kinder Eggs on the key chain and men’s genitalia (both called *vejce* in Czech) is more than a matter of linguistics. The two “eggs” hanging on the key chain, containing the *dead* days of completed service are the embodiments of the conscripts’ manhood. Moreover, like the Easter eggs that the Czech men get for lashing the women on Easter Monday, the Kinder Eggs on the key chain are **earned** trophies. Contrary to the passive reality the enlisted’s tasks in the professionalizing military, the customs related to the measurement of time which are a part of the hierarchival system of *mazactvi*, mark the time as filled with manhood-building activity.

In a situation which defined them as passive neophytes doomed to wasting one year of their life, the enlisted in the professionalizing Czech military assumed agency in a way typical for their hero – the Good Soldier Svejk. Taken out of society and subjected to the rules of the total institution, they took discipline to the extreme and made time, the military’s tool for their oppression, into an instrument of their own, albeit imagined, agency.

5 - Postscript

Everyday, as I arrived at work at the Air Force Base, I was welcome at the gate by heavily smoking conscripts. Dressed in green camouflage with blue berets, young and bored beyond belief, their eyes spilling apathy, the involuntary conscripts appeared to me as heralds of earlier times, a dying species in the era of military professionalization. The physical youth of the men contrasted sharply with their occupational obsolescence as soldiers. They were unwilling laymen in the age that was to belong to enthusiastic professional practitioners of the art of military violence, which made the former appear irrevocably stuck in the past. When I was later traveling through many Czech bases during my research, the

enlisted men's boredom, which channeled the general misery of the post-socialist Czech military establishment, projected a distinct aura of intimacy. Because of the initial research, which I was conducting among them, I was able to tell, by the details of their uniforms, the ways that they tied their shoelaces and straps of their beret how many days they had left till the end of his service.

This cultural know-how as well as the soldier's distinct unprofessionalism gave me a certain level of self-assurance. As I watched them, filling out my pass, unhurriedly dropping cigarette ashes on my ID, I felt the anthropologist's honor to have been able to witness and record a culture threatened with immediate disappearance.

Illustration 1: "*Rambové versus Švejci*" ("Rambos versus Švejks").



Source: Karel Vrána, *Týden*, 8 October, 2001, pp. 16-17.

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Footnotes :

¹ T. Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press. 1988 ; Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Authority." *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1988 ; G. Marcus and M. Fischer, *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1986 ; E. Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

- [2](#) H. Cervinkova, Hana. Průzkumná sonda názoru vojáku základní služby na působení v ACR (HF Monitor 80). Prague: July 2001.
- [3](#) M. Vlachova, "Professionalization of the Army of the Czech Republic." Conference Paper, Transforming Post-Communist Militaries: Professionalisation of the Armed Forces in Central and Eastern Europe. Joint Services Command Staff College, Watchfield, April 2001.
- [4](#) In 1990, the government shortened the two-year period of conscription service to eighteen months and introduced optional civilian service for men who refused to serve in the army for religious or other reasons. Since 1993, the conscription period has been only one year long, but the number of men entering military service continued to decrease considerably. While in 1993, there were 68 630 enlisted in CAF, their number in 2001 was only 24 955 (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, The Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic. Prague: AVIS. 2001, p.43). This was both due to the unpopularity of military service and the falling number of male population. The number of 18-year old men in the Czech Republic in 1993 was 94 000, in 2001 only 70 500, with a further decreasing projection for the year 2018 at 46 000 individuals (*Ibid*).
- [5](#) Vlachova, 2001, *Op. Cit.*
- [6](#) C. Rice, The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army, 1948 - 1983: Uncertain Allegiance. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1984 ; J. Simon, Warsaw Pact Forces: Problems of Command and Control. Boulder and London: Westview Press. 1985 ; M.P. Ulrich, Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 1999.
- [7](#) After Tvrdík's resignation two years later, the new Minister, Miroslav Kostelka, moved the date further up to the year 2004.
- [8](#) MOD (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic). Zítřek patří profesionálům (Tomorrow Belongs to Professionals). Prague: AVIS. 2001, or the more comprehensive handbook, *The Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic* : Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic. Nehrajem si na vojáky: Stručný návod, jak zvládnout reformu armády. Prague. 2001.
- [9](#) H. Cervinkova, We're Not Playing at Being Soldiers: An Ethnographic Study of the Czech Military and its Changing Relationship with the State and Society in the Period of Post-Socialist Transformation. Dissertation Manuscript. New York: New School for Social Research. 2003.
- [10](#) G. Deleuze and F. Guattari. "1227: Treatise on Nomanology – The War Machine." Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1987. pp. 351-423.
- [11](#) Cervinkova 2003, *Op. Cit.* ; H. Cervinkova, "Military Masculinity in the Czech Military after Socialism." in Spaces of Masculinity. Bettina van Hoven (ed.). London: Routledge. 2004.
- [12](#) J. Hasek, The Good Soldier Švejk. New York: Penguin. 1973.
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- [14](#) P. Kopecký, "Skončujme se švejkovstvím. Lidové noviny. March 7, 1997, p. 10.
- [15](#) K. Vrana, "Sedivý kontra Tvrdík: Reform ozbrojených sil jako stret vojáku a ministerstva.", *Tyden*, 14 January 2002. 24-25.

- [16](#) E. Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor Books. 1961 ; Herzfeld, 1997, *Op. Cit* ; M. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1984 ; M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1984.
- [17](#) Goffman 1961, *Ibid.* ; J. Van Bladel, “Russian Soldiers in the Barracks: A Portrait of a Subculture.” in *Russian Military Reform 1992-2002*. A. Aldis and R. Mc Dermott eds. Frank Cass Publishers. 2003.
- [18](#) Van Bladel 2003, *Ibid.* p. 64
- [19](#) A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1909 ; V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1966.
- [20](#) Turner 1966, *Ibid.* p. 95.
- [21](#) E. E. Evans-Pritchard. *The Nuer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1940, 94-138 ; E.P. Thompson, E.P, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism.” *Past & Present*. Number 38. 1967, 56-97.
- [22](#) Thompson 1967, *Ibid.*
- [23](#) Goffman 1961, *Op. Cit.*

James K. Wither

Battling Bullying in the British Army 1987 – 2004

Abstract

This article explores the attempts by the UK MOD to eradicate bullying in the British Army. Although British recruits are not confronted by mistreatment that compares with the phenomenon of *dedovshchina*, the Army has struggled to eliminate incidents of bullying from the ranks, which have tarnished the image of the British Army. The article examines the nature and extent of the problem, the efficacy of official policy to combat it, and suggests reasons why bullying persists even in a long- standing professional army. It also seeks to provide instructive insights for those militaries of the successor states of the Soviet Union that are currently blighted by *dedovshchina*.

“Bullying has no place in training tough soldiers” House of Commons, 1989

Introduction - the UK context

The British Army is renowned as one of the most professional and effective armies in the world. Conditions of service for Britain’s volunteer recruits are a far cry from those faced by reluctant conscripts in Russia’s under resourced and decaying armed forces. Young British soldiers are not confronted with the phenomenon of *dedovshchina*, the institutionalized mistreatment and misuse of recruits by more senior soldiers and sometimes officers, that remains widespread in the Russian and other conscript armies of the successor states of the former Soviet Union. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the British Army has failed to eliminate incidents of violent and cruel behaviour towards its soldiers despite a longstanding official commitment to tackle the problem. In an internal Army survey in 2003, for example, 43% of a sample of 2,000 soldiers responded that bullying was a problem and 5% claimed to be victims of it¹.

The purpose of this article is to provide insights into the problem of the bullying, particularly of recruits, in the British Army. It will examine the nature and extent of bullying, official policy to combat it, and suggest reasons why the problem persists even in a long established, professional army that is subject to both democratic civilian control and parliamentary and public scrutiny. Although statistics illustrate that bullying takes place in all three British armed services, this study will focus on the Army, which has both the greatest number of recruits and proportionally the largest number of recorded incidents of mistreatment. The choice of 1987 as the starting point for analysis is not arbitrary. It was then that bullying in the Army became a significant matter of public and parliamentary concern, arguably for the first time. Since the late 1980s, it has also become increasingly clear to service chiefs that the ill treatment of soldiers tarnishes the positive public image of the British Army and hampers efforts to recruit and retain personnel with the appropriate aptitudes and skills in the competitive UK employment market.

The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) defines bullying as : "...the use of physical strength or the abuse of authority to intimidate or victimize others, or to give unlawful punishments,"² Official MOD and British Army policy on bullying is "zero tolerance" and specific responsibility is placed on all leaders "to protect others from physical and mental bullying, and to report any incident promptly."³ The latest Defence White Paper of December 2003 states that : "Our service personnel need to feel confident that they are individually valued and respected, that complaints from them will be dealt with effectively and fairly, and that harassment and bullying have no place in service life and that any perpetrators will be dealt with firmly"⁴.

MOD attempts to tackle the problem of bullying in the late 1980s

In 1987, about the same time that Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy drew official and public attention to *dedovschchina* in the Soviet armed forces, a series of

revelations about regimental initiation rites in the British Army forced the MOD to place the problem of bullying high on its personnel management agenda. Senior officers and defence officials were shocked by reports of bizarre and vicious initiation ceremonies in the Army involving beatings, humiliation and sexual assaults taking place in prestigious regiments such as The Coldstream Guards and The King's Own Scottish Borderers. Reports of these events soon reached the press in the UK and abroad⁵. Some of the occurrences appeared uncomfortably similar in brutality to reports of the worst excesses of *dedovshchina* starting to emerge from the Soviet military. One example from a British infantry regiment will suffice to illustrate this point : “a 20 year old private...testified that his initiation consisted of being burned on the genitals, sexually assaulted with a broomstick, forced to march in place with string tied to his genitals and ankles and dropped from a window”⁶. Spokesmen for the MOD and the Army were anxious to stress that bullying was not widespread and claimed that press reports gave a false impression of the extent of the problem. In a statement to Parliament in January 1988, the Under Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, Mr. Roger Freeman, explained that in the previous two years, during which more than 20,000 troops had passed through training, only around 100 allegations of bullying, ill treatment and intimidation had been reported and nearly half of these had not been substantiated⁷. An internal review by the Adjutant General, General Sir David Mostyn, also concluded that bullying and other forms of mistreatment were not prevalent. However, Jack Ashley MP (now Lord Ashley), a leading parliamentary campaigner on behalf of bullied soldiers, expressed the view that the restrictions of *The Official Secrets Act*, fear of reprisals and an “atmosphere of intimidation” meant that many victims would not come forward to complain or give evidence against their tormentors. He claimed that official figures on bullying were only the “tip of the iceberg” of the problem⁸. The incidents of serious mistreatment of recruits that emerged in 1987 resulted in the sacking of at least one commanding officer, a number of high profile courts martial cases and a vigorous anti-bullying drive by the Adjutant General. The

MOD launched a series of measures to tackle bullying, which were reported to Parliament in January 1988⁹. A ban on unauthorized initiation ceremonies was the most significant action. The practice became illegal under military law and the subject was added to the section on discipline in *The Queens Regulations for the Army*:

“The essential ingredients of discipline and military efficiency owe nothing to any unauthorized initiation or other rites aimed at terrifying or inflicting physical or mental degradation upon any individual. Such conduct would be directly contrary to the requirements of training, morale and good leadership...Allegations of unauthorized activities are to be referred to the Special Investigation Branch for investigation with a view to the taking of disciplinary action under the Army Act 1955 against the instigators and other participants. The contents of this paragraph are to be repeated at least annually in all formation, unit and sub unit orders.”¹⁰

The man management training and selection of Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) and junior officer recruit instructors were also revised, as were screening measures during recruitment to identify individuals who might be particularly vulnerable to bullying. Welfare support for young soldiers was increased with the establishment of 92 additional Women’s Royal Volunteer Service (WRVS) posts. These volunteers, quickly dubbed “Agony Aunts” by the press, were intended to provide a source of advice and assistance for junior soldiers who were too nervous to complain about ill treatment through official channels¹¹. At the time, complaints under the Army’s redress procedure had to be processed through NCOs and officers in the chain of command who might be the source of a grievance in the first place. Extra funding was provided to establish an additional 100 supervisory posts in the Army’s training organization, to be implemented by March 1989. However, then as now, the government resisted calls for an independent public enquiry into the bullying of recruits or the appointment of a

military ombudsman to provide an element of impartial, external oversight and hear complaints by soldiers unable or unwilling to use the official redress process. The investigation of grievances remained in the hands of commanding officers, who could call on the services of the Special Investigation Branch (SIB) of the Royal Military Police when necessary. As such investigations were not independent of the chain of command, this procedure did not satisfy Jack Ashley, who described it as “wholly inadequate”, not least because he felt commanders might suppress complaints rather than court bad publicity for their regiments¹². The MOD also failed to create a centralized database to collate complaints about bullying¹³ or monitor the impact of the measures being taken to combat the ill treatment of recruits. A number of the concerns raised in reports and parliamentary debates in the late 1980s have re-occurred periodically in discussions on bullying in the Army up to the present day.

MOD policy towards bullying in the post Cold War era

After the furor caused by the graphic press coverage of bullying in the late 1980s died down, there was little sustained public or political interest in the matter. Since conscription ended in 1962, few members of the public in the UK have any direct experience of life in the armed services; subsequently most politicians also take little interest in military matters. Besides, the attention of most defence commentators in the early 1990s was focused on the reduction and restructuring of the armed forces following the end of the Cold War. As a professional military, the British armed forces have traditionally been somewhat separate from the culture and values of wider society. For most senior officers, the Army’s relative distance from the public it defends has not been unwelcome as it has helped to safeguard the Service from social trends that could pose a threat to the distinct ethos and discipline necessary to sustain troops in combat. However, in the 1990s the British armed forces faced unprecedented challenges to their assumptions, values and management culture. A growing emphasis on individual rights and a welter of employment regulations and laws, such as the Human

Rights Act of 1998, when Britain formally adopted European Union human rights legislation¹⁴ into national law, had a significant impact on the workplace in both the public and private sectors. National agencies such as the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) successfully attacked traditional attitudes concerning gender and race, not least in the armed forces. As a result, the Services had made considerable progress towards eliminating racial and gender based discrimination, bullying and harassment by the end of the decade. This was achieved through a package of measures that included a policy of “zero tolerance” of abuse, equal opportunities awareness training programmes and access for soldiers to civilian employment tribunals¹⁵. The MOD’s achievements were even recognized by the CRE, formerly a severe critic of racism in the armed forces¹⁶. As the MOD’s human resource management focus in the 1990s was directed at high profile and legally pressing equal opportunities issues, it is perhaps not surprising that problems associated with the mistreatment of soldiers in basic training were comparatively overlooked. However, some measures introduced to combat racial and sexual abuse and harassment undoubtedly assisted the victims of other forms of bullying. Redress of grievance procedures were revised in 1997, and again in 2002, to enable complaints to be addressed more speedily and efficiently. For the first time, it became possible for individuals to make complaints to officers outside their immediate chain of command¹⁷. Confidential telephone helplines, manned by welfare support agencies, were introduced in December 1997 to provide information and advice to soldiers who felt unable or unwilling to approach their superiors. Soldiers were also actively encouraged to take problems to medical officers, padres or the WRVS. Official guidance to officers and soldiers, particularly *The Values and Standards of the British Army* pamphlet of 2000, reinforced the “zero tolerance” of bullying and harassment message. These statements of principle were supported in practice by courts martial, which when appropriate sentenced those convicted of physical violence or degrading

and humiliating behaviour towards other soldiers to detention and dismissal from the Army.

The MOD has consistently maintained that the bullying of recruits is a minor problem in the Army¹⁸. Official statistics reported to Parliament have tended to verify this claim¹⁹, although due to the fact that records of complaints about bullying were not introduced until December 1997, it is difficult to make comparisons with data from the 1980s or early 1990s. Even after 1997, significant gaps remained in the collection and collation of data, for example on the potential links between bullying and cases of self-harm²⁰ or absences without leave (AWOL). There is also evidence, as in the past, that many individuals are reluctant to make formal complaints²¹. A critical Amnesty International Report in 2000 on the UK's recruitment of under 18s, highlighted the particular difficulties faced by young recruits in this respect :

“The MOD's statements of principle do not allay concerns about accessibility to procedures for making a complaint, particularly with regard to children who may be easily intimidated and confused about the right steps to take. Nor do they allay concerns about the popular perception by young recruits that bullying is part of military life and that complaints will not be impartially investigated and acted upon²² ».

A number of press reports in the late 1990s, based on soldiers' testimonies and courts martial transcripts, indicated that the official position on the extent of bullying in the Army may have been too sanguine. The results of a *Sunday Times* newspaper investigation published in October 1997 portrayed an Army in which little had changed since the 1980s, with violent assaults on recruits and sadistic “initiations” still common²³. Despite a tendency for the press to sensationalise and exaggerate the extent of mistreatment, a series of reports between 1999 and 2002 of violent assaults on recruits and humiliating initiation rites organized by

NCOs and older soldiers suggested that measures introduced to tackle the problem of bullying following earlier scandals were not working²⁴. A leading article in *The Independent* newspaper in 2002 claimed that there was “something deeply wrong” with the way new recruits were treated and described bullying as “routine”²⁵. The House of Commons Parliamentary Defence Committee²⁶ took a somewhat more restrained view in a report of February 2001, which nevertheless concluded that “...regrettable incidents of racial and sexual harassment and other forms of bullying are still occurring and efforts to eradicate these must continue”²⁷.

Isolated incidents or a widespread problem ? – the impact of recent investigations

During 2002, media and parliamentary attention turned to the issue of suicides of soldiers in training at Army bases in Deepcut and Catterick²⁸. Relatives of some of the deceased, unwilling to accept the verdicts of internal Army investigations, lobbied their Members of Parliament (MP) to call for a public enquiry. In a major parliamentary debate in February 2003 on soldiers’ deaths in barracks, several MPs expressed alarm about possible links between bullying and suicide and one asserted that : “there is evidence of a culture of extreme bullying, routine violence and sexual harassment that constitutes torture and inhuman and degrading treatment”²⁹. Once again, government ministers sought to illustrate the gap between the rhetoric and reality, pointing out that the number of suicides in the Army was in decline and that statistics generally compared favourably with those for civilians³⁰. However, the same statistics revealed that the 16-19 age group was a noticeable exception, with suicide rates in the Army 1.5 times higher³¹.

In October 2002, Mr Adam Ingram MP, The Minister of State for the Armed Forces, commissioned a review of the initial training of recruits across all three Armed Services³². The timing and focus of the study was primarily motivated by continuing media reports of bullying and harassment and the unexplained suicides of young soldiers in training. The appraisal team’s findings were

published in February 2003; the MOD was at pains to stress that the consultants involved were both independent of the chain of command and the personnel organization. On the specific issue of bullying, the team found “no evidence of any organized culture of bullying or systematic harassment”³³ and concluded “...our overall judgement is that the situation with regard to bullying has improved in recent years and cases of alleged assault or bodily harm are actually rare in Initial Training establishments”³⁴. That said, the appraisal team noted that 7 – 8% of those interviewed claimed to be the victims of bullying, mainly from their peer group rather than supervisors³⁵ and concern was expressed about the “widespread reluctance” of recruits to report bullying incidents, which suggested that official statistics of the problem might, in the words of the investigators, be “technically unreliable”³⁶. A series of measures were taken as a result of the report, many of them familiar themes from earlier attempts to eradicate bullying. These included : more rigorous screening of recruits; improved education of instructors; stricter monitoring of training; guaranteed access by recruits to confidential welfare support; opportunities for recruits to provide anonymous feedback to the chain of command and improved ratios of instructors to trainees. A “training covenant” was also introduced to make explicit, and provide a common reference point for, the code of conduct expected of both instructors and recruits³⁷.

Anxious to be seen to be doing everything possible to improve the care regime for young soldiers, the MOD followed up the earlier report with a re-appraisal in July 2003 to assess progress³⁸. This second report acknowledged improvements made in many units and praised the ability of training establishments to produce large numbers of high quality, motivated soldiers. But, the team also concluded that the system was “running at risk” and still, “exhibiting the stresses and strains associated with a persistently high throughput of trainees and the effects of under-resourcing, notably in the area of supervisory and instructional manpower”³⁹. Lack of investment was also apparent in the

shabby accommodation and poor support and recreational facilities found in some Army training units, which combined with an inadequate supervisory regime, created an environment where, “there is continued, high risk of personal and disciplinary problems arising until substantial, decisive corrective action is taken...”[40](#). The investigators received some reports of “low-level” bullying, again mainly within recruit peer groups, although most training staff interviewed felt confident that they could deter or prevent serious incidents[41](#). More disturbingly, investigators found that some instructors in Army training units actively discouraged recruits from seeking help from welfare agencies or those officers specifically charged with recruits’ care[42](#). Perhaps, not surprisingly, they encountered evidence of the perennial reluctance of British soldiers to approach officers with their problems[43](#).

These reports on initial training did little to reassure the growing number of MPs and sections of the media and public that were convinced bullying in the Army was rife[44](#). Unfortunately for the MOD, these perceptions were reinforced by the final Surrey Police investigation report, released in March 2004, into the suicide of young recruits at the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC) training establishment at Deepcut in southern England[45](#). Bullying, as such, was not the investigators’ remit, but their report nevertheless expressed disquiet about wider evidence of mistreatment of soldiers in the Army’s training establishments and recommended a broader enquiry into the problem[46](#). Whilst acknowledging improvements made in the Army’s care regime for young soldiers since 2002, the report was damning on the failings of the preceding 15 years. Among the issues highlighted by the report were the longstanding inadequacy of funding for welfare and supervisory resources in training and the absence of a coordinated, organization-wide response to deficiencies identified by previous investigations. To add weight to those MPs who had been calling for the appointment of a military ombudsman since the late 1980s, the report stressed the need for greater accountability and transparency in the Army’s training regime. It recommended a further enquiry to

consider the benefits of “a continuous independent oversight mechanism” to enable the Army to strike a balance between the need for tough training and the management of the attendant risks for young soldiers [47](#).

Following publication of the report, the government agreed that the House of Commons Defence Select Committee would undertake an enquiry to follow-up the concerns and recommendations of the Surrey Police report. To date, details and terms of reference have not been announced, so it remains to be seen how far the committee’s deliberations will clarify the extent and nature of bullying in the Army and confirm or allay public fears. Given the historical record, it is probably too much to expect the committee to provide definitive answers.

Problems of analysis and the wider societal context

Throughout the period under discussion, the official MOD line has remained consistent that bullying is not a significant or widespread problem in the British Army. There is ample evidence to support these claims, but the MOD has not helped its cause by taking cover behind statistics of questionable value. Spokespersons for the organization have also tended to re-state the mantra of “zero tolerance” rather than responding directly to specific parliamentary and public concerns. For champions of bullied soldiers, the MOD’s instinctive culture of secrecy has generated a suspicion of deliberate cover-up, not assisted by continued official reluctance to countenance a full, independent public enquiry into initial training in the Army. As a result, notable efforts made by the armed services to combat bullying since the late 1980s have received scant parliamentary and public attention, whilst media reports that often exaggerate the problem of bullying have gone largely unchallenged. A sober discussion of the issue has undoubtedly been hampered by the relative lack of reliable statistics and the absence of comparative data on bullying from other Western armies. But, it is evident from the MOD’s recent reviews, that the British Army’s training system has suffered from long term under funding. Poor quality facilities and an

inadequate level of supervision in some units created an environment that significantly increased the risk of occurrences of bullying. Whilst the MOD identified and introduced appropriate policies to tackle the problem from the late 1980s onwards, it arguably failed to follow through with adequate resources to implement and support them fully, at least prior to 2002. Official complacency, a lack of central policy coordination and direction, as well as the perennial difficulties associated with resource overstretch, all played a role in this failure.

The growing public consciousness of workplace bullying in Britain generally over the last 15 years is another factor that makes it difficult to evaluate the changing nature and extent of bullying in the Army. Because of social and legislative changes, employees are less likely to tolerate what they perceive to be intimidating or offensive behaviour by superiors or colleagues and are more likely to make formal complaints or seek legal redress than in the past. The armed forces are not immune from these changes, nor can they escape the consequences of the resulting trend towards what has been called a “culture of compensation” in which complainants seek to exploit their grievances for personal or financial gain⁴⁸. The Army is by no means the only organization in the UK that is perceived to have a problem with workplace bullying. Other areas of the public sector, including the prison, postal and health services have all suffered their share of damaging disclosures in recent years. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has described bullying in the British workplace as “alarmingly prevalent” and suggested that as many as 10% of British workers may be victims⁴⁹. The CIPD cited heightened awareness of equal opportunities’ issues, combined with increased financial and staffing pressures in many organizations as contributing to the increase in incidents of bullying. Findings suggested that bullying was institutionalized in many organisations and complaints’ procedures were often inadequate.

More research would be needed before it would be safe to conclude that the Army's record in recent years actually compares favourably with some other public sector organizations, but workplace reports and statistics suggest that bullying in the armed services might reflect a wider societal malaise rather than a peculiarity of the military environment. That said, much civilian workplace bullying involves verbal abuse, harassment or intimidation, rather than the physical threats, humiliation and violence, which have tended to characterize reports of bullying in the British Army. Arguably, the military environment and culture, particularly during recruit training, cause soldiers to be more susceptible to serious bullying than their civilian peers. Recruits are socially and geographically isolated, subject to military discipline and are employed in an organization that values physical toughness and aggression. There is general agreement among sociologists that soldiering is different from other occupations⁵⁰. Soldiers may be required to give their lives for the wider community and their training has to inculcate the necessary physical and mental robustness to accept this. The battlefield is, in the words of Martin van Creveld, "the province of hardship and suffering, of stress, of fear and pain and death"⁵¹.

Essentially, basic training takes the civilian identity of each individual, breaks it down under constant pressure and rebuilds it as a soldier. It is a time of unique psychological vulnerability, especially for adolescent men and women whose personalities are still forming. NCO instructors have a crucial role in this process, reinforcing behaviour that confirms individuals' new identities as soldiers and condemning that which does not. The process is necessarily harsh. Since 1945, there has only been one year in which British soldiers have not been killed in combat. There is, therefore, a fine line between tough training and physical and psychological abuse and it is easily crossed. Vicious, or simply over zealous, instructors are not the only source of potential mistreatment during initial training. Currently, vulnerable recruits in the British Army are more likely to be the victims of peer group bullying. Cruel treatment can never be condoned, but will be hard

to eradicate in an organization that values strong group cohesion as essential to success on the battlefield.⁵² Such cohesion is particularly important in a small professional army such as Britain's, where even soldiers from specialist and technical corps are expected to fight. It has long been accepted that soldiers are not bound together in battle by ideology or personal values but by the notion of comradeship. Such tightly knit fellowship requires informal group dynamics that reinforce attitudes and behaviours that allow soldiers to overcome and control their fears and emotions. Therefore, a necessary part of basic military training is to identify those individuals who cannot be socialized into such informal groups and remove them before they are in a position to undermine unit morale and combat effectiveness. The experience for individuals who fail to conform to the emerging group identity and standards of behaviour during basic training can be traumatic. Again, in such a situation the line between physical and psychological stress and real abuse can be slender.

Given the necessary toughness of military training, the British Army cannot hope to eliminate all forms of behaviour towards its recruits that might be considered bullying in an increasingly sensitive and litigious civilian employment environment. The MOD faces an unenviable predicament. It has to reassure parents that their sons and daughters will not be brutalized during training, whilst at the same time ensuring that soldiers are adequately prepared for the rigours of combat. Outside scrutiny of military training might satisfy some of the MOD's more vociferous critics, but could impose such stringent standards of care for soldiers during training that operational capability is ultimately undermined. Nevertheless, if the British Army is to escape the imposition of external oversight, the MOD's policies to combat bullying must be backed by a real commitment on the part of leaders at all levels to enforce them, as well as continued improvements that build on the training infrastructure and staffing measures launched in 2002. The recruitment process must also identify vulnerable and unsuitable individuals before they enter the military training system. The MOD

will have to apply constant vigilance over its training regime if it wishes to retain its independence to train soldiers at the required standard to maintain the British Army's professional competitive edge.

There are many contrasts, not least in culture, traditions and the nature of civilian control and accountability, between the British Army and those of Russia and other post Soviet states. By comparison, British soldiers are well trained, fed and paid; the vast majority of their officers have a strong professional ethos and integrity. The British Army's recruits are volunteers and although they face tough training, it is not a regime of institutionalised cruelty. However, the British Army's efforts to tackle bullying, its successes and failures, can still prove instructive for those militaries currently blighted by *dedovshchina*. British experience suggests that recruits in professional armies can be as vulnerable to mistreatment as those in conscript militaries. Because basic training deliberately isolates soldiers from wider society and necessarily stresses physical toughness, it intrinsically creates an environment in which bullying can occur. Tackling the problem requires, not just the introduction of appropriate corrective measures such as those discussed above, but also a commitment to back them from all levels in the chain of command, especially junior NCOs. Adequate investment in training establishments is essential to ensure that accommodation and supporting facilities are of satisfactory quality, staffing levels are sufficient and instructors are properly selected and trained. These measures are critical to maintain discipline and sustain morale and thus counter the element of bullying behaviour that seems to be present in even the most closely controlled military training establishments. As the British Army has found, greater transparency in the training system may be the price of restoring public confidence in the wake of well-publicized mistreatment scandals. If armies in the successor states of the Soviet Union can overcome the worst excesses of *dedovshchina*, they will, like the British, still face the challenge of striking a balance between tough training for

combat and a care regime that prevents the exploitation and abuse of young soldiers by their supervisors or peers.

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Footnotes :

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3 *Ibid.*

4 UK MOD, Delivering Security in a Changing World, Defence White Paper, HMSO, 12/03, C16147, Supporting Essays, Essay 5 People, p. 17.

5 See for example : David Hughes, “Army to Fight Bullies”, *The Sunday Times*, 29 November 1987, Howell Raines, “British Army Stung by Tales of Brutality in the Ranks”, *The New York Times*, 6 November 1987, p. 8. and Yvonne Preston, “British Army to Curb Its Bully Boys”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 November 1987, p. 23.

6 *The New York Times, Ibid.*

7 UK Parliament, House of Commons Hansard, HMSO, Col 254, 26 January 1988.

8 *Ibid.* Col. 340, 27 October 1987.

9 *Ibid.* Cols. 255 – 256, 26 January 1986.

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11 Hay J. “ Agony Aunts Plan to End Army Bullying”, *Sunday Mail*, 31 January 1988.

12 UK Parliament, House of Commons, Hansard, op cit, Col. 341, 28 October 1987.

13 Official statistics for incidents of bullying were not kept until December 1997.

14 Unlike those of Spain and France, the British armed forces are not exempt from this legislation.

15 Military personnel may only apply to Employment Tribunals in cases of alleged sexual or racial discrimination.

16 See House of Commons Select Committee Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix 4, Racial Equality in the Armed Forces, HMSO, January 2001.

17 For details of the British Army’s redress procedures see: Army General and Administrative Instructions (AGAI) management and Resolution of Complaints Vol. 2 Chapter 70, May 2002. Available from:

<http://www.army.mod.uk/servingsoldier/termsofserv/discmillaw/ref/index.html>

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18 See for example the comments by the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff in the BBC Newsnight interview of November 2003. *op cit*.

19 UK Parliament, House of Lords Hansard text for 20 Jun 2000, Col. 424 and House of Commons Hansard Written Answers for 5 Mar 2003, Col. 1028W.

20 Until as recently as 2002, self-harm was regarded as a disciplinary matter and evidence of “malingering”.

21 Proceedings of the House of Commons Defence Committee Second Report, 14 February 2001, paragraphs 126 - 127.

22 Amnesty International Library, “United Kingdom: U-18s: Child soldiers at risk”, 7 November 2000, chap. 3.2 Bullying and remedies, pp. 6 – 8. Available from : <http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGEUR450562000> (Accessed 9 April 2004) Uniquely in Europe, the UK’s professional armed forces rely on the recruitment of under 18s to meet recruiting targets. This age group represents up to a third of the total intake, particularly in the Army.

23 Jonathan Carr-Brown and Stephen McGinty, “Army Recruits Sue MOD over Initiation Beatings”, *The Sunday Times*, 19 October 1997.

24 See for example: “New Recruits were forced to dance Naked Conga”, *The Herald (Glasgow)*, 4 February 1999, p. 10. and Jason Burke, “Bullied army recruits being forced to desert” , *The Observer*, 4 June 2000.

25 Leading Article, “The Army must fight to restore confidence in its training “, *The Independent*, 29 October 2002, p. 16.

26 The Defence Committee, which has cross party membership, provides parliamentary oversight over all defence policy, administration and expenditure matters. The committee can summon government ministers to give evidence for its enquiries.

27 House of Commons Defence Committee 14 February 2001, *op cit*. paragraph 128.

28 Ironically, in 2001, Russian officers had asked for help from their British counterparts to combat the high rate of suicide in their armed forces, estimated at around 2,000 per year. See: Macer Hall “Russians call in our Army over suicides”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 August 2001.

29 UK Parliament, House of Commons Hansard Debates for 4 February 2003 (pt.1), Col. 3WH.

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31 Dr T. Fear and Scott Williamson, “Suicide and Open Verdict Deaths among Males in the UK Regular Armed Forces” Defence Analytical Services Agency, 14 July 2003, pp. 2 – 3. Available from: <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/pdfs/suicide/suicide.pdf> (Accessed 14 April 2004). The analysis also indicated that the US military had higher rates of suicide than the UK Armed Forces.

32 Directorate of Operational Capability, MOD, Appraisal of Initial Training, 18 December 2002. Available from: http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/publications/it_appraisal_full.pdf (Accessed 12 April 2004)

33 *Ibid.* paragraph 72.

34 *Ibid.* paragraph 73.

35 *Ibid* paragraph 71.

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37 MOD Press Notice No: 032/03 Appraisal of Initial Training, 10 February 2003. Available from: http://news.mod.uk/news/press/archive/archive_master.htm (Accessed 14 April 2004)

38 Directorate of Operational Capability, MOD, “ReAppraisal of Initial Training”, 14 July 2003. Available from: http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/publications/it_appraisal_full.pdf (Accessed 16 April 2004)

39 *Ibid.* paragraph 56, p.12.

40 *Ibid.* paragraph 29, p. 6.

41 *Ibid.* paragraph 23, p. 5.

42 *Ibid.* paragraph 17. p. 3.

43 *Ibid.* paragraph 30, p. 6. Researchers have found a greater emphasis on formal military discipline in the British Army, compared with those of other Western European countries. This might be a factor in the reluctance of British soldiers to approach their officers with problems. See: Joseph L. Soeters, Donna J. Winslow and Alise Weibull, Military Culture, in Giuseppe Caforio ed. Handbook of the Sociology of the Military, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York, 2003, p. 243.

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48 For a discussion of this issue see: Jon Lamb, “Bring Your Suit to the Workplace”, *People Management: the magazine of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development*, 2 March 2000, p. 20.

49 Dominique Hammond, “Someone to Lean On”, *People Management: the magazine of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development*, 6 December 2001, pp. 32 – 37.

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The Duty to Serve and the Right to Choose: The Contested Nature of Alternative Civilian Service in the Russian Federation

Abstract

The drafting and passage of Russian legislation on alternative civilian service took almost nine years after it was constitutionally guaranteed. The issue has been inextricable from sensitive debates over citizenship rights and duties, religious freedom, and military reform. This article assesses the operation and meaning of alternative civilian service in the Russian Federation through an examination of the legislative drafting process, the debates on the various draft laws, and the provisions of the resulting legislation, finding that the passage of the most restrictive draft of the law resulted in large part from the relative strength of the military establishment among the stakeholders in the legislative bargaining process.

The drafting and passage of Russian legislation on alternative civilian service took almost nine years after it was constitutionally guaranteed. The issue has been inextricable from sensitive debates over citizenship rights and duties, religious freedom, and military reform. This article assesses the operation and meaning of alternative civilian service in the Russian Federation through an examination of the legislative drafting process, the debates on the various draft laws, and the provisions of the resulting legislation, finding that the passage of the most restrictive draft of the law resulted in large part from the relative strength of the military establishment among the stakeholders in the legislative bargaining process.

The 2004 spring call up of conscripts for the Russian armed forces saw the first opportunity for conscientious objectors to claim their right to alternative civilian service under federal legislation. While this right has been constitutionally guaranteed since 1993, a law elaborating its operation was only passed in July 2002, coming into force in 2004. Perhaps unsurprisingly, alternative civilian service has been a particular contentious issue, inextricable from sensitive debates over citizenship rights and duties, religious freedom, and military reform. It lies at a particularly telling junction, combining the obligation to serve one's state, usually associated with republican citizenship and the ideal of the citizen soldier, with the recognition of an individual's right to conscientious objection, stemming from ideas of freedom of conscience and religious toleration. The conditions for the exercising of this right and the discharging of this duty cast a light on both the structure and character of a particular citizenship regime. This article assesses the operation and meaning of alternative civilian service in the Russian Federation through an examination of the legislative drafting process, the debates on the various draft laws, and the provisions of the resulting legislation.

The Russian Federation constitution declares the right to alternative civilian service in Article 59, which states

1. Defense of the Fatherland shall be a duty and obligation of citizens of the Russian Federation.
2. A citizen shall carry out military service according to the federal law.
3. A citizen of the Russian Federation shall have the right to replace military service by alternative civilian service in case his convictions or religious belief contradict military service and also in other cases envisaged by the federal law.

As with many provisions in the constitution the particulars of exercising this right, such as who qualifies as a conscientious objector, the length and nature of alternative civilian service, and where such service is to be performed, was to be elaborated in corresponding federal legislation.

The process of drafting and passing this legislation took almost nine years, during which alternative service claimants were for the most part denied their constitutional right. This delay was the result of a number of factors, some political and others merely practical or administrative. During this period new laws were required in most areas and delays were experienced in many spheres as a result of the sheer number of legal acts that required passage. The drafting process itself could be quite protracted. In the case of alternative civilian service the military establishment constituted a powerful interest, which was well represented on the State Duma defense committee. It was consistently opposed to the legislation and intent on both frustrating the drafting and passage of such legislation and made every effort to make any legislation that did see the light of day particularly difficult to use. In large part these objections were framed in terms of national security and military preparedness, as the option of alternative civilian service would rob the armed forces of a valuable pool of conscript labour. While there were non-governmental champions of alternative civilian service, namely Soldiers' Mothers and the Antimilitarist Radical Association, they were able to exert little if any influence on the drafting process.

Finally, the antagonistic relationship between the State Duma and the executive branch and the institutional predisposition to legislative gridlock in the second republic under the Yeltsin presidency¹ served to retard the legislative process through partisan confrontation and the proliferation of nuisance legislative initiatives.

Under the Putin presidency the matter of alternative civilian service has been resolved in a relatively timely manner as part of the general effort to complete the foundation and edifice of the 'dictatorship of law' and as one of the first tentative steps towards military reform. That said, it should be noted that the version of this legislation signed into law in July 25, 2002 was perhaps the more attractive to the military establishment, short of having no law at all.

The debate over the alternative civilian service and the resulting institutions are significant for Russia's emerging citizenship regime is for a multiplicity of reasons. The course of the debate and the resulting legislation can tell us much about the relative strength of particular institutions and groups within civil society, as well as their ability to bargain effectively with the state over particular rights and duties. Additionally, the study of marginal groups, such as conscientious objectors, can be effective in revealing the contours of complex structures and large scale changes, such as those occurring in the Russian Federation. These issues also cut straight to the heart of several questions of social justice and the extent to which democratic principles are actual and substantive.

Drawing on the account of the origins of rights provided by Charles Tilly², rights are here understood as historical products of struggle and resistance, grounded in the particular histories of particular places. Tilly offers a useful definition of citizenship rights and convincing logic for theorizing their expansion and transformation in periods of transition. Citizenship rights are defined as enforceable claims made on the state or its agents, where the criteria for such claims is membership in the political community or those subject to its jurisdiction. These claims are the product of struggle on a national scale, emerging from bargaining between the state and organized individuals or groups of its population. Historically, this bargaining began over state appropriation of the 'means of war', but later expanded both in the range of claims recognized and the extent of the population capable of making such claims.

In this article I examine the development of the law on alternative civilian service, the debates surrounding the drafting of this legislation, the efforts of the military and civil society organizations to influence the terms of alternative service, including eligibility, duration, and place of service, and local municipal legislative innovations aimed at enabling conscientious objectors to both exercise their constitutional right and serve the state. The contested nature of the meaning of

this right and duty which developed over the course of the debate and in the final version of the law, as well as the perceived challenges to the federal order by local legislation, offer important insights into the ongoing construction of a Russian citizenship regime and the possible direction of military reform.

Some Theoretical Preliminaries: Compulsory Military Service, Conscientious Objection and the Institution of Alternative Civilian Service

Compulsory military service and the ideal of the citizen-soldier have been closely associated with modern citizenship since the time of the French Revolution. According to this reading, the duty of all male citizens to take up arms in the defense of the state is among the most fundamental. Military training and service has been identified not only with the defense of the state but also with the formation and education of citizens.³

However, these deep republican roots also engender a profound tension between this ideal of duty and equality and the fundamental liberty of citizens under free government. The rise of conscription in a number of states in the eighteenth century brought about conscientious objection on the part religious groups, whose teachings forbid the use of violence. Appeals by these groups to the fundamental right of freedom of conscience must be taken seriously by states with liberal core values. As with other rights, claims for conscientious objection soon experienced a spillover effect, expanding beyond the traditional peace churches to other sects and religious individuals whose faiths do not require non-violence, and finally to those whose pacifism is secular, based on moral or philosophical grounds rather than religious ones. Objection is necessarily resistance and a challenge to the authority of the state, but the acceptance of conscientious objection recognizes some resistance as legitimate.

The conflict between the demands of states for universal, compulsory, male military service and the claims of individuals for exemption on the grounds of freedom of conscience may be mediated through the institution of alternative

civilian service.⁴ Alternative civilian service simultaneously affirms the legitimacy of the state's claim that citizens must serve and defend the state, while recognizing the rights of individual citizens to freedom of conscience. However, this institutional compromise raises a number of practical questions, the determination of which reflects the character of the citizenship regime of a particular state.

Provisions for alternative service are necessarily restrictive, lest they open the floodgates to mass evasion of military duty. States must find the correct institutional balance to allow for the exercise of particular guaranteed rights, while preserving the integrity and equality of conscription. As demonstrated below, it is difficult to insulate the issues of conscientious objection from larger issues of military reform, as both sides of the debate use the limits of conscientious objection to promote their own vision of the relationship between citizen and state and the extent of the legitimate demands of the each on the other. I argue that this instrumentalization of the institution of alternative civilian service may be unavoidable in the development of Russia's citizenship regime and that the debate and its outcome provide the institutional framework for citizenship practice.

There are a number of issues which must be resolved for the implementation of any regime of alternative civilian service. The first concerns the nature of the conscientious objection itself. Traditionally, conscientious objectors have been members of so-called peace churches, religious communities that preach non-violence and refuse to bear arms or serve in militaries as a matter of faith. The state must make a determination of whether particular groups qualify as legitimate religious communities.

A more recent phenomenon is the incidence of secular objection, where individuals claim to be pacifists for moral or political, rather than religious

reasons. This represents an expansion of the basis of legitimate objection from its traditional origins in the liberal recognition of freedom of conscience.

Secular objection has often been associated the phenomenon of selective objection, whereby an individual will refuse to participate in particular conflicts. This became increasingly common in the American case during the Vietnam War and often draws upon a secularized theory of just war, whereby certain conflicts are deemed not to be a last resort or self-defense, and are therefore unjust and illegitimate.

An additional consideration is the type of alternative service that is to be performed in place of military service. Many conscientious objectors refuse all association with military organizations, including non-combative duties in military hospitals, supply depots, and the like.

Recognition of the right to conscientious objection and the utility and legitimacy of alternative civilian service requires the establishment of adjudication bodies and procedures for the determination of legitimate conscientious objectors, as well as institutions for the coordination and placement of labour resources with a mind to serving the public good.

Margaret Levi has argued that there are two categories of conscientious objectors, absolutists and contingent objectors. Absolutists, typically members of religious communities opposed to violence, will refuse military service under all conditions, even when the costs are extremely high. Such costs might include social stigma, imprisonment, abuse, or even death. Contingent objectors will refuse military service only if the costs are perceived to be lower than those associated with active combat duty. Levi's study correlated increased claims and performance of alternative civilian service in the second half of the twentieth century in France, the United States, and Australia with both the growth of

religious communities opposed to the use of violence and a greater institutional acceptance of and opportunity for alternative service.⁵

Alternative Civilian Service in Russia

Alternative civilian service is not without precedent in Russian history, though its application was most restrictive. The institution of conscription in 1874 was met with resistance and objection by various religious groups. Given the subordination of the Orthodox Church to the state and its call for the defense of 'faith, tsar, and fatherland', this was necessarily sectarian objection. These non-violent religious communities included Molokans, Dukhobors, Mennonites, Tolstoians, and Baptists. Of these, only the Mennonites were successful in securing the right to alternative service, combining an historical claim with a strong bargaining position vis-à-vis the state. Upon their immigration to Russia, the Mennonites exacted a promise from Catherine II guaranteeing that they would never be asked to bear arms. This claim was backed up by their connections with powerful elites, their considerable economic clout, and their credible threats to emigrate. So powerful was their position that they were able to refuse an offer of non-combatant service in the armed forces, instead winning the privilege to serve in forestry units administered by fellow Mennonites.⁶

Conservative elements in the government regarded the pacifists as both shirkers of military duty and religious outlaws. However, even after the legalization of alternative religions in 1904, persecutions continued, as greater emphasis was placed on the civic duty to perform military service. Those who refused to serve were stripped of status and privileges, jailed and often tortured. The outbreak of WWI only intensified the situation with a dramatic increase in the number of claimants for conscientious objectors. Josh Sanborn has argued that there was additional suspicion of religious pacifists because the German heritage of a majority of the sects inspired charges of treason and the presumption of their acting as some type of fifth column. However, there was some support for the

expansion of conscientious objection among liberal elites, both out of sympathy with the growing movement of Tolstoian pacifists and the more general liberal value of freedom of conscience.⁷

If the reaction of the state was divided, there was widespread suspicion and hostility towards conscientious objectors among the masses, who merely regarded them as shirkers and cowards.

A similar debate between liberals and conservatives occurred under the Provisional Government but was cut short by the October Revolution and the withdrawal from the First World War. More surprising is the allowances for conscientious objection and civilian service made by the Bolsheviks. Sanborn attributes this to both tactical and ideological considerations. The Bolsheviks had enough opposition to contend with, so a tactical alliance with pacifist sectarians would neutralize an additional source of struggle. Ideologically, it was recognized that these groups had not only struggled against Tsarism, but had achieved a form of religious communism, which it was thought would be easier to assimilate than to destroy. An additional factor allowing for such a policy was the sympathy of Lenin's close associate, Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич with sectarian groups, lending high level support to their cause.⁸ While the combination of these factors resulted in the enactment of provisions for alternative service from 1919, these measures were consistently opposed by elements in the military and the Commissariat of Justice, which argued that there was a necessary uniformity of civic obligations for Soviet citizens and that those who refused to discharge those duties should not be allowed to vote, hold office, or be eligible for social benefits.

The provisions for alternative service faced the same questions of the adjudication of claims and the nature of the alternative service encountered earlier. According to the Sovnarkom decree of 4 January 1919 the United

Council of Religious Communes and Groups was asked to give expert testimony to determine the veracity of pacifist claims, which were to be decided before people's courts.

The representatives of the Commissariat of Justice attempted to frustrate the process by questioning the validity of the testimony of the United Council, but far more obstructionist measures were encountered outside the capitals. Local draft boards sent claimants to military tribunals rather than people's courts and regularly ignored the provisions of the decree to find these pacifists guilty of treason.[9](#)

In the years following the Civil War the measures grew increasingly restrictive in response to the declining health of Lenin, the decline of the political fortunes of Bonch-Bruевич, and the destruction of the sectarian communities during collectivization. These changes were effected through Commissariat of Justice Circulars first replacing expert testimony with local witnesses and then restricting the eligibility to members of religious sects which had refused to take up arms under tsarism, listing only the Dukhobors, Molokans, Mennonites, and Netovtsy, thereby removing moral conviction from the equation.[10](#)

It is important to highlight that these changes were justified with appeals to uniform civic duties for Soviet citizens. While these restrictive provisions for conscientious objection were reaffirmed in the 1925 Law on Conscription, there were dropped from the 1939 version of the legislation on the grounds that so few claimants had come forward, achieving the uniformity of civic duties and revolutionary consciousness in law if not in deed.

The concept of alternative civilian service returned to Russia during *glasnost*' when public space opened for discussion of previously taboo topics. It emerged both in the growth of new religious groups, and the diminution of barriers to

freedom of conscience and in the context of discussions of the military reform in the wake of the disastrous Afghan War, which eroded much of what was left of public confidence in Soviet military and the ideal of universal military service.

Steven Solnick has noted that difficulties in conscript mobilization had existed and worsened for decades, so that the military encountered mounting difficulties in fulfilling its draft quotas by the late 1980s. Most significant for this article is his observation that increasingly the universal character of military service was only in name, as it became easier to obtain deferments and exemptions for some, while many of those unfit or unsuitable for military were inducted simply due to their availability.¹¹

Many of the ideas which emerge during *glasnost* were carried forward by reformist forces in the newly independent Russian Federation. The provision for alternative civilian service emerged as part of the draft constitution prepared by the presidential administration over the course of 1992. It may be considered part of a larger effort to construct liberal institutions and legislative frameworks as a means of anti-communist rehabilitation and an effort to bring Russian legislation and institutions into accordance with international standards.

From the very beginning the military establishment was opposed to the idea of civilian alternative service. It should also be noted that harsh conditions in the Russian military, especially for conscripts resulted in massive draft evasion. Poor food and housing conditions low wages, the rampant hazing of young recruits by older conscripts and officers, and the conflicts in Chechnia all contributed the deepening recruitment crisis. In addition to the ideological opposition of the military establishment and many conservative politicians, it was feared that any provision for alternative civilian service would be abused by draft evaders seeking a legally sanctioned means for avoiding military service.

Following the approval of the new constitution in December 1993 a legal void was created in the area of alternative civilian service. An initial draft of an alternative service law passed first reading in the State Duma in December 1994¹², only to be returned to committee for further discussion and amendment. Progress on the bill was slow and in May of 1996 it was reported that work on the law on ACS continued during the difficult passage of the law on defense, which provides the legislative basis for the organization and regulation of the defense establishment.¹³ It was not until October 7, 1998 that the draft law on ACS returned to the StateDuma for its second reading, only to be rejected.

The Impact of Civil Society

The two civil society organizations most involved in the campaign for alternative civilian service legislation were the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers (CSM) and the Antimilitarist Radical Association (ARA). While arguing for the guarantee of constitutional rights, both of the groups saw alternative service as the means to an end, rather than an end in itself. For Soldiers' Mothers alternative service was seen as another avenue for the avoidance of compulsory military service. The ARA regarded alternative service as an agent of military reform.

CSM is one of Russia's most recognizable and successful civil society organizations with a truly national grassroots structure. It achieved enormous success in mobilizing public opinion during the first Chechen War (1994-1996), combining daring acts, in which mothers would rescue their conscripted sons from barracks and prisons with a strong political organization capable of forming alliances with prominent members of the State Duma. Key to their success in this effort was the consonance of their moral claims as mothers protecting their sons with the prevailing, traditional gender roles in Russian society.¹⁴

What had been its strength during the first Chechen conflict proved to be a weakness in its efforts to affect military policy in general and the law on

alternative service in particular. As Amy Caiazza has observed, reliance on a traditional gender role allowed military officials to dismiss the CSM as hysterical, irrational, unprofessional, and naïve women unable to fully grasp the complexities of security issues. This obstacle was reinforced by the pervasive sense among policy elites that interest group activity in military policy debates was a form of unwelcome and illegitimate intrusion. Participation in military service policy remains, by and large, restricted to policy elites.¹⁵

The ARA was formed on the basis of the Russian Radical Party, which had enjoyed some small electoral success in the local Moscow city Duma in the early 1990s. Following its formation in 1993 the ARA identified the passage of alternative service legislation as its top priority. While signalling the importance of alternative service as a constitutional right, it was explicit in its belief that there was a greater purpose in the pursuit of this legislation. The ARA believed that the institution of alternative would make the existing system of military recruitment untenable and force a change in national military policy.¹⁶

The ARA was far less successful than the CMS in its activities for a variety of reasons. It was unable to mobilize public support for its cause and it was frustrated in its attempts to create a national, grassroots organization among its target audience, draft-age men. Additionally, while it was able to forge links with international radical and antimilitarist groups, which could provide financial and organizational support, these resources proved of little value in the relatively closed world of Russian military policy.¹⁷ Its persistent efforts at lobbying on alternative civilian service and other military policy issues did result in some support from prominent figures in the State Duma, but it was not possible to translate this into any appreciable impact on the legislative process in military policy. This lack of success and organizational difficulties led to the virtual suspension of its activities following the Third Congress of the ARA, held in Moscow on June 23-24, 2001.¹⁸

The limited influence of nongovernmental organizations on the alternative civilian service should not be particularly surprising, given post-Soviet Russia's weakly developed civil society and the fact that issues framed in terms of security remain largely closed to non-state interest groups.

Filling the Void: Local Governments Take the Initiative

The prolonged absence of federal legislation led to a multiplicity of ad hoc and improvised approaches to the claiming of the right to alternative civilian service guaranteed under the constitution. These have ranged from outright rejection of claimants by draft boards, often resulting in fines or imprisonment to innovative local initiatives, which attempt to provide a framework and institution for the performance of alternative service. The variation in outcomes has had the effect of compromising the principal of universality and in many cases constituted a clear violation of the constitutional rights of particular Russian citizens.

State Duma Deputy Iulii Rybakov revealed that he had learned from the General Staff at the Defense Ministry that 1,966 individuals who had been drafted asked to perform alternative civilian service.¹⁹ Of this number of claimants it was reported that 3 had been jailed for draft evasion.

In the midst of this legal void a number of municipalities stepped into the breach by providing their own mechanisms for the exercise of the right to alternative civilian service. First among these was Nizhnii Novgorod. Mayor Yurii Lebedev initiated the program by municipal order on June 27, 2001. This program had the dual purpose of enabling draft age residents of Nizhnii to exercise their right to alternative civilian service while drawing on a much needed labour pool for the provision of arduous and low status jobs in local hospitals. The program began operation in the fall of 2001, when the twenty successful claimants (out of a total of fifty-one applicants) began work at City Hospital No. 1.²⁰

The program was designed and administered by the City Administration Committee on Servicemen Affairs of Nizhnii with the approval of the mayor, and the governor of Nizhnii Novgorod Oblast', Gennadii Khodyrev.

According to the program the conscientious objectors were to serve as orderlies in local hospitals, working eight hours a day for 354 roubles per month for a period of three years. In order to determine the legitimacy of a claim, applicants were made to visit seriously ill patients and a morgue in a hospital, which in combination with the long service terms of three years (compared to two years for military in the army) and low pay was intended to scare off false claimants.

The program was put in place by the city administration without the support of the local draft board.²¹ While this arrangement did allow potential conscientious objectors to exercise their constitutional right, it was a clear infringement by a local government on a federal competency.

Local officials stressed the high costs for conscientious objectors participating in their alternative civilian service program. While describing the physical demands of the hospital work, the Chair of the City Administration Committee on Servicemen Affairs, Lev Pavlov stated that he "personally would never have done it."²²

An analysis of the Nizhnii experiment by the General Staff main mobilization department revealed that the introduction of the option of civilian service had no effect on the number of draft evaders. Out of a total of 9885 recruits called up for the annual draft in 2001, only 60 requested alternative civilian service and of those only 15 reported for duty at the hospital to perform this service.²³ During this period the proportion of draftees opting for evasion remained relatively stable in comparison to past years.

However, senior officials in the Defense Ministry were extremely critical of these local experiments on the grounds that matters of defense policy were the preserve of the federal government and these localities had intruded on an area of exclusive federal competence. The Head of the Administration for the organization and Mobilization at the Defense Ministry, Vladislav Putilin, insisted that alternative civilian service should only be offered following the passage of a federal law.^{[24](#)} This view was echoed by President Vladimir Putin, who voiced his support for the concept of alternative civilian service but insisted that experimentation prior to the passage of federal legislation is illegal and that all activities in that sphere should be referred to the Office of the Prosecutor General.^{[25](#)} He was even more stinging in his criticism of the Nizhnii experiment, dismissing it as the politicization of the issue by an unpopular mayor seeking re-election.^{[26](#)}

One of the problems for those who select alternative service under these experimental municipal schemes is that because they are not recognized by the federal government and the armed forces there is no guarantee that those who have completed the alternative service will not be called up again for military service. High-ranking military and Defense Ministry officials hinted as much during criticism of the Nizhnii experiment.^{[27](#)}

In another setback, the decree by the mayor authorizing the alternative service experiment was overturned by a February 2002 regional court decision.^{[28](#)} As expected, the General Staff ordered the conscientious objectors working in Nizhnii to report for military duty, prompting them to quit their jobs at the hospital and effectively ending the experiment.^{[29](#)}

Another problem that the federal government feared was the precedent setting nature of the Nizhnii experiment. The city of Perm very quickly followed the Nizhnii example, allowing the Perm Centre for the Support of Democratic Youth

Initiatives to place individuals who had been approved for alternative civilian service.[30](#) Even as late as March 2002, as the government was preparing to release its draft legislation, the city of Petrozavodsk announced plans to introduce its own local program for up to 300 claimants who would serve only 2 ½ years.[31](#)

Federal Legislation

In late 2001 there was significant progress on the issue of alternative civilian service on several fronts. The Kremlin sponsored 'Civil Forum' which was widely derided as an attempt to manage civil society, provided a forum for a face-to-face meeting between Defense Ministry officials and NGOs active in the campaign for the realization of alternative civilian service.[32](#)

Debate also occurred at the cabinet level. A draft law on alternative civilian service was prepared by the government and presented in January 2002, which was based on recommendation of the General Staff and the Defense Ministry.[33](#)

The provision under this draft were particularly onerous, outlining a four year service term, as well as stipulating that the service should be extraterritorial, meaning that it should be performed outside the objector's place of residence, and that the service is to be performed in non-combat roles in the military. This draft also requires the claimant to prove to the draft board that military service would violate his convictions, religious or otherwise. However, the draft produced by the Defense Ministry was not the only variant developed by the government.

The Labour Ministry was also charged with the preparation of draft, given its responsibility for the administration of labour resources, which outlined the economic sectors and professions in which alternative service can be performed.

It was then decided that a compromise government draft, based on the Labour Ministry version but amended in consultation with the military and the Defense

Ministry was to be presented to the State Duma by Labour Minister Aleksandr Pochinok. This variant also allowed for civilian service to be performed near one's place of residence and for the possibility of being enrolled in institutes of higher learning while performing alternative service.[34](#) Reaction to the Labour Ministry compromise draft was mixed. Federation Council Chairman Oleg Mironov supported this variant, noting that the term of service should not exceed three years, while adding that the term for service in the army should be reduced to six months.[35](#)

The cabinet opted for the Labour Ministry draft at a January 30, 2002 cabinet meeting where the Defense Ministry's version was roundly criticized for its harsh conditions by Prime Minister Mikhail Kasianov, Deputy Prime Ministers Valentina Matvienko and Ilia Klebanov, as well as Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu.[36](#) In her announcement of the approval of the Labour Ministry compromise draft Deputy Premier Valentina Matvienko explained that the principal of extraterritoriality would only be employed under emergency conditions and that possible areas of service might include nursing homes, orphanages, and the fire service.[37](#)

More than one commentator on military affairs believed that the selection of the more liberal Labour Ministry draft was part of a larger effort to force the General Staff and Defense Ministry to more actively pursue military reforms[38](#), including professionalization of the armed forces, which could potentially render conscientious objection and alternative service a dead letter and significantly alter the obligations constituting the institution of citizenship. Even those who insisted that the primary significance of this was the concretization of a constitutionally guaranteed right admitted that such rapid movement after years of glacial progress was likely a function of the desire to reform the military on the part of the bill's sponsors.[39](#)

The draft legislation was introduced for first reading on April 17, 2002. The State Duma was to consider four variants of the legislation, but one was withdrawn just prior to the session. This left the deputies to choose from the government draft, an independent 'democratic' draft authored by Iulii Rybakov, Eduard Vorobiev, V.N. Lysenko, A.E. Barannikov, and Oleg Shein, and a 'radical' draft from V. Semenov.[40](#)

Table 1. Comparison of the Concepts of the Drafts for the Law of the Russian Federation "On Alternative Service"

Proposal in the Draft Legislation	Government of the RF	State Duma Deputy Ia.A. Rybakov et al.	State Duma Deputy V.O.Semenov
Term of Service	48 months for those without higher education; 24 for those with higher education – [for comparison, service in the army is 36 and 18 months for those without and with higher education, respectively]	In one's place of residence: 36 months for those without higher education; 18 for those with higher education. In the case of extraterritoriality: 30 for those without higher education; 15 for those with higher education.	30 months for those without higher education; 15 months for those with higher education.
Principle of service	In the place of residence and other regions.	Territorial (in the place of residence). Beyond those borders, under exceptional circumstances.	
Place of service	In state and municipal enterprises and organizations; in	In unitary enterprises established by the RF, subjects of the RF, or municipalities, and also in	State, municipal, or community organizations.

	the capacity of civilian personnel in enterprises and organizations of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, other troops or armed formations. Citizens belonging to indigenous, small-numbered peoples may serve in enterprises and organization of traditional economies and traditional crafts.	state or municipal companies. The social sphere (social, health, and city services, etc.). In exceptional circumstances in military hospitals	
Principle of indication	Individual declaration		
Citizens directed to alternative civilian service	Those subject to call-up, who were called up that year in a state of health for military service; those who have deferrals and exemption from service according to the law on military service.		
Alternative service in the military	Permitted	Permitted with agreement of the individual	Excluded
Proof of conviction	Required	Not required	
Circumstances for Alternative Service	If the convictions or religious beliefs of a citizen prohibit the performance of military service;	If the convictions or religious beliefs of a citizen prohibit military oaths and/or the performance of military	The adoption by a citizen of the decision to perform alternative civilian service in

<p>if a citizen belongs to an indigenous, small-numbered people, engaged in a traditional lifestyle, participating in traditional economic activities.</p>	<p>service as well as other circumstances envisaged by federal laws.</p>	<p>the place of military service upon call-up.</p>
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<p>Schedule of types of work and obligations (professions), as well as enterprises and organizations where the performance of alternative civilian service is envisaged</p>	<p>Defined by the government of the RF</p>
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<p>Foundations for the denial of institution of alternative civilian service</p>	<p>If a citizen violates the term and/or order of service of the declaration of the substitution of military service by conscription with alternative civilian service; if the draft board does not recognize well-founded</p>	<p>Documents are not presented by the citizen in accordance with the norms of the given law; The grounds which prompt the citizen to make a petition for the substitution of military service with alternative service do not correspond to the requirements of the given</p>	<p>If a citizen violates the term and/or order of service of the declaration of the substitution of military service by conscription with alternative civilian service without a valid reason.</p>
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<p>arguments by the citizen that their convictions or religious beliefs prohibit military service;</p> <p>if there is false information in the declaration of the citizen for the substitution of conscripted military service with alternative civilian service;</p> <p>if a citizen is called up twice before the draft board and does not appear to have a valid reason;</p> <p>if earlier an opportunity for alternative civilian service was presented to a citizen and he declined it.</p>	<p>law;</p> <p>The declaration for alternative service and the supporting documents knowingly contain false information;</p> <p>Organs of interior affairs, residential organizations or organs of local self-government in the place of residence of a citizen, the administration of an educational institution or place of work of a citizen presents information confirming that the activities or conduct of a citizen do not correspond to his assertion his holding convictions or religious beliefs which prohibit taking military oaths and/or performing military service;</p>
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Date on which the federal law on alternative service would come into

January 1, 2004.

January 1, 2003

January 1, 2003

force

Adapted from "Sravnitel'naia tablitsa kontseptsii proekta Zakona RF "Ob al'ternativnoi sluzhbe," <http://www.akdi.ru/PRAVO/news/analiz.htm>

The three draft laws were introduced into the State Duma for discussion in the daytime session. The government draft was presented by Labour Minister Pochinok. He explained that the government took a balanced approach to alternative civilian service, allowing successful claimants to serve in or near their place of residence and to continue with their studies.⁴¹

Rybakov introduced the 'democrat' draft by maintaining that a professional army would be more effective and Russia should follow the example of Western countries, where laws are not made by generals. After labeling the government's proposal as general's draft, he emphasizing that his draft would not require any evidence or substantiation of convictions by conscientious objectors before draft boards and that it envisaged an alternative service term equal to that of military service.⁴² This version would dramatically reduce the costs of conscientious objection by allowing for service in the place of residence and no extension of the service term.

In Semenov's addressed to the State Duma he explaining that the true goal of his draft was the promotion of the refusal of military service in general. He also highlighted his extremely liberal stand on the issues of term of service, place of service, and type of work which would be available to conscientious objectors.⁴³

The aim of this draft was to challenge the ideal of the citizen-soldier and to question the claim of the state on its citizens for the performance of military service. Such a vision of the citizenship regime goes well beyond the unrealized liberal conditions set down in the 1993 constitution.

Representatives of the Defense Committee and the Legislation Committee also made presentations at the daytime session. Andrei Nikolaev reported that the Defense Committee was a co-initiator of the government draft and had based its decisions on the central question of whether male citizens must fulfill their duty to defend the Motherland. Having reached the conclusion that all young men must perform this duty, they suggested that those of draft age not called up for military service should perform alternative service as required by the state.⁴⁴ It should not be surprising that the Defense Committee would emphasize duty and state security, as well as the role of the state in directing the disposition of alternative service labour resources.

Pavel Krasheninnikov, representing the Legislation Committee highlighted the need to ensure the exercise of the constitutional right to alternative civilian service through legislation which is not discriminatory. He dismissed Semenov's draft out of hand as romantic and criticized Rybakov's draft for ignoring the rights of the indigenous small-numbered peoples. While he acknowledged that the longer service terms were discriminatory, the committee believed that the government draft was the best and recommended its adoption in the first reading.⁴⁵

The drafts were open to discussion and debate in the evening session of the April 17, 2004, during which representatives of all of the major fractions in the Duma spoke. Unity, Fatherland-All Russia, Peoples Deputies, and Russia's Regions all supported the government draft. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation claimed that the legislation was inopportune, as the priority should be on solving the current problems of the military, such as hazing and the sending of conscripts to 'hot spots', while the imposition of alternative service would only make matters worse.⁴⁶ They appeared to be entirely unconcerned with the constitutional rights of conscientious objectors.

In a similar vein the Agrarians opposed all of the drafts, claiming that the prime concern should be national security and that young people should be called up to work with computers rather than chamber pots. Both Yabloko and Union of Right Forces criticized the government draft for what they saw as an excessively long service term. Rybakov added that the government draft was unworkable and that it would only result in the poor having to serve in the military while those that who were able to bribe their way out compulsory service would successfully evade their civic duty.[47](#)

In the voting that followed the drafts by Rybakov and Semenov were rejected, while the government draft was approved by a narrow margin, gaining 245 votes in its favour. The draft was then adopted in its first reading in a vote of 251 for the motion.[48](#)

Predictably, the reaction of civil society groups who had campaigned for the passage of alternative civilian service legislation overwhelmingly negative. Valentina Melnikova of the Russian Union for Soldier's Mothers Committee was quoted as saying that the provisions were humiliating and impossible for conscientious objectors to fulfill.[49](#) It is telling that much of the critical reaction centred on the restrictive terms of alternative service, arguing that the option was necessary to allow young men to avoid the dangers of army life. Such a provision would have such an elastic definition of conscientious objection that the very institution of military service obligation would be challenged.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Defense Minister, Sergei Ivanov said that he was satisfied with the draft, but that he would have preferred a service term of 6 years for alternative civilian service.[50](#) This length was based on a calculation of hours of service for military personnel, noting that they are on duty twenty-four hours a day and do not receive holidays. It also clearly demonstrates a

preference on the part of the military establishment for terms of alternative service so onerous that they really would be all but impossible to fulfill.

The second reading of the government draft occurred on June 19, 2002, resulting in only minor changes despite the hundreds of amendments submitted by liberal deputies. The most significant change was the reduction in the term for alternative service from four years to three and a half years for those without higher education and from two years to twenty-one months for those with higher education. Those who perform their service on military installations would have their terms reduced by six months. The controversial clause requiring claimants to prove their convictions before draft remained unchanged. The decision where alternative service is to be served was also left up to the discretion of the military, rather than automatically being in their place of residence.[51](#)

The final reading of the draft took place on June 28, 2002, and it was adopted with a vote of 237 in favour[52](#), thereby preserving the changes made in the second reading. It was passed by the Federation Council along with a raft of other significant legislation in a six and half hour marathon session on the final day of its spring sitting[53](#) and was signed into law by the president on July 28, 2002.

Conclusions

The drafting process, the legislative and public debates, and the final version of the law on alternative civilian service described above are significant not only in and of themselves, but also for what they can tell us about the social and political transformations taking place in the Russian Federation more generally. Indeed, the multiple implications of this legislation allow for speculation on areas including the limits and exercise of citizenship rights and duties, resolution of competing claims of the state, its agents and citizens, the impact of particular groups in civil society and the state on the legislative process, and military

reform. Additionally, it is often through examining the situation of groups at the margins of society, such as conscientious objectors, that social and political dynamics are most starkly revealed.

Among the conclusions that can be drawn from this examination of the debate and drafting process for the law on alternative civilian service is that the elaboration of the regime of citizenship rights and duties often has more to do with the struggles over attendant policy issues than the fulfillment of the abstract principles of equality and justice or the implementation of constitutional norms. In the case of alternative service, the outcome of the debate and the final form of the legislation was most strongly affected by the ongoing inter-agency struggle over military reform. Since coming to power, Putin has presided over the restoration of stable funding of the defense budget, constituting a marked improvement from the relative neglect experienced under Yeltsin. In part this may be attributed to the administration's dependence on the military for the maintenance of domestic order in North Caucasus, however imperfect that has proven to be, and the projection of influence in other former republics.

However, this more supportive approach towards the military has not been unqualified. Putin has consistently demanded progress in the area of military reform. In addition to relying on the powers of the purse, his administration has deployed alternative, 'liberal' reform options, developed both inside and outside of the executive branch, which are less palatable to the military establishment, during the debates over military reform in an effort to move this agenda forward.

As suggested above, the debate over alternative civilian service in government circles and the floating of the more liberal Labour Ministry proposal was part of a larger struggle over the direction and pace of military reform, including the professionalization of the armed forces. This dynamic was not without precedent. In the spring of 2003 the Ministry of Defense's military reform plan had to compete with an alternative 'liberal' plan advanced by the Union of Right

Forces, under the stewardship of Boris Nemtsov. While the Defense Ministry plan was eventually adopted as the basis of military reform, the then Prime Minister Mikhail Kasianov voiced his preference for the SPS variant and cabinet agreed to fund only thirty per cent of the Defense Ministry reform.⁵⁴ In the case of alternative service examined above, the deal that was struck over alternative civilian service and its consistency with previous policy struggles offers us a glimpse of the probable direction of military reform.

At the same time, the passage of the legislation is revealing about the rights and duties entailed in the emerging citizenship regime and the relative importance of particular rights in the public debate. Indeed, one of the most interesting absences from the public debate on alternative service was the complete lack of discussion of what constitutes religious freedom and freedom of conscience.

One would expect that Russia's controversial Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religion Associations would play a major part in any discussion of alternative service. This law, passed in September 1997, recognizes Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism as traditional faiths and grants certain privileges to the Russian Orthodox Church in recognition of its special historical role. All other religious groups were compelled to demonstrate fifteen years of continuous operation or were obliged to register with local authorities and accept certain restrictions on their rights and activities. In essence, this meant that even those groups reestablishing religious communities dissolved under Soviet repression were subjected to these limitations. The law was passed in response to fears voiced by the Russian Orthodox Church that foreign sects were 'poaching souls' from the traditional religions at a time when Russian citizens were spiritually vulnerable. The new restriction applied to all of the so-called non-traditional groups, which included such long-standing mainstream groups as the Roman Catholic Church, as well as groups newer to Russia, such as the Mormons and the Hare Krishna. This legislation seriously compromises the universality of freedom of conscience, as demonstrated by the recent

Moscow District Court ruling banning the activities of the Jehova's Witnesses⁵⁵.

This should be especially important for the debate on alternative civilian service, given that the most universally recognized group of conscientious objectors have been religious objectors from peace churches. However, the absence of this debate is most likely explained by the positions and interests of the agencies and civil society groups participating in the public discussion of the issue. The proponents of increased access to alternative service are not religious activists, even if many of the objectors whom they are defending refuse military service on religious grounds. Instead, their ultimate goal is to help as many conscript-age men avoid military service as possible or to further the cause of military reform, so the grounds for their objection are of little or no concern. On the other hand, the military establishment has an interest in limiting and controlling the number of eligible objectors. In theory, the restriction of objection on the basis of religious belief would be one method for controlling the number eligible for alternative service. However, this would remove an element of control over the determination process from draft boards, which the military has so jealously guarded.

At the institutional level, the relatively timely resolution of the issue under the presidency of Vladimir Putin demonstrates the commitment of his administration to the completion of the legal edifice of the state and to fill in the remaining legislative voids. In and of itself, this is a positive development, as it reduces legal and institutional uncertainty and goes some way to reduce the arbitrary nature of the implementation of constitutional norms and to improve the universality of the exercise of citizen rights. In this regard a restrictive federal law, however flawed is far superior to no federal law.

The hostile reaction of the federal government to local attempts to fill the rights vacuum, such as those of Nizhnii Novgorod, are unsurprising in today's Russia, where the president has a publicly stated policy of restoring the 'power vertical'.

While local authorities justified these experiments as allowing citizens to exercise their constitutional rights, these efforts further endangered the universality of the citizenship regime and infringed on the federal jurisdiction, neither of which could be construed as promoting institutional stability or development.

However, at the level of the meaningful exercising of constitutional rights serious concerns do remain. The final text of the law retains its restrictive character, in terms of both the length of service and the process for the verification of pacifist convictions. Critics have argued that these provisions have made the right to alternative civilian service all but impossible to exercise. There are real questions about whether the law will actually allow conscientious objectors to exercise their rights. States may legitimately make alternative civilian service less attractive and more costly than military service through measures such as extended service terms in an effort to limit free riding by would-be draft dodgers.

However, conditions which unnecessarily put the lives of conscientious objectors in danger, such as placing them in combat units where they are likely to suffer abuse, is to compromise the right that the legislation was intended to protect.

The course of the public and legislative debates and the final form of the law also demonstrate the relative strength of particular institutions and groups within civil society, as well as their ability to bargain effectively with the state over particular rights and duties. The process clearly demonstrated the weakness of the civil society organization which championed greater access to alternative civilian service and the relative, if not unqualified strength of the military establishment in military policy arena.

The dominant position of the military establishment in this debate is not surprising given that it is part of the state and that it has an institutionalized role in the legislative process, including its representation on the State Duma Defense

Committee. It was most adept at mobilizing its resources to promote its own interests throughout the legislative process and public debate, attempting to frame the issue in terms of security and military preparedness. Consistent with their position on military reform, they made every effort to make alternative civilian service as unattractive as possible, so as to protect their ever-shrinking pool of conscripts, upon which they believe the future of the military depends.

The institutional resources and status of the military gave it significant strength in the bargaining process with the policymakers in the executive branch, as demonstrated by the resulting legislation.

The non-governmental proponents of alternative civilian service, namely Soldiers' Mothers and the Antimilitarist Radical Association, were unable to exert any significant influence on the legislative process, which is again evident in the final version of the law. However, they were able to achieve some small measure of exposure in the popular press to the extent to which they were permitted to participate in the public debate. The Antimilitarist Radical Association had a very narrow support base, limited resources, and little influence as an anti-establishment social organization. As such, their role was limited to lobbying individual members of the State Duma, small street demonstrations, and press releases, while the obstacles they encounter threatened their very viability as an organization.

The Committee of Soldiers' Mother continues to be a vital civil society organization, but the limitation of their praxis was demonstrated by their failure to make any significant impact on the alternative service debate. The closed nature of the military policy arena and the professionalization and securitization of the debate turned their strength of maternal moral suasion into a weakness, as military officials could dismiss them as irrational and naïve. Despite their significant contacts in the State Duma, these obstacles effectively undermined

their bargaining position and excluded them from any meaningful participation in the debate on the shape of alternative service legislation.

The inability of liberal politicians and human rights activists to influence the drafting process reflects the current political realities in Russia and the continued strength and conservatism of the military establishment. While the views expressed in the 'liberal' draft may be shared by certain members of the cabinet and particular ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour, their overall role in the process was reduced to provide the executive with an alternative draft that was unappealing to the military, which could be used to extract future concession on the contentious issue of military reform.

Military reform in some form is inevitable and when it happens the terms of conscientious objection, alternative service, and universal military service will necessarily be reconfigured. The drafting process examined above may be viewed as not simply the a conflict between 'reformers' and the military establishment over issues of military reform and manpower, but also the contestation over what the state can legitimately claim from its citizens and the extent and purchase of particular citizenship rights.

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Footnotes :

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² Charles Tilly, "Where Do Rights Come From?," in Theda Skocpol, ed., *Democracy, Revolution, & History*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 58.

³ For a more complete discussion of the concept and ideal of the citizen-soldier see Eliot A. Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service*, Cornell University Press, 1985, especially pp. 117-132.

- 4 An in-depth treatment of this topic may be found in Michael F. Noonan Jr.'s "Legal Aspect of Conscientious Objections: A Comparative Analysis," in *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance*, Charles C. Moskos and John Whiteclay Chambers II, eds., Oxford University Press, 1993.
- 5 Margaret Levi, *Consent, Dissent, and Patriotism*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- 6 Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925*, Northern Illinois University Press, 2003, pp. 183-184.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 186-188.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 190.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 193.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 197-8.
- 11 Steven Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions*, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 175-176.
- 12 "Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russian Federation," Statement Submitted by the Transnational Radical Party, <http://www.radicalparty.org/comm55/item%2011.htm>
- 13 Doug Clarke, "Federation Council Approves Defense Law," *RFERL Newslines*, 16 May, 1996, <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/1996/05/1-rus/rus-160596.asp>
- 14 For an in-depth treatment of this subject see Amy Caizza, *Mother and Soldiers: Gender, Citizenship, and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia*, Routledge, New York, 2002, esp. ch. 7.
- 15 Caizza, *Ibid.* pp.137, 139.
- 16 www.ara.ru
- 17 Caiazza, *Op.Cit.* p.150.
- 18 http://web.radicalparty.org/pressreleases/press_release.php?func=detail&par=6596
- 19 Yelena Roudneva, "Alternative Service Pioneers Fear Draft," *gazeta.ru*, 13 February, 2002. See also Tatyana Titiova, "Christian Conscientious Objector Imprisoned," *Keston News Service*, 19 April, 2001, <http://www.starlightsite.co.uk/keston/kns/2001/010419RU.htm>
- 20 Guy Chazan, "Alternativniks" Challenge Russia's Conscript Army, *Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 2002.
- 21 Vladimir Dolgodvorov, "Smes' konstitutsionnogo s nizhegorodskim," *Trud*, 9 November 2002, <http://www.trud.ru/Arhiv/2001/11/09/200111092070802.htm#>
- 22 Sarah Karush, "Russian Pacifists Serve in Hospitals," *AP*, 14 February, 2002.
- 23 "Alternative Service Introduction to Have No Effect on Number of Dodgers," *Interfax/AVN*, December 6, 2001.
- 24 "Defense Ministry Accuses Regions of Meddling in Matters of National Security," *RFE/RL NEWSLINE* Vol. 6, No. 24, Part I, 6 February 2002.
- 25 "Putin Says He Supports Alternative Military Service..." *RFE/RL NEWSLINE* Vol. 6, No. 49, Part I, 14 March 2002.
- 26 "...As He Slams Nizhnii Novgorod's Experiment." *RFE/RL NEWSLINE* Vol. 6, No. 49, Part I, 14 March 2002.
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- 28 Oksana Yablokova, "Torn Duma Passes Alternative Service," *The Moscow Times*, Thursday, 18 April, 2002, p. 3

- [29](#) “Conscientious Objectors Caught in Battle between Center and Region”, *RFE/RL NEWSLINE* Vol. 6, No. 116, Part I, 21 June 2002.
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- [31](#) “Another Russian City Plans to Offer Alternative Military Service,” *RFE/RL NEWSLINE* Vol. 6, No. 42, Part I, 5 March 2002.
- [32](#) “Regional NGOs Force Military to Accept Alternative Service”, *Op. Cit.*
- [33](#) “Government Drafts Bill on Alternative Service,” *RFE/RL NEWSLINE* Vol. 6, No. 6, Part I, 10 January 2002
- [34](#) “... Reaches Compromise on Alternative Service,” *RFE/RL NEWSLINE* Vol. 6, No. 27, Part I, 11 February 2002
- [35](#) Yelena Roudneva, “Alternative Service Pioneers Fear Draft,” *gazeta.ru*, February 13, 2002
- [36](#) “Regional NGOs Force Military to Accept Alternative Service”, *Cf. note 30.* ; “Government Adopts Bill on Alternative Service,” *RFE/RL Newsline*, Vol. 6, No. 31, Part I, 15 February, 2002.
- [37](#) Sarah Karush, “Russian Pacifists Serve in Hospitals,” *AP*, 14 February, 2002.
- [38](#) John Boyle, “Analysis: Rampages Ignite Russian Debate on Army Reform,” *Reuters*, 17 February, 2002.
- [39](#) Yuri Filippov , “How to Serve Fatherland without Arms in Hand.” *RIA Novosti* (Moscow), 9 April, 2002.
- [40](#) Tat’iana Smol’iakova, “Chelovek bez ruzh’ia,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 4 April, 2002, http://www.rg.ru/Anons/arc_2002/0417/1.shtm .
- [41](#) *Plenarnye zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 17 apreliia 2002 goda, Dnevnoe zasedanie, http://www.akdi.ru/gd/PLEN_Z/2002/04/17-04_d.htm
- [42](#) *Ibid.*
- [43](#) *Ibid.*
- [44](#) *Ibid.*
- [45](#) *Ibid.*
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- [47](#) *Ibid.*
- [48](#) *Ibid.*
- [49](#) Vladimir Kovalev, “Russia: Lengthy Alternative,” *Transition Online*, 16-22 April, 2002, <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=33&NrSection=6&NrArticle=4209> .
- [50](#) “Duma Adopts Bill on Alternative Service,” *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 6, No. 73, Part I, 18 April 2002.
- [51](#) *Plenarnye zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 19 iuniiia 2002 goda, Veчерnee zasedanie, http://www.akdi.ru/gd/PLEN_Z/2002/06/19-06_v.htm
- [52](#) *Plenarnye zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 28 iuniiia 2002 goda, Veчерnee zasedanie, http://www.akdi.ru/gd/PLEN_Z/2002/06/28-06_u.htm
- [53](#) “Series of Landmark Bills Race through Upper Chamber...,” *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 6, No. 128, Part I, 11 July 2002.

54 “Ivanov slivaet voennuiu reformu,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2003-04-25/1_ivanov.html

55 “City Court Backs Ban of Jehovah's Witnesses”, *The Moscow Times*, 17 June, 2004, p. 3.

K. Bannikov. Antropologiya ekstremal'nykh grupp. Dominantnye otnosheniya sredi voennosluzhashchikh srochnoi sluzhby Rossiiskoi Armii, RAN, Moskva, 2002. 399 p.

Bannikov's book is a prominent work in the social-scientific landscape of post-Soviet Russia. Devoted to the study of informal hierarchies in the army, this work is quite unusual in terms of Russian human sciences where military studies have usually been monopolised by military sociologists.

Bannikov offers a lot of new sociological material on the army analysed in a convincing anthropological way. Initially, not specialized on military matters but a specialist on traditional rituals in Eastern Asia societies, he received a higher education in cultural history, ethnography and social anthropology. But, like every young man in the USSR, Bannikov served in the Soviet army at the end of the 1980's.

Deciding to come back to this personal experience in the 2000's, and motivated by the necessity of understanding and analyzing what he observed in the army during his own service, his book fruitfully applies anthropological methodology to personal observations and field researches.

His sources are numerous and diversified. Gathering conscripts' letters, interviews, diaries, drawings and military songs together as primary sources, their diversity allows him to propose an original and decisive analysis of relationships among Russian soldiers in today's Russia.

Bannikov's book is devoted to the study of violence inside the Russian army. He does not deal with violence against a foreign enemy and avoids the question of war situations (as in Afghanistan or Chechnya). He is interested in an

anthropological approach of violence and the Russian army offers him an illuminating object.

In the Soviet army, *dedovshchina* appeared in the 1950's and was officially recognised at the beginning of the 1960's. This phenomenon seems to be a quite specific Soviet one, harder and more violent than hazing in Western armies. In the Russian army, *dedovshchina* involves specified stages. The two-year term of service is informally divided into four or five periods of time that confer a special status on enforced participants, from the lowest to the highest. The raw recruits are called *dukhi* during their first six months of service. They become *molodye* for the next six months, then *cherepa*. During the last semester, they are called *dedy* and *dembelia* when they are about to quit the army. Older conscripts abuse younger one. The informal status is more important than the official rank in everyday relationships. People in the army wear the same clothes, are submitted to the same time organization and the same orders. However, each soldier in every military unit is submitted to varying local traditions. Bannikov underlines the effect of external influences on each group member. Daily life is attentively described: the progressive personalization of the uniforms, the barracks life, the quality of food, and the transformation of the body during these times.

But Bannikov shows that these observations are not as specific as they could seem. As he suggests, informal hierarchies in the Russian army coincide with the universal trinomial model "pariah – mass - elite". Inside external groups, inter-individual communications deteriorate and are progressively replaced with new norms, new hierarchies, new signs and symbols and, as a conclusion, new traditions. However, as underlines Bannikov, these new structures remember archaic rituals more than modern legal institutions. In army communities, the rites of transition to the next hierarchical stage involve a ritual of beating. During the first year of service individuality is steadily destroyed; while during the second year this individuality destroys the others. Social mobility in extreme communities

reproduces a system of organized violence on the principals of archaic initiation rites.

Bannikov here refers to his own initial works and interests for traditional rituals. *Dedovshchina* appears as the symbol of an archaic syndrome. Inspired by the work of Erving Goffman on closed institutions, Bannikov briefly compares different closed institutions in post-Soviet Russia. The difference between army and prisons, according to Bannikov, is slight. The main difference lays in the fact that the term of service is the same for everybody and the seasonal manning. This conclusion is important in the context of post-Soviet Russia. Indeed, as Bannikov underlines, "The scientific investigation of aggression and violence in contemporary Russia is rather specific : resulting from the structural transformation of all socio-political systems, violence and aggression invading all social strata are developing much faster than our knowledge about them" (p. 364). From the army's case, Bannikov contributes to the understanding of post-Soviet society, underlying the violence of archaic practices generated by the liberalization of an authoritarian regime.

[Françoise Daucé](#)

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R.G. Gallego. Blanc sur Noir. Arles : Actes Sud, Paris, 2003.

Gallego's book, which was first published in Moscow in 2002, was immediately translated into many European languages. The speed of implementing foreign language versions shows the importance of this text, a testimony of common life in Soviet orphanages. Gallego was born in Moscow in 1968 from a Spanish mother. Strongly handicapped at his birth, Ruben Gallego was separated from his mother and transferred from orphanages to asylums till 1990. Thanks to the *perestroika* and the opening of Russia, he managed to quit the USSR and to find his mother. He began to write his memories in the 90's.

His testimony is highly illuminating concerning soviet daily life in closed institutions. His first quality is to show the difficulty, in USSR, to accept differences which in Gallego's case are both ethnic (he is recognised as Spanish) and physical (he is multi-handicapped). The question of alterity is central in this book. Gallego spent his youth in institutions gathering young or old "outsiders" of the Soviet society. He describes relations with the "nianas" (nurses), who represent normal people and often accuse their pensioners of being useless. Because of this incomprehension, young handicapped people in orphanages construct their own social life, with its codes, practices and values. They are used to divert official laws and rules to their own profit. This composition of a "small society" within orphanages allowed the survival of children and explains the sustainability of Gallego's book and its title "White on black" : black as the soviet reality of orphanages, white as the solidarity and closed relationship with other handicapped children.

Gallego describes the importance of solidarity between children in the orphanages. For example, in his chapter "The fight", he shows the common training of children to help one of their friends who have to fight against a valid guy. He also describes friendly and tender relations with one or two professors and nianas. But such solidarity is often broken by deaths and transfers. Such

separation was difficult to support for Gallego who evokes his own periods of anorexia and depression. Asylums appear just as destructive to the individual, owing to frequent rupture of social collective links between children. Gallego describes the common points between orphanages, prisons, the Gulag and the army. Concerning prison, he is even envious of the prisoners' destiny. Nianias are presented as authoritarian, venal and insensitive. They are the sergeants or screws of soviet orphanages. As he writes, "Prisoners are lucky. They will serve and will become free. On the contrary, we can't hope for anything. Our establishment is closed".

As a conclusion, far from sensationalism, this book gives insight into understanding the reality of Soviet closed institutions. From the point of view of daily life, it invites readers to think about informal private solidarities in their interaction with official public rules.

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V.V. Savel'ev, *Kak vyzhit' v neustavnoi armii.* (from the series *Psychological Practice*), Rostov-on-Don, Feniks, 2003, 224 pages.

This is one of the most interesting – and from the perspective of one who is interested in the phenomena of harassment (*dedovshchina*) in the Russian military – one of the most important works this reviewer has encountered in some time. It is clearly written, although it does contain some Russian military phrases and words. It is not intended to be an academic study. Rather, it is written from the vantage point of someone who dealt with such problems for many years.

In contrast to many works dealing with the topic, Savel'ev meets the issue head on, explains it, and is very critical of the senior ranks of the Russian military for permitting it to continue. Furthermore, while the author attempts to provide suggestions for dealing with it, this reviewer would argue that like most Russian officers, he fails to understand the key reason for *dedovshchina* – in this reviewer's opinion, the failure of the Russian military to create the kind of a non-commissioned officers corps that exists in the American, British or German militaries. Until there is significant movement in that direction, I believe this debilitating phenomena will continue.

The Author. First, something on the author. Savel'ev introduces himself as a psychologist, who served more than twenty years in the Russian/Soviet military “in the field.,” which he believes gives him a good understanding of the inner-workings of the Russian military at the unit level. Furthermore, he maintains that Russian commanders at all levels are aware of the phenomena and understand its negative impact on the Army. He notes that considerable attention has been given to dealing with it. Indeed, he notes that “officers in military academies have defended tens of dissertations on the topic, and created hundreds of theories dedicated to understanding the phenomena of ‘*dedovshchina*’”(p. 9).

Dedovshchina. Savel'ev's (a pseudonym) explanation of the process of *dedovshchina* – how it develops over the two year period recruits serve in the military – will come as a shock to many Westerners because of its detail and bluntness. To begin with, everyone who is being called to the colors has heard of *dedovshchina*, and they are aware of what awaits them. Fear of serving in a military beset by *dedovshchina* is one of the main reasons that young Russians avoid military service. To many young Russians joining the Army “creates a feeling of doom” to use Savel'ev's phrase. Once they are called up, military service (with regard to *dedovshchina*) can be divided into four stages.

The first stage (or six months) begins when the young soldier arrives at the unit and is placed in quarantine. Savel'ev calls this a “chaotic, unsystematic reception of information” which not only confuses the recruit, but tends to confirm his perception of the military as a disaster (p. 10). In fact, most of the recruit's information about what lies ahead of him comes not only from sergeants, and instructors, but from those from his home town who are already serving in his unit. The second part of the first stage begins a few weeks later when the recruit is let out of quarantine and arrives at the unit to which he is assigned. During the first two weeks, little pressure is exerted on the young soldiers. In fact, during this time he is sized up by those who have served for some time. The older soldiers are involved in teaching the youngsters “how to behave.” The concern on the part of those who have served longer is to identify those who are psychologically weaker, while at the same time spotting those who will be reliable – in carrying out the instructions and supporting the interests of the more senior soldiers. Those identified as “weak” are given the name “sisters.” These individuals are constantly picked on and forced to perform a wide variety of unpleasant duties.

As one would expect from the vantage point of a psychologist, Savel'ev considers the reaction of these recruits to *dedovshchina* to be more complex than many might think. In fact, he breaks up their response into six categories; a

feeling of resentment, a belief that the process is positive, a feeling of silent protest, anger, fear, and hatred. By and large, however, regardless of what the senior soldiers do, the vast majority of the new soldiers go along with them because they see no other alternative.

Then comes the second half of the first year. By and large those who were not harassed during the earlier period are more than happy to keep quiet – to let others suffer the kinds of humiliations they had to put up with. After all, why shouldn't the younger soldiers have to put up with the same kind of harassment they experienced?

By the beginning of the third period, i.e., the first half of the second year, the soldier is in a position to demand that the new “sisters” work for them. In essence, Savel'ev argues, the soldier in this category faces a moral decision. Will he harass the recruits or will he focus on passing on the traditions of the unit – as he gets involved in training them? This is the group most involved in harassing new recruits.

Finally, there is the fourth period – the last six months of service as soldiers begin to think about becoming civilians again. They are careful to avoid getting into trouble – anything that could lead to a lengthening of their service time.

Interestingly, Savel'ev does not stop at this point. He further breaks down conscripts into sub-groups; something this reviewer has not observed previously. First, are those who fight against *dedovshchina*. They are few in number. Second, are those who are good soldiers, avoid harassing younger soldiers, but who never speak up against abuse. Then there are what he calls the “passive-positive micro-group.” These soldiers are good natured, avoid harassing junior soldiers, but they will not challenge senior soldiers. Fourth, Savel'ev identifies

those who fill leadership positions trying to get others to perform their duties while violating military discipline and hiding it.

Another sub-group involves those who frequently violate discipline but who are more than prepared to act in a positive manner when the issue furthers their interests. Finally, there are those who carry out their duties, but go along with violations of discipline – having as their code of behavior “I don’t know anything.” The bottom line, according to Savel’ev is that *dedovshchina* is not an isolated phenomena. Rather, it exists throughout the military and it draws all soldiers into it. It could not exist were it not for the kind of support from soldiers as noted above. He also notes that this arrangement not only leads to problems within the military, it also can and has led to suicide on the part of recruits.

Savel’ev’s Solution. Now comes the question, to quote Lenin, “what is to be done?” The rest of the Savel’ev’s book is devoted to a number of what one might call “case studies” efforts to explain and highlight the problem of *dedovshchina*. The author’s discussion of these problems – drawn from real life cases do an excellent job of explaining how the process works.

Lest the reader get the wrong impression, many of these suggestions are not just a repeat of what those of us who followed the actions of old Soviet Main Political Administration were used to. Indeed, in one chapter, Savel’ev discusses a Baptist preacher, who apparently came to his town sporadically, but who must have been one of the most charismatic individuals he ever encountered. He writes about how this individual (he identifies him as Aleksandr Ivanovich) came to town and how he witnessed Aleksandr’s ability fundamentally to change lives – on the spot. He spoke and people listened. Savel’ev argues that he is not interested in religion per se, but that he tried to interest his superiors in having Aleksandr come to the unit and work to bring members to recognize the importance of a moral foundation in dealing with others. He proposed to his

commander that Aleksandr be invited to address the troops, but the commander was “categorically oppose.” (p. 213).

Indeed, according to Savel’ev, one of the main problems facing the Russian military and one of the primary reasons for *dedovshchina* is the lack of a sense of morality when it comes to dealing with others. Soldiers are not taught the importance of morality, and commanders shy away from such things. In this context, he is very critical of “social-state education” – what in Soviet times was referred to as political training. According to Savel’ev, “Most of the time is concentrated on learning historical facts from the battle of Kulikovsky to the Great Fatherland War” (p. 215). Students memorize dates, but learn nothing about the importance of patriotism. Equally significant, in his opinion, is the failure of this education program to deal with current topics such as the wars in Afghanistan, or Chechnia. The military brass is apparently too afraid to permit in-depth discussions of such events.

The result of this lack of moral education means that about all educational-patriotic officers can do is to help the soldiers avoid performing “unsatisfactorily,” by placing primary emphasis on physical training. In essence, he accuses the military command structure of acting like an ostrich by sticking its head in the sand and ignoring a major ethical problem – the one that he believes is the key to solving the problem of *dedovshchina*.

Savel’ev concludes his book by asking the rhetorical question – “Why a book on such a current issue,...if it does not appear under my name?” (p. 217). He answers his question by noting that he is confident some senior officers will read the book, perhaps that will lead them to realize the depth of the problem and the steps that need to be taken to deal with it. As he put it, “why during peacetime do soldiers lose their lives, desert, kill themselves and their colleagues ? Why ? Where is your answer, comrade High Ranking Military commander ?”(p. 218).

Will it work? It is always difficult for an outsider to pass judgement on solutions for dealing with internal problems in other armies – after all, Savel’ev spent 20 years in uniform, presumably first as a political officer and later as a psychologist in the Russian military. However, having spent 32 years (active and reserve) in an American uniform, and having had extensive contacts with the Soviet and later the Russian military, I feel qualified to at least suggest that as sincere as Savel’ev’s suggestions are, even if they were adopted, they would not completely solve the problem of *dedovshchina*. Why do I say that ?

In my opinion, the key to dealing with problems like *dedovshchina* is the NCO or non-commissioned officer (or serzhant as the Russians call what they consider to be the equivalent). It is no exaggeration to suggest that the contemporary American, British and German militaries are run by seasoned, professional NCOs. Indeed, any general or admiral who really thinks he or she is personally running the troops is deluding himself or herself. Unfortunately, that is not the Russian practice. Permit me to provide a few examples.

Several years ago I was part of a party taking Soviet officers around a US Navy ship. When we came to a missile mount, the Soviet admiral asked the young enlisted missile technician (an E-5) about his job. His answer, “I repair and fire these missiles, Sir.” The admiral could not believe his ears and asked for a re-translation. When it had been translated again, the admiral simply shook his head and said, “I don’t understand, in the Soviet Navy, that is a job performed by two junior officers.”

Then there are Savel’ev’s comments relative to the training of new recruits – in particular the observation that most of it is done within the unit, by soldiers who have served a year or so. To an American, this is unbelievable. To cite only one example. When new recruits show up for boot camp in the US Marines, they are met by seasoned NCOs – all of whom have been through a second boot camp –

one aimed at making sure they can take the pressure they are about to put the recruits under, and to show them how to train them. These NCOs stay with them 24 hours a day throughout their 12 weeks of boot camp. The “drill instructors” or DIs as they are called, are in turn carefully supervised by company level officers. Indeed, I can remember taking Russian admirals through both a Marine and Navy boot camp and hearing them remark in amazement about the professionalism of the DIs and how well trained the recruits were after only 12 short weeks. “If we had such a program, we would not have many of the problems with sailors that we have at present,” was the way one admiral put it to this reviewer.¹

The fact is that NCOs are critical when it comes to running a military. In the West, they are the ones who work, eat and sleep with enlisted personnel, while in the Russian military, officers and warrant officers tend to ignore what is going on at the unit level. They apparently see recruits, who will only be around for two years as cannon fodder. Besides, the kind of work done by NCOs in the West is a job for officers in the Russian military.

All indications are that the Russian High Command is paying little attention to the problems raised by Savel'ev. The moral problem is not new. In 1989 the senior political officer of the Northern Fleet told this writer the following: “In 1917 we destroyed the old Gods and replaced them with communism. Now the God of communism is dead and we no longer have a moral compass. We need something to give our lives meaning.” In fact, senior Russian officers are afraid to deal with moral questions. For awhile it appeared that they would include chaplains in the military, but this was rejected as too “divisive.” As a consequence, the generals have side-stepped the issue thereby making it difficult for officers like Savel'ev to deal with *dedovshchina* from a moral standpoint. Indeed, in reading Savel'ev's discussion of the need for a moral foundation, I was reminded of the East German experience. While former

members of the East German military faced the same kind of problems in delegating authority, they have also had problems in efforts to personalize the major changes that took place after reunification². This led to what the West Germans to argue that the East Germans have what they call “*Die Mauer im Kopf*”, or the wall of the mind. To a large degree, the Russian High Command is suffering from a similar problem – they find it difficult to make the critical psychological changes that are needed to deal with a post-communist Russian military that is living in a more democratic environment.

The psychological revolution has yet to take place. Recently, however, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov purportedly remarked that *dedovshchina* will disappear as a problem once service by conscripts is limited to one year – an planned for 2008.³ While this planned change will eliminate two of the four categories outlined by Savel’ev, what guarantee is there that the problem will disappear ? How will these new recruits be trained ? By the *kontraktniki* ? By those recruits who have served six months ? In fact, the problem could get much worse as unit cohesion decreases. After all, one of the things that Savel’ev notes that helps keep some of the problems under control is unit cohesion. The Russian High Command apparently fears the kind of delegation of authority that is common to Western militaries. While this refusal to delegate authority may be cultural, this reviewer would argue that failure to embrace it will extract its price, because, without a dedicated group of professional, authority wielding NCOs, I suspect the problem will only get worse. If anything, sweeping the problem under the rug will not solve it. If anything it could make matters worse.

Savel’ev’s book presents one of the best insights into the problems faced by the Russian military in trying to deal with the age old problem of *dedovshchina* this reviewer has encountered. It is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the nature of such problems in the Russian military. That is especially true for

those who think Moscow is on the way to resolving some of the key problems like *dedovshchina*.

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Aldis, Anne C. and Roger N. McDermott, eds., Russian Military Reform, 1992-2002. Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003.

In this edited volume, the fourth book in the Cass Series on Soviet (Russian) Military Institutions, the authors analyze the security threats the first two post-Soviet administrations and military apparatus have had to contend with. The period covered by this volume is one of the most tumultuous which has confronted the Russian military. The array of new threats, resource limitations, the ambiguity of civil-military relations, and the interaction between the military, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies, vastly complicates the institutional responses of the Russian military to the security environment of the late twentieth and early 21st century.

The first section of this volume explores the complex nexus of, military reform, the political dynamics of a transitional state, and a dramatically altered security environment. The chapter by Marcel de Haas, "The Development of Russia's Security Policy, 1992-2002", is an overview of post-Soviet military organs and key personnel, and key Russia security documents. De Haas examines successive iterations of National Security Concept, Foreign Policy Concepts, and Military Doctrines. An interesting conclusion that de Haas draws from the themes of these key security documents is that, despite 9/11 and the Moscow theatre siege, the Putin administration is not yet willing to systematically revise these documents to reflect a more pro-Western orientation, but has rather only shifted towards the West at a symbolic level.

The durability of Russian military perceptions also effects political competition as discussed in the second chapter, "Civil Military Relations During Reform", by Jennifer Mathers. For Mathers, the permeability of the boundary between military and civilian during the era of reform poses a long -term threat to civilian

oversight and reform. The changing structure of civil military relations is also examined in the third chapter “A New Day for the Russian Army: Reforming the Armed Forces under Yeltsin and Putin” whose authors, David J. Betz and Valeriy G. Volkov, speak of a “new concordance” between the Russian military and the federal executive under Putin. The Putin presidency and its “pragmatic nationalism” have heightened the prospect for significant reforms that had languished under the Yeltsin administrations. Betz and Volkov conclude that Putin’s bearing, and the military’s respect for such a leadership style, has created a window for reform, a window whose length of existence may be greater than the authors’ assumed at the conclusion of the chapter, based on Putin’s re-election and the performance of the Russian economy as of late.

In the fourth and final chapter of this section, Joris Van Bladel discusses “Russian Soldiers in the Barracks: A Portrait of a Subculture” and the impact that some of the more dysfunctional features of Russian military culture has had on the Russian public’s perceptions of the need for reform. Van Bladel focuses on the negative impact of *dedovshchina* by using Goffman’s conceptualization of “total institutions” to frame the difficulties of eliminating such an abusive informal institutional culture. Van Bladel maps out a series of possible reforms to eliminate this systematic bullying of soldiers, reforms that are essential if Russia is going to go the route of an all-volunteer force. Key features of these reforms include: dismantling the total-institutional format of the army; building in reporting and oversight functions into the officer corps; and, encouraging the army to take responsibility for the mistakes and inaction. All of the above are worthy goals, however the likelihood of these reforms being implemented is not adequately addressed in this chapter.

The second section of this volume moves on to a discussion of the force structure of the Russian military. In the fifth and sixth chapters “Nuclear versus Conventional Forces: Implications for Russia’s Future Military Reform” and “The

Strategic Rocket Forces, 1991-2002” Frank Umbach and Steven Main respectively, detail the consequences of the failure to provide the resources to support a modern conventional force structure, an over-reliance on the Russian nuclear arsenal to make up for stalled reforms. While nuclear arms control treaties with the United States would imply a reduction of the Russian nuclear arsenal to free up resources to deal with new security threats that can only be dealt with by conventional forces, the Russians are concerned with preserving a strategic nuclear force enabling them to maintain superiority over regional nuclear rivals, especially China. The power of what Umbach refers to as the “rocket mafia” is a substantial impediment to reforms.

In the next three chapters “Reform and the Russian Ground Forces” by Michael Orr, “Reform of the Russian Air Force” by Stéphane Lefebver, and “Rudderless in a Storm: The Russian Navy” by Mikhail Tsyarkin, the authors trace out the difficulties each of the respective branches of the Russian security apparatus face in executing reform programs. These chapters echo Umbach and Main’s conclusions about the major obstacles in the stalled reform of the RSVN. Orr attributes the failures of reform of the Russian ground forces to the influence of Soviet era mindsets. The conservatism of the Russian ground forces has delayed the adaptation to the Western “revolution in military affairs”. Despite the shocks of the Gulf War, the Chechen conflict, and 9/11, Russian ground forces remain mired in the past. Another major difficulty which Russian ground forces face are the declining quality of conscripts and recruits, morale difficulties, and what continues to be endemic corruption among officers, all of which have impeded professionalization of the ground forces.

The fall of the Russian navy from a force “second only to that of the United States” in the late 1980s, to a force “just over one-quarter of the Soviet navy in size” (according to Russian Navy Commander in Chief Admiral Kuroyedov) is chronicled by Mikhail Tsyarkin in the ninth chapter. The end of the Cold War hit

the Russian Navy particularly hard because many of its central missions derived directly from anticipated conflict with NATO and US naval forces. The Russian Navy interpreted the series of cuts in its budgets as not being necessarily a valid readjustment of military spending priorities but rather a self-serving interpretation that this was a continuation of the tradition of “navy haters” in the military and civilian hierarchy that did not contribute to the historic mission of the Russian Navy to develop and maintain a blue water navy. The sense of drift in the incorporation of the Russian Navy into the overarching post-Soviet grand strategy was compounded by the inability of the Russian Navy to provide direct support for the wars in Chechnia and other low-intensity conflict operations.

In the third section of the book titled “Experience” the authors use the Chechen wars to illustrate the constellation of problems with confront Russian force structures, and how they are emblematic of the dilemma posed by adjusting the national and internal security apparatus from the Soviet-era mindsets and Cold War security threats, to the rapid diffusion of “small wars” and counterterrorism threats of the early 21st century. In “The Challenge of ‘Small Wars’ For the Russian Military”, Pavel K. Baev opens his discussion by observing that in the 1992-2002 period the Russian armed forces were involved “in more regional or localized violent conflicts than any other army in the world.” Have the Russian armed forces incorporated the lessons learned from this experience ? Baev points out that despite this extensive and intimate experience with “small wars” and other forms of low intensity conflict starting with instabilities in the late 1980s and lasting to the first Chechen War, Russian military conservatism and the uncertain leadership of the Yeltsin administration and Russian public opinion, the problems posed by “small wars”, was not effectively addressed.

In chapter eleven “Information Warfare in the Second Chechen War: Motivator for Military Reform” Timothy L. Thomas reviews the impact of the Chechen conflict on the development and implementation of Russian military information

warfare (IW) doctrine, strategy, and tactics, by also discussing how the Russian military has also attempted to respond to the prospect of a Western consolidation of “information superiority” as demonstrated by the at least at first glance successful use of information warfare by US and allied states in Gulf I, Kosovo, and the clearly mixed record of Gulf II and the “global war on terror.”

In the final chapter of the section on “experience” Jacob W. Kipp in chapter 12 “War Scare in the Caucasus: Redefining the Threat the War on Terrorism”, examines the evolution of Russian “threat perception” using the war scare in the fall of 2002 between Georgian and Russia regarding the infiltration of Chechen guerrillas into the Pankisi Gorge. Russian threat perception in the Fall of 2002 crystallized a change in the succession of Russian threat perception paradigms. Kipp briefly traces in a genealogy of paradigms from the perception of the West (NATO expansion of US superiority) as the primary threat to Russian security, to an emphasis on the war on terror and the mix of national and internal security threats. At the conclusion Kipp uses the Pankisi Gorge war scare to justify his assertion that “the War on Terrorism has brought to an end the post-Cold War decade of transition”, reflecting a focus on threats in the near abroad that will provide a momentum to minor reforms.

The aptly titled concluding section of the volume “Where To?” maps out the near-future prospects of the Russian armed forces accomplishing even the slightest reforms, let alone a deep and systematic reforms. In “Putin’s Military Priorities: The Modernisation of the Armed Forces” Roger N. McDermott stresses the urgent need for a comprehensive modernization of Russian armed forces. Russia has, unlike the United States, not yet begun on a comprehensive military reconfiguration to adjust to the new low-intensity conflict environment, despite having more direct experience with this form of conflict. McDermott points to the difficulties of developing comprehensive reform in an era of low morale and resource limitations.

In chapter 14 “An Economic Analysis of Russian Military Reform Proposals: Ambition and Reality” authors Peter Sutcliffe and Chris Hill conduct a detailed review of the economic limitations of reform. One of the more interesting points of the chapter is the importance of continued strong demand and prices for oil for the future success of Russian economic growth, and by implication the creation of additional resources which might make the Russian armed forces more amenable to systematic reform,. It appears that in the intervening year and a half since the chapter was written the strength of oil markets may give the Russian economy an extra boost and perhaps give the prospects for reform more breathing space. In the concluding chapter of the book “Reshaping Russia’s Armed Forces: Security Requirements and Institutional Responses”, Christopher Donnelly summarizes the complexity of military reform, which is difficult especially problematic given the Soviet legacy of closed military and intelligence cultures and atavistic mindsets forged by the Great Patriotic and Cold Wars.

Donnelly distills the necessary reforms of the Russian armed forces into five points: 1) basing force structures on a realistic understanding of threats; 2) balance of resources devoted to meeting threats with other social and political goals; 3) ensure the armed forces are supported by the population; 4) inter-service rivalries controlled; and, 5) cognizance of the need to develop definitions of national and internal security that do not raise unnecessary fears on the part of neighboring states and major peer competitors.

Whether or not the Russian armed forces can follow these general steps to reform is in the end the most important question that Donnelly and the rest of the contributors to the volume have attempted to address. Donnelly points to a critical element of reform in the penultimate section of the chapter, the need for a “very good information system” which subjects threat assessment to openness and oversight, to ensure the most fundamental element of any systematic reform, accurate threat assessment. A critical point for not only the Russian armed

forces, but on which the military, intelligence, and law enforcement apparatus of either states, need to learn.

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**V. L. Berseneev, I. E. Duniushkin, R. R. Sadriev, N. A. Salmin (eds.),
Doklady nauchnoi konferentsii voennaia reforma v Rossii : istoriia i
sovremenost', Ekaterinburg, November 2002.**

The book consists of thirty-one essays presented at a major conference in Yekaterinburg in 2002 on historical and contemporary Russian military reforms from the Tsarist, Imperial, Bolshevik, Soviet and post-Soviet periods, up to the present day. The book focuses primarily on military issues and problematics: ultimately, the equation of optimal resources for optimal outcomes during the time periods concerned is the issue at the heart of the papers presented; economic and social factors are only considered in terms of negative effects. However, viewing the reform problematic in a historical continuum forefronts the inter-relation of the Russian military's development with that of Russia as a culture and spatio-temporal entity since the birth of the modern era and, as such, usefully anchors contemporary reform debates in a historical context. Thus, the book provides a useful overview of Russian military reforms in history and their relevance to contemporary conceptions of the reform problematic: but one that errs towards military history.

The first section of the book focuses on the history of military reform in Russia. The challenge of the military reform in Russia is consistently related to the problem of limited resource allocation. The dialectic is quickly established : reformers had to choose between two concepts : extensive (large, but cheap and unprofessional army) versus intensive (small, but well trained and equipped army) forces. Usually, due to limited resources, the choice fell on the former.

The authors identify seven phases of military reform in Russia up to the post-Soviet independence, the ebb and flow of which elucidates the book's character. Firstly, those during the reign of Peter I (1720s), the main achievements of which were the creation of the regular army and a naval fleet. These intensive reforms facilitated Russia's victory in the 'Northern War' with Sweden, underpinning the

contributors' reverence for Peter I's military reforms, with them reckoned as the most successful in Russian military history.

Secondly, Arakcheev's reforms (1805-07), whose main goal was the increase of the Russian army, while at the same time saving state resources on the army maintenance. A system of military settlements was created (a self-sustaining military-agricultural system, in which the peasants were transformed into military recruits, responsible for army maintenance). Their ineffectiveness, the Arakcheev-instigated system being abolished in 1857, precipitated a new wave of reforms begun in earnest after the Crimean war.

Thirdly, Milyutin's reforms (1860-1870s), during which the transition from recruit to universal compulsory military service system began (completed only by 1874), and the systematic creation of military academies fomented a large military intelligentsia. With the reequipping of the army with more modern military equipment, the beginning of railway construction, division of Russia territory into fifteen military districts (which existed up to the disintegration of the Russian Empire), and the reduction of the term of service to fifteen years, the military took a more modern shape.

Fourthly, Sukhomlinov's reforms (1905-1912), precipitated by a period of stagnation of the military reform and army bureaucratization (1880-90s), represented a new wave of the military reforms that consisted in the growth of military expenditures (up to 25-40 per cent of the state budget), the militarization of the economy, and an increase in the armed forces' size.

Fifthly, the post-Civil War reforms of the Red Army. After First World War the Russian army ceased to exist - the Red Army created during the Civil War, and which went on to defeat the White-Russian forces, assert control over the Caucasus and conduct the later 'Storm over Asia', consisted of workers and

peasants, whose sole purpose was to defend the newly created Soviet state in the time of the civil war. The Bolsheviks' government extensive reduction of the armed forces (from 5.5m to 600,000 in 1923), transformed the army into a militia (territorial-militia) system, the limitations of which in the then international system led to a 1939 law on general military conscription.

Next, it is argued that from the 1950-1990s the Soviet army went through a process of gradual decline, stagnation, demoralization, and loss of prestige. Universal military conscription allowed the Soviet party *nomenklatura* to control the USSR's ethnically and geographically diverse population, the army serving the purposes of the *nomenklatura* to reinforce their position. No real reforms took place during throughout the period.

The stage is set for the final Soviet articulation of military reform, the Gorbachev's 1988 declaration of intent to reform the Soviet army was declared: but no action followed.

Despite this, the book lacks a discussion of the politico-military relations which fomented cyclical attitudes towards and capacities for substantive military reform: particularly relevant in terms of the apparently willed inertia of the post-Second World War period. Russia's wars, political tensions, and non-military individuals as drivers of military-technical and organizational reform are not addressed. The contrast between the massive energies deployed to scientifically/technically innovate in the realm of nuclear weapons (and other unconventional weapons in the 1980s) and the reality of a comparatively badly equipped albeit mass army are similarly omitted.

The second half of the book focuses on contemporary Russian military reform. The authors divide the history of the last decade in two : 1992-1997, during which

the old Soviet defence system degraded; and post-1997, when more systematic attempts were made to reform military structures.

The authors argue that in the 1990s the military potential/capacities of Soviet times were lost, and that Russian military power had to be rebuilt from scratch. The only parameter of power preserved in full from the Soviet era was that of nuclear weaponry. Military policies, determined by difficult economic considerations, had to be carried out in the general framework of reform efforts in the transitional society.

From 1997, reform became more substantive with the reduction of armed forces to 1.2m, a five service military structure reduced to three element structure (land forces, military-air forces, navy fleet), and the adoption of a number of documents aimed at systematic military reform. The focus often tends to material aspects of reform.

Finally, several key challenges for ongoing reform efforts are identified: bringing military capacities of the country into line with global standards; optimising the military structure to fit the economic capabilities of the state; enacting the new military doctrine; improving the armed forces qualitatively (in fighting capacity etc.); equipping them with modern arms and military technical equipment; introducing at least elementary state and civil control of the armed forces; reorganising the currently weak military management; and raising the morale of the army.

The book is to be commended for looking at Russian military reform in a historical perspective. The book's focus on ideal types of contemporary military organization for Russia reflects the historical debate on optimal military outcomes. This is at the expense discussions of domestic politico-military relations, particularly the issue of political stability and its effect on reform, and

the role of the military in the wider (and extensive) Russian 'security sector'. Unintentionally, the book perhaps reflects the weight of history and mentalities on the contemporary Russian army, for instance the recurring interest in operations in the North Caucasus, military-technical superiorities and the similar interest in the supposed keystones of a mass-army's military effectiveness – organizational cadres and morale/élan. These tendencies, combined with the clean lines of statistical fields, are indicative of the ghosts of the modern era in attitudes towards personnel training and reform which, when placed (albeit in limited contingents) in the cauldrons of Afghanistan and Chechnia, have ultimately led to fissures being exposed. Yet a consciousness of the capacity to mend such failings drives the book – Peter the Great's thoroughgoing reforms being thus the point of departure and destination. In sum, a very useful handbook on the (military) history of military reform in Russia.

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Aleksandr Gol'ts, *Armiia Rossii: 11 poteriannykh let*, Moscow: Zakharov, 2004, 224 pp.

Specialist of military questions, Aleksandr Gol'ts worked for *Red Star (Krasnaia Zvezda)*, the newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, before joining various prestigious magazines such as *Itoги*. He is considered one of the most prominent journalist on military matters in Russia today. His book, "*The Russian Army : 11 lost years*", is dedicated to military reforms in post-Soviet Russia. With his extensive knowledge of institutional realities of the military establishment, Gol'ts provides a well-documented and precise observation of the politics of transformation within the army. The first part of his book is chronological. He analyses the four main periods of reform. Starting from 1992, he distinguishes the projects of Gratchev (1992), Baturin (1996), Sergeev and Kokoshin (1997) and finally Ivanov and Kvashnin (2003). His exposition is quite clear : the successive ministers of defense did not manage to propose and implement an effective reform of the army. His conclusion is pessimistic : no positive result was achieved in the military field for 11 years - even at the intellectual level – for the military and political leaders did not managed to reach a consensus on this subject.

The last three parts of the book are thematic and devoted to the social, political and economic background explaining the failure of military reforms in Russia. As far as politics are concerned, Gol'ts analyses the problem of civil-military reorganization and civil control over the armed forces. He underlines the negative impact of the two successive Chechen wars on military reforms. From an economic point of view, he highlights the permanent shortages and financial problems of the Russian armed forces. In conclusion, he stresses the responsibility of the military high command of the army concerning failed reforms and quotes B. Yeltsin saying in 1997 : "Generals are today the main restraint on military reforms" (p. 177). [Editors' note]

On 8 May 2004, marking the end of World War II, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov announced that only professional armed forces could guarantee Russia's security and implementation of its international objectives. This implicit admission of failure to reform the military is superbly discussed by a former correspondent of *Krasnaia Zvezda*, the official daily newspaper of the Russian Army, in the book under review.

According to Colonel General Vasily Smirnov, chief of mobilization for the armed forces, about 18,000 potential recruits evaded military service during the latest conscription campaign¹. To solve this problem, a contract system has been instituted under which up to 70 percent of all future recruits will be paid to serve in uniform by the year 2008.

The military budget envisages an expansion in numbers of such servicemen as follows:

Year	Funding (billions of rubles)	Personnel (thousands)
2004	9.7	15.7
2005	20.9	54.5
2006	21.7	26.8 (sic)
2007	26.8	50.6

Incentives for enlistment include monthly bonuses from 3,300 to 5,000 rubles (the latter in Chechnia). Beginning with the year 2008, the term of military service will be reduced to one year.

However, the demographic crisis in Russia specifically affects the 18- to 22-year-olds, which permits recruitment to meet only between 40 and 50 percent of requirements. Thus, the goal of ten combat-ready divisions for the Caucasus and Central Asia by 2006 (compared with only three divisions and four brigades available now) appears beyond reach.

A meeting of some 500 generals and admirals from all service branches heard their commander-in-chief, President Putin, state that Russia's armed forces were not combat ready and also lacked up-to-date weapons².

Putin himself revealed that by the end of 2007, soldiers under contract would comprise almost half of those in uniform, which would allow draftees to serve only one year. By that time, he anticipated some 150,000 volunteers filling "high-readiness units." At this same meeting, Defense Minister Ivanov stated that the armed forces totaled 1,130,000 men and women or some 30,000 fewer than the previous year.

Putin also has promised to increase the military budget for 2004, which had totaled the equivalent of \$13.5 billion during the previous year. Ivanov complained that less than 20 percent of all weapons were up-to-date. He also revealed that 35 percent of non-combat deaths in the military have been suicides.

Finally the Novosti news agency reported that the former Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Air Force, and Navy (DOSAAF) is being resurrected. This organization had conducted pre-military training in the Soviet Union for youth between the ages of 16 and 18.

It is hoped that this valuable contribution to our knowledge by Aleksandr Gol'ts on a most important subject will be translated into English and, thus, reach the non-Russian reading public.

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