



**“I don't owe anyone anything”
Draft-avoidance in contemporary Russia**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines draft-avoidance in the context of contemporary Russia. The objective of the research is to shed light on army-avoiders' views and reflections, not only for a better understanding of the issue of the conscription crisis, but also to provide insights into the transition from the Soviet to the Russian era and how young men negotiate and relate to processes of social change. To meet this objective, the study draws on nine qualitative interviews with young Russian men. As a conceptual framework for analysis, the study uses a gender perspective, especially masculinity. The term empowerment, including the supplementary categories of identity, agency and critical consciousness, has been chosen as a theoretical lens to further illuminate the interviewees' views on conscription and experiences of draft-avoidance.

The study findings indicate that the interviewees wished to avoid the draft because they viewed the conscription system and military service as disempowering, as well as contradictory to their personal life aspirations. The findings also suggest that emerging masculinity notions and values integral to market capitalism contribute to empowering self-identifications, and thus play an important role in the process of draft-avoidance. Moreover, the findings indicate that draft-avoidance can be seen as a manifestation of the interviewees' ability to act as reflective and critical social agents who seek to actively direct their own lives. Furthermore, draft-avoidance appeared to be the interviewees' way of managing the contradictory challenges and expectations that the individual meets in a transitional society.

Analytically, the study brings evidence to the on-going debate that there is coexistence of change and continuity, and that in a transitional period, namely this can create tensions and conflicts, which the deepening crisis of the conscription system and growing draft-avoidance in Russia are an example of.

Key words agency, continuity, critical consciousness, draft-avoidance, empowerment, identity, military service, masculinity, social change

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, throwing Russia¹ into turmoil. The disappearance of state ideology, that for over 70 years had defined the direction of the society, led to radical economic, political and social changes (Oushakine 2009: 1). Further, the transition to both market economy and democracy had "no clear set of rules or paths to follow" (ibid.: 4). Even today, 20 years after the emergence of the Russian Federation, uncertainty seems to characterize Russia's process of "defining and redefining itself" (Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2002) in the post-Soviet era. Hence, it is not unusual to hear Russians state that they have no idea where the country is heading, and what will await them in the future.

At the micro level, in ordinary people's lives, the end of Soviet rule meant new challenges and responsibilities, but also new democratic freedoms. As the authoritarian state weakened and loosened its grip on the citizens, the etocratic social order (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2007), where every citizen's "social standing and identity" were defined "by their position in relation to the state", started to break down (Meshcherkina 2000: 105-106). Whereas before "in order to prosper, a man had to submit to the rules of the game" and the collective, now one could no longer expect the state to provide everything one needed for a worthy life (ibid.; also Belovranin 2011: 7). The abrupt transition to market system set new requirements for everyday survival, and people were compelled to become less dependent on the state. As a result, the unidirectionality that had characterized the Soviet society had to give way to pluralism in the form of new practices, strategies, values and identities typical for a capitalist society². (Ashwin & Lytkina 2004; Kay 2007: 2; Kiblitckaya 2000; Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2003b: 58; Mescherkina 2000).

In the post-Soviet era, one of the main fault lines between the state and citizens has been compulsory military service and maintenance of the Soviet-style conscription system. Young men evade the draft in growing numbers, but in recent years, the government has merely sought to strengthen the institution, notwithstanding its own promises about transition to a contract-based professional army. Maintaining the old conscription-based recruitment system is often justified with the lack of financial resources. However, universal male conscription is not only a question about

1 I regard Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation as one country, which is the common way of thinking among Russians, too (Taylor 2003: xi). The USSR was, of course, more than Russia and consisted altogether of fifteen republics that today are independent states with fates of their own. Nevertheless, the Russian predominance in the Soviet Union with Moscow as the unquestionable center was evident (Sakwa 2008: 209; Hedetoft with Blum 2008: 18).

2 As for example Berthoud (2003: 70, 83) points out, market capitalism is not only a question of how to organize the economic sphere but "the market mentality" and "economic logic [are] projected on to the social whole", affecting value systems and people's relationships both to each other and to the state.

money. As Gol'ts (2005: 203) points out, inability to imagine the country without an enormous army, that trains every male citizen to be a soldier, is part of the logic of militarised society.

1.1 Russian military in crisis

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, the new Russian Federation inherited its Cold War superpower army – weakened and outdated in many aspects (Mikhailenok 2006: 112), but nevertheless “accustomed to getting its own way” (Sakwa 2008: 392). The economic collapse of the 1990s shook the military badly throwing it into a deep crises, which it has not been able to overcome to date. However, it has shown striking resistance to change and remains in many ways, including the conscription system, a copy of its precedent, the Soviet army (Gudkov 2006: 56). The military is the last state institution that has not been reformed, even though the whole society around it has gone through drastic changes after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Gol'ts 2005; Belovranin 2011; Sakwa 2008: 395). It has been blamed for being a closed, archaic and nomenclatural³ institution. Instead of defending the interests of the majority, the army is said to represent a small elite group and thus undermine the country's democratic development as a whole (Belovranin 2011: 8; Mikhailenok 2006: 121-123; Gudkov 2006: 56). Even though debate about the urgent need for radical improvements has been going on since Boris Yeltsin's⁴ presidency, a truly successful and thorough military reform still waits to be carried out (Baev 1996; Mikhailenok 2006: 113-114).

Today, the Russian army still relies to a considerable degree on Soviet military doctrine and the traditional way of fighting a war that counts on unlimited human resources and the bravery of the Russian soldier⁵, disregarding lives lost (Gol'ts 2005: 202; Gudkov 2006: 56). In other words, the military strategy is based on the idea that winning a war is not so much about high technology and professionalized training as it is about having the biggest number of men to sacrifice in the battle (Gol'ts 2005). Essential to this strategy is mass mobilization through conscription. However, the Ministry of Defence faces grave and constant difficulties in trying to implement the biannual draft. In fact, a small minority of young men eligible for military service reports at the enlistment offices⁶. Recruitment difficulties have already undermined the army's performance ability. Hence, the crises of the Russian armed forces is to a significant degree a crises of its Soviet-style conscription system. (Pantelogiannis 2003: 11; Spivak & Pridemore 2004: iii; Eichler 2006; Petrov 2003: 292).

3 The Russian term *nomenklatura* (Engl. nomenclature) refers to the privileged bureaucratic Communist party elite in the Soviet Union.

4 The first president of the Russian Federation, 1991-1999.

5 According to Vihavainen (2008: 297), the exceptional combat fitness of Russian soldier is an important part of Russian national mythology.

6 http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20100401/158394675.html, <http://www.spacedaily.com/2002/021206145741.ooyw2y54.html>

Army, conscription and the question about Russia's future

The disintegration of the USSR weakened significantly Russia's position in the international arena (Sperling 2009: 218). However, since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, aspirations to return Russia its lost prestige and superpower status have grown stronger (Oushakine 2009: 7; Pirani 2009: 119). The armed forces had been the key pillar of the Soviet power (Hedetoft with Blum 2008: 19). In the government's view, not only Russia's past but also its future as a strong state depend on the military. Furthermore, like in the Soviet period, compulsory military service continues to be seen as the core of the strength of the armed forces. (Eichler 2012: Sperling 2009; Sperling 2003: 240).

Despite the uncertain times that the country has gone through, the army has always remained loyal and supportive of those in power (Smirnov 2009: 101). During its 20-year-long history, the Russian Federation has been involved in several military conflicts⁷. However, from time to time, it has been uncertain if the state authorities can rely on the military as an efficient instrument that will help to attain its foreign policy goals. The latest demonstration of the ineffectiveness and outdatedness of the Russian military and its strategies took place in 2008, when it was unable to "easily defeat even such a weak enemy as Georgia" (Golts 2011: 4; de Haas 2011: 5).

In his speech from 2006, president Putin tied young men's willingness to join the army to the question about Russia's future and fate in the following way (see also Sperling 2009: 231):

We must explain to the entire generation of young people that the question of whether or not to serve in the army should not even come up for a young person to begin with. We must all realize that without the army there would be no country. Nobody should have the slightest doubt on this score. No army, no Russia. (Quoted in Blum 2006: 2).

As the quotation above demonstrates, the current Russian leadership considers itself an 'educator'⁸ whose task is to shape the citizens' consciousness (Nikonova 2010: 360). In practice, it has tried to do this through patriotic education programs⁹. As part of them, Soviet-style basic military training has been (re-)introduced first as an elective, and later as a compulsory subject in schools as of 2003 (Sakwa 2008: 405; Webber & Zilberman 2006: 179-180). By targeting especially male youth at an

⁷ Chechnya in 1994-1996 and 1999-2003, Georgia 2008

⁸ The idea of "the pedagogical mission of the Russian state" in relation to its citizens can be traced back to the 18th century and Catherine the Great (Nikonova 2010: 360). Inspired by the ideas of the French Enlightenment, the tsarina's view was that ordinary people needed to be educated and controlled by an enlightened autocrat. According to Nikonova (idib.), this idea "gradually became a tradition of imperial political culture, which was later inherited by the Soviet regime" and the current Russian leadership.

⁹ http://archives.ru/programs/patriot_2015.shtml

early stage of their identity formation processes, the government hopes to enhance willingness to join the army (Shaburova 2005: 94). It wishes to mould young men into patriots who identify themselves with the role of soldier and support the government in its attempts to restore Russia's status as a military superpower (Sperling 2009: 218-234)¹⁰.

1.2 Topics in earlier research

The problematic situation of the Russian armed forces and the topic of draft-avoidance along with it have been widely discussed not only in the media but also in academic research both in Russia and internationally. Several Russian researchers have been occupied with studying young people's perceptions of military service (e.g. Shevtsov 2006; Klement'ev & Nikolaeva 2000; Peven' 1997). Many times Russian research about the topic tends to feed directly into policy debates. Appearing supportive of the government's attempts to attract more recruits to the army, many argue that the main reason for today's young men's reluctance to serve can be found in lacking patriotic education (see Shevtsov 2006: 113; Petrov 2003: 298-299; Peven' 1997: 25). Devaluation of such concepts as 'duty to the motherland' and army as 'school of life', together with the damaged image of the armed forces and lowering prestige of military professions, are often mentioned as the main factors explaining the growing draft-avoidance (Petrov 2003: 294; Klement'ev & Nikolaeva 2000: 73; Serebryannikov 1999: 42; Peven' 1997: 22).

Furthermore, Russian researchers have also blamed 'pacifist¹¹ propaganda' for advocating draft-evasion (Peven' 1997: 24; also Ivanova 2003). Such claims, however, appear to be in contradiction¹² with survey results, according to which 74 per cent of young Russians stated that they were ready to defend their families, but only 25 per cent said they would fight for the independence of the Russian state¹³ (Peven' 1997: 25). Caiazza's (2002: 108) view that wide-spread draft-avoidance is rather an expression of "substantial dissatisfaction with the Russian regime" than spreading pacifism seems thus more convincing. Petrov (2003: 295), on the other hand, sees that the underlying reason for draft-avoidance can be found in the changing value system: for today's young Russians personal profit has become more important than the common good or the interest of the state¹⁴.

10 http://www.gazeta.ru/news/social/2010/02/02/n_1452031.shtml, http://archives.ru/programs/patriot_2015.shtml

11 According to Pavlova (1999), pacifism had a bad name also in the Soviet Union where it was labeled as bourgeois.

12 I understand pacifism as an ethical standpoint that condemns "war immoral by its very nature" (Cady 2010: 76).

13 In Gavriluyuk & Malenkov's (2007) study about young people's values in Tjumenskaya oblast', 48,9 per cent of respondents stated they were ready to defend the fatherland. In Kay's (2006: 209) study, "[m]en's attitudes to military service reveal[ed] a strong sense of moral responsibility and an acceptance of a male obligation to protect and to serve". Thus, pacifism hardly explains the scale of draft-avoidance in Russia.

14 Also several other studies suggest that 'Western-style' values and ideals such as individualism, independence and freedom are strengthening in post-Soviet Russia (see e.g. Petrov 2008; Skutneva 2003; Ashwin 2000: 18; Meshcherkina 2000: 109; Ruchkin 1998).

In their survey study for draftees, Klement'ev and Nikolaeva (2000) sought to find out what kind of factors determine young men's attitude towards military service. Among their 155 respondents, negative attitudes were prevalent. The main reasons contributing to this were fear and perceived chaos in the armed forces, loss of personal resources, and lack of prestige and profit. Klement'ev and Nikolaeva argue, however, that the responses were contradictory; on the other hand, the draftees acknowledged also potential positive outcomes and elements of military service. These included, for example, development of physical strength. Comparing both negative and positive opinions, Klement'ev and Nikolaeva come to the conclusion that military service has not lost its value for young men, but what they struggle with is to see what real prospects it could offer.

In her extensive study *Men in Contemporary Russia: The Fallen Heroes of Post-Soviet Change?*, Kay (2006) has dedicated one chapter to analyzing men's views about military service. Kay's findings point to a generational gap. For those who had served in the armed forces in the Soviet Union, military service was a source of pride and it was viewed as a positive experience, a male duty and a patriotic act. On the other hand, as Kay describes, those of the older generation who for some reason had not been in the army in their youth were embarrassed and awkward about it. However, today's young men of conscription age were much less positive and more critical towards obligatory military service. (Kay 2006: 17, 60, 62, 64).

According to Kay (2006: 67-68), compulsory military service often conflicts with other "responsibilities and obligations" young Russians face in the context of market economy. Hence, Kay sees that the main reason for today's young men's reluctance to join the army lies in "new socio-economic realities", that is, the pressing need to get a decent job and keep it in order to get by or to enter on a career (Kay 2006: 17, 67-68). Moreover, like Klement'ev & Nikolaeva (2000: 73), Kay (2006: 67) argues that many regard the time spent in the service as a waste of personal resources because they simply do not see how the training could be of use in civil occupations.

Further, Semenova and Utkina (2004: 127, 130) have studied teenage boys' perceptions of the relatively new Russian holiday of 23rd of February, the Defender of the Fatherland day. They claim that one of the reasons why so few identify with the role of soldier is that today's young people have not internalized the "bloc consciousness" that Soviet generations were brought up to, and have not, thus, adopted the traditional enemy images. Serebryannikov (1999: 41-42) makes a similar note: compared to the 1980s, perceiving another state as a threat to Russia has become 2 to 3 times less common. As a consequence, even 70 per cent of young Russians consider maintaining an army

unnecessary.

Moreover, Semenova and Utkina (2004: 130) suggest that for today's Russian youth, the military no longer represents a crucial element for constructing and expressing one's masculinity. The same argument is also made by Eichler who has studied the Chechen wars from a gender perspective. She claims that the large-scale army-avoidance is a concret manifestation of "the weakened link between masculinity and the military in post-Soviet Russia". According to Eichler, *dedovshchina*¹⁵ is one of the main reasons that leads so many men to reject the role of soldier: "[T]he brutality of these practices and the many consequential deaths have made it increasingly difficult to maintain the gendered myth that strategies of humiliation and abuse are necessary to turn conscripts into 'men'." Further, the link between masculinity and the military is also undermined by the growing influence of new notions of capitalist masculinity. (Eichler 2006: 491-493).

Eichler has further developed her study about demilitarization and remilitarization of Russian society in her book *Militarizing men: Gender, conscription and war in Post-Soviet Russia* (2012). Taking feminist international relations and the concept of militarized masculinity as her theoretical starting points, Eichler analyses the viewpoints of both activists from the Soldiers' mothers' movements, Chechen war veterans and draft evaders. Her conclusion is that "militarized masculinity has been both challenged *and* reinforced in post-Soviet Russia".

Taken together, despite the fact that much of research has been motivated by the conscription crisis caused by widespread draft-avoidance, no study has focused particularly on draft-avoiders' perspective. For example, in both Peven' (1997) and Klement'ev & Nikolaeva's (2000) surveys all respondents were conscript soldiers. Further, a considerable amount of attention has been dedicated to studying and analysing the work of the Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers, a non-governmental organization that is very active in discussions about conscription and military service, and which is often regarded as the voice of draft-avoiders in the public (e.g. Caiazza 2002; Eichler 2006; Zawilski 2010).

1.3 Problem statement

This study seeks to bring focus to the perspectives of young Russian men who have wished and managed to avoid compulsory military service, and their viewpoints on conscription and draft-

15 Brutal bullying and hazing of new conscripts

avoidance. In this way, by tapping into the draft-avoiders' reflections, it hopes to create better and fuller understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. The study's position is that, in order to understand draft-avoidance, it is necessary to shed light on the issue at the level of individual men and obtain first-hand knowledge from draft-avoiders themselves. The study seeks to achieve this by giving priority to 1st person accounts and vocalizing social actors that have been mostly silent in discussions concerning conscription and compulsory military service (see Caiazza 2002).

Furthermore, the study aims to provide insights into the transition from the Soviet era to the Russian and how young men as social actors relate to social change. The young men's immediate social context is increasingly characterized by the processes of globalization and market capitalism. However, at the same time, the context is also shaped by the structures of the old Soviet society in the form of the conscription system and Soviet notions of male citizenship and masculinity ideals that the state continues to hold on to (Eichler 2012: 84). Hence, through the personal and individual, this study seeks to be a tool for understanding wider processes of change and continuity in today's Russia (see McLeod & Thomson 2009: 8-10).

1.4 Research questions

Against this context, the main question this thesis aims to answer is: Why do young Russian men seek to avoid compulsory military service?

To be able to answer the research question, I have formulated the following supplementary questions:

- What are the draft-avoiders' views about the conscription system and military service?
- What do they intend to do instead of going to the army?
- How do they rationalize and justify draft-avoidance?
- What kind of role do social networks, masculine identity and critical consciousness play in draft-avoidance?
- What do the young men's reflections and viewpoints mean for the understanding of processes of social change in today's Russia?

1.5 Finding my thesis

Curiosity marked the beginning of this thesis project. In the spring of 2010, I was an exchange student at the Pomor State University in Archangel, North-West Russia. It was the 65th anniversary of Soviet victory in World War II. Born in Finland, a country whose national identity is closely tied up with the trauma of the Winter and Continuation Wars, I have grown used to pompous, repetitive commemorations of war. However, after weeks and months, as the Victory Day of 9th of May drew closer, the fact that in the Russian spring the War really seemed to be *everywhere* started to overwhelm me. I thought: surely there is no need for *so much* repetition? After all, all the Russians I socialized with appeared to know the history of their country much better than what I was used to from home! Everybody knew the official story about the War, and the constant repetitions of it began only to feel more like a strange exaggeration – at least to me, an outsider. Only later, as I started to study more in-depth the meaning of the Great Patriotic War, I was to discover that its omnipresence was in no way a coincidence, but a project driven by the state, carefully designed and certainly not without a purpose.

My attention was especially drawn to the images of veterans and soldiers. Perhaps because they also seemed to be everywhere, from postcards and posters lining the streets to bookshops, cinemas, museums and special events at the university. If the War was the main topic, brave Soviet soldiers who defeated Hitler's army were the centre of that topic. In a newspaper, Russian boys assured that they would always be ready to defend the Fatherland, in the same way and in the same spirit as their grandfathers had done. I was used to this kind of stories from home where the narrative of the Winter War and the innocent Finland in the midst of superpower games still serves well as a rationale for universal male conscription. A thousand times I had heard Finnish boys say that they will go to the army and learn to defend the Fatherland so that veterans' sacrifice would not be rendered meaningless.

I was curious to know if Russia and Finland really had a lot in common when it came to the meaning of war as a motivator for my generation to join the army. After all, both countries have universal conscription that make all men liable for military service. Moreover, in both countries it is the very same great war but only from two different perspectives that is given a special meaning. Thus, out of curiosity, I started to talk about the topic with Russian boys I met, mostly at the university. In Finland, the vast majority of young men serve in the military. However, to my surprise, none of the Russians I got to know were planning nor expressed willingness to join the army. Quite the contrary, I got to hear amazing stories about youngsters who were specially trying

to avoid being drafted. I was puzzled, and wondered: why did the war narrative not work in the same way in Russia as it did in Finland? Why did so many young Russian men not take compulsory military service for granted? I wanted to understand better. That was the beginning of this thesis.

In the first place, my plan was to write about draft-avoidance from a masculinity perspective. After all, conscription is a gendered institution, and feminist research has shown that the military does not only produce professional soldiers but, more importantly, men who identify themselves with a military or militarized notion of masculinity (see e.g. Eichler 2012). Further, in feminist research and critique of international relations, the militarization of men's identities has been connected to violence on both micro and macro levels, as well as to the classic dilemma of IR, namely that of War and Peace. In order to be able to wage war, a state has to make sure that at least a part of its male population identifies itself as soldiers who are ready to die for their country:

[T]he waging of war and the militarization of men ultimately depend on the decisions of individual citizens. Whether women and men accept the idea that military service is key to masculine identity and/or men's citizenship has direct consequences for state policies or war and militarization. [...] Masculinity plays a central role in states' (re)production of military violence. [...] Militarized masculinity is part of the foundation of the contemporary international system. Therefore an analysis of militarized masculinity enhances our understanding of how states and the international system operate, and the potential for their transformation. (Eichler 2012: 136-137).

Since my background was both in International Relations and gender studies, anchoring my study in this framework seemed like a logical, and not least a comfortable choice.

However, the focus of the study was to change after my fieldwork in Russia in 2011, and interviews with young men who had managed to avoid military service. I started to feel that my preliminary choice of theory was drawing attention away from what the interviewees themselves actually had highlighted and what was important for them. The original approach did not seem to resonate with the reflections and experiences the interviewees had shared with me. The concept of militarized masculinity appeared somewhat limiting and that it did little to help explain what draft-avoidance was about for the avoiders themselves.

Unexpectedly, two articles inspired and helped me to find my thesis. The first was Cockburn's. She has written: "Women's reflections on war are closer to those on the culturally attuned sociologist or anthropologist than those of the international relations discipline which [...] tends to speak for and from the abstract masculinity of statesmen, diplomats and military" (Cockburn 2010: 146).

Cockburn points to the importance of finding a right perspective. Thanks to her comment, I realized that I did not wish to write on an abstract level, nor in general, in a way that I feel is distanced and disconnected from actual people and their lived lives. I did not want to reduce the interviewees' stories into generalizing descriptions of changing masculinities in today's Russia. In the light of the interview data, neither did questions about militarization of masculinity and Russian society seem relevant in their abstractness. I understood that I wanted to find a perspective that would make the young Russian men visible and heard, not bury their reflections and viewpoints under theoretical presuppositions. Further, another source of inspiration became Conway's (2008) study on white South African conscientious objectors during apartheid. It lent me confidence to analyse draft-avoidance in Russia from a new perspective, namely that of empowerment.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. In the next chapter, the context of the study is further detailed with focus on the history of conscription in Russia, and draft-avoidance today. Chapter 3 discusses and reflects on the methodological issues of the study. Chapter 4 presents the conceptual framework of the thesis. Chapter 5 focuses on informant presentation, data presentation and analysis. Finally, a summary and concluding remarks will be offered in chapter 6.

Chapter 2. Conscription in Russia

This chapter focuses on conscription in Russia from both historical and contemporary perspectives. It begins with the Soviet period, especially the meaning of conscription at the time. It then looks at challenges facing the institution today, looking particularly at the issue of draft-avoidance. Taken together, the chapter attempts an outline of the research context; the changing dynamics of the conscription system in contemporary Russia.

2.1 The Soviet era¹⁶

The establishment of universal conscription in Russia can be traced back to the time of Peter the Great¹⁷. In 1705, "all classes of the population were [made] liable for military service" (Nikolaieff 1949: 117-118). However, Peter's successors did not apply the principle of universality consistently. It was the Soviet constitution from 1936 that, on the eve of the World War II, re-established the institution of obligatory military service by declaring the defence of the fatherland as "the sacred duty of every citizen¹⁸". The law on conscription applied only to male citizens. (Nikolaieff 1949: 125; Eichler 2012; Zhel'vis 2011: 231).

The re-establishment of universal male conscription was part of the development of Soviet society as a whole. The state aimed at creating a new Soviet citizen who would devote him-/herself to the noble cause of building and safeguarding communism (Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2003b: 27-28; Vodichev & Lamin 2008: 118). A central part of the project was establishing a gender-based division of labour, which would serve the needs of the state and where the conscription system played a key role (Ashwin 2000: 1; Tartakovskaya 2000: 118-119). As a consequence, the spectrum of socially accepted gender roles in Soviet society became strictly limited (Ashwin & Lytkina 2004: 307). Whereas the domestic sphere and parenting were left for women, every male citizen was treated as a potential soldier who was needed to defend the socialist motherland from "the perceived military threat from capitalist enemies" (Schrand 2002: 203)¹⁹. In Caiazza's (2002: 5) words, "motherhood and military service represented the pinnacle of what female and male citizens were expected to contribute to society". Hence, male citizenship was first and foremost defined in terms

16 At its best, this section is a simplistic account of conscription in the Soviet period, as the scope of the thesis does not allow presenting and discussing every detail. It should be noted that the Soviet era was not a static period, but rather, the society developed and had a dynamic of its own, also the conscription system.

17 1682-1725

18 "Article 132. Universal military service is law. Military service in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army is an honourable duty of the citizens of the U.S.S.R." <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons04.html#chap10>

19 Nevertheless, also women were expected to work outside the home.

of the duty of soldiering.

The purpose of two or three²⁰ years of compulsory military service was not only to teach men soldiering. More importantly, the army was meant to be the school of communism that would “mold young men into patriotic and loyal citizens” (Eichler 2012; also Mikhailenok 2006: 112; Gudkov 2006: 41). Furthermore, the military was also presented as the main institution of male socialization, 'the school of life for men', and becoming a soldier as a rite of passage into manhood, a fulfilment of masculinity (Belovranin 2011: 7; Eichler 2012; Kon 2002). The notion that a man was not a real man, had he not served in the army, was deliberately constructed and actively propagated by the state, and most Soviet citizens came to subscribe to it (Belovranin 2011: 7). Hence, through conscription, the state successfully built a link between Soviet male identity and the role of soldier (Schrand 2002: 203).²¹ Since the USSR relied on the military as the foundation of its superpower position, this myth about manliness was part of a larger ideological system that served the interests of the state both on national and international levels (Belovranin 2011: 7; Hedetoft with Blum 2008: 19).

After the Great Patriotic War, the notion of military service as a sacred duty of every truly patriotic Soviet man grew only stronger (Kay 2006: 47). Veterans were heroized and made into “role models for the younger generation” (Eichler 2012: 15). Up until mid-1970s, at least half of conscription aged men served in the armed forces (Gudkov 2006: 42).

The military was a powerful and central institution in the Soviet state²² (Belovranin 2011: 8). There was a prestige to military professions, and “the role of soldier offered disadvantages as well as advantages to the individual man” (Schrand 2002: 204). On the one hand, if one wished to lead a comfortable life without troubles, one had to submit to the collective, hierarchical order in the military and in the society in general (Belovranin 2011: 7; Eichler 2012: 25). On the other hand, the army had an important and positive function as an institution of vertical social mobility. In other words, in the repressive society, it provided a channel to high status jobs and positions, and worked thus as a kind of 'social lift'. For many young men, joining the military meant a chance to leave behind the monotonous countryside or small town life somewhere in the periphery of the empire, to see and experience the world, as well as to change their life prospects. (Mikhailenok 2006: 106-107;

20 In the navy, service lasted three years (Jones 1982; Andresen 2010).

21 All this is, of course, typical of all societies with universal male conscription.

22 According to Sakwa (2008: 392), “[t]he USSR was one of the world's most militarised states with five million men under arms in 1988 and another four million employed in defence industries”. Around 15 to 20 per cent of GDP was spent on the army. (see also Vihavainen 2008: 304).

Gudkov 2006: 41).

2.2 The post-Soviet era and the conscription crisis

Military service loses popularity

According to Eichler (2012: 59), "[d]raft evasion and desertion were marginal phenomena in Soviet society." However, during the 1980s and 1990s, Russia's military discredited itself in a number of ways, something which changed people's perceptions of conscription drastically²³. The failed military campaign in Afghanistan in the 1980s was followed by the difficult and unpopular Chechen wars. In 2000, Russians were shocked by the accident of submarine Kursk. The poor conditions that conscripts had to bear with, including lack of food²⁴ and adequate equipment, as well as the growing corruption and lack of discipline in the armed forces were made commonly known by the media. The Russian public was also alarmed by the high non-combat death and suicide rates, often a result of bullying and hazing known as *dedovshchina*. All these factors together led to a decline in public trust towards the military, making also conscription highly unpopular. (Zhel'vis 2011: 231; Lokshin and Yemtsov 2005: 1; Petrov 2003: 294; Eichler 2012). In addition, the breakdown of Soviet authoritarianism and the promise of social change and democracy made it possible to contest obligatory military service (Eichler 2012).

Whereas about 30 years ago, 90% of draft-aged youngsters reported that they were eager to join the army, now the numbers have literally turned upside down, as 80% expresses reluctance to serve (Serebryannikov 1999: 44). Today, the majority of Russians regard conscript soldiers first and foremost free as labour force for the state (Mikhailenok 2006), and some compare obligatory military service to serfdom²⁵. This drastic change in attitudes manifests also in the growing number of men trying to avoid service²⁶ (Lokshin & Yemtsov 2005: 6; Serebryannikov 1999: 44). In theory, all Russian men between 18 and 27 are still required to serve in the country's armed forces. In practice, however, only a small minority of those eligible for service, about 10 %, fulfil their constitutional duty (Gudkov 2006: 42; Mikhailenok 2006: 115). Draft-avoidance has become so commonplace that, according to an independent military expert Pavel Felgenhauer, the whole conscription institution is about to collapse²⁷.

23 This was the same time when the Soldiers' Mothers movement was started (Eichler 2012: 85).

24 Scandals have continued to date, and for example, news about undernourished soldiers are regular.

25 <http://www.mk.ru/print/articles/520932-novoe-krepostnoe-pravo.html>

26 <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1094351.html>

27 <http://news.mail.ru/politics/4019042/>

Even though conscription affects the lives of hundreds of thousands of young Russian men twice every year, there are neither frequent nor visible protests to it. For example, a demonstration for voluntary military service held in Moscow in 2007 managed to mobilize only about a hundred people²⁸.

Recruiting the poor and the sick

The rapid decline in the number of conscripts results partly from the loosened draft regulations (Lokhshin & Yemtsov 2005: 6). Another factor contributing to the manning problems in the military is the challenging demographic situation in the country. Russia's population declines every year by about 700,000 (Sakwa 2008: 315). The birthrates started to fall in the end of the 1980s and were especially low in the beginning of the 1990s. As a consequence, there are less potential recruits available today.²⁹

Since filling the annual draft quotas has become increasingly challenging, the military recruitment offices have gained bad reputation for their illegal recruitment practices. Physically unfit and ill youngster who should have been granted exemption, students with deferments, and even foreigners have been forced to serve³⁰. (Lokhshin & Yemtsov 2005: 6- 7). According to Webber & Zilbermann (2006: 117), “[s]uch behaviour on the part of the military institution displays the characteristics associated with an authoritarian State, rather than a liberal democracy”. The military has also been criticised for recruiting ex-convicts in growing numbers (Zhel'vis 2011: 232).

Further, the problem of manning is not only a question of quantity, but also of quality³¹. Even as many as 59% of Russia's population live in poverty³², a fact that manifests itself in conscripts' poor health (Klement'ev & Nikolaeva 2000: 72). Many suffer from chronic diseases (Peven' 1997: 22). The average height among conscripts is 1,6-1,7 meters, and the majority weighs only around 50 kg, whereas the ideal numbers would be 1,8 meters and 63 to 74 kg³³. The Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers claims that “95 per cent of conscripts are sick in some degree”, and therefore not fit for service³⁴. Moreover, alcohol and drug abuse are alarmingly usual (Peven' 1997: 22), and 30% of

28 http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2007/09/29/n_1123346.shtml

29 <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1888238,00.html>, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1094351.html>

30 <http://www.mk.ru/print/articles/589410-menyaem-armiyu-na-zagranitsu.html>,
http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Military_Concerned_With_Evasion_As_Army_Draft_Begins/2176960.html

31 See e.g. <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=12226>

32 <http://www.rosbalt.ru/blogs/2012/01/11/932127.html>

33 http://www.aif.ru/article/print/article_id/40987

34 <http://www.gzt.ru/print/352413.html>

draftees suffer from mental illnesses³⁵.

As the above mentioned figures testify, "the burden of conscription falls disproportionately on the poor" (Lokshin & Yemtsov 2005: 1). Around 80% of conscripts come from the countryside or small towns³⁶ and from poor, low-educated working class or rural families. Only about 4 to 6% of draftees are from the two main cities, Moscow³⁷ and St. Petersburg, and merely 16,8% have higher education³⁸. Young men with middle class background or from elite families, who would be the healthiest and most fit for service, are the ones who are most successful in avoiding it³⁹. (ibid.; Mikhailenok 2006: 119; Peven' 1997: 21-22).

Hence, the conscription system both reflects and deepens the stratification of Russian society, the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and have-nots (Mikhailenok 2006: 124-125; Petrov 2003: 296). Those, who are better-off, can afford to use one of the many methods to avoid the draft, "shifting the burden to the poor" (Lokshin & Yemtsov 2005: 3; Mikhailenok 2006; 124-125). Mikhailenok (ibid.: 114, 116) claims that instead of working as a 'social lift' like the Soviet army, today's Russian military has turned into an institution of social outsidersness that gathers those who do not have the right social networks or financial resources to buy themselves off. Further, coinciding with "critical years of entry into the labour", military service "distorts working histories possibly leading to some losses of incomes over the entire work-life horizon" (Lokshin & Yemtsov 2005: 9-10).

In the Soviet period, military service was a male rite of passage. Today, however, the process of solving the question of how to avoid the army marks the entrance into adulthood for many young Russians⁴⁰. Serebryannikov (1999: 44) claims that 'dodging the draft' has become an admired thing to do among youth. A young man showing eagerness to serve can be regarded as a strange exception⁴¹. Nevertheless, in the rural areas, military service continues to be considered prestigious, and many young men are eager to serve. After completing compulsory service, many decide to continue working on contract basis. Thus, for some, the army can still mean new life prospects.⁴²

35 <http://news.mail.ru/society/1801261/>

36 <http://nvo.ng.ru/printed/224476>

37 Every third draft-avoider lives in Moscow: <http://www.ng.ru/printed/23933>.

38 <http://www.vz.ru/society/2010/7/26/420812.html>

39 Kay (2006: 54) quotes a Russian military recruitment officer in her study: "The problem is that lots of the young men who really are fit both physically and mentally do go on into higher education and beyond into postgraduate studies. So we really have to fight for every single fit conscript that we can get."

40 <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/10/world/europe/10iht-russia.html>

41 <http://arh.mk.ru/print/articles/595556-god-sluzhi-vek-uchis.html>

42 <http://www.ng.ru/printed/77601>

According to a survey, 35% of conscripts served against their will, and 40% were not pleased with their service period⁴³. In other words, there are still many young men in Russia who are willing to go to the army, find it not that bad an experience and decide to tie their future to the armed forces.

The problem of violence in the military: Dedovshchina

If in the Soviet times the military offered "idealized images of masculinity, manly comradeship and friendship"⁴⁴ (Kon 2002: 232), the situation today is quite different. One of the biggest plagues that the Russian military struggles with is *dedovshchina*, cruel harassment and violence against junior conscripts⁴⁵. It is one of the main factors contributing to young men's aversion to the army⁴⁶ (Zhel'vis 2011: 232; Novik & Perednya 2006: 103).

Moreover, *dedovshchina* is frequently the reason behind desertion cases, which have also been on the increase⁴⁷ (Mikhailenok 2006: 115), and, even more sadly, the high non-combat casualty and suicide statistics in the Russian army. According to the Committee of the Soldier's Mothers, there are on average 2000 deaths per year in the Russian military, one fourth of which are suicides.⁴⁸ Malnutrition among soldiers is also often connected to *dedovshchina*: seniors often demand new conscripts to give up their food rations.⁴⁹

However, the representatives of the army have played down the issue, and claim that the problem is not widespread. The military has tried to avoid responsibility, for example, by suggesting that the 'roots of *dedovshchina*' can be found in the homes and environment today's young men grown up in, not in the army itself. Moreover, it has blamed the media for reporting only about incidents that put the armed forces in an unfavourable light, and thereby fostering the prevalent negative opinion about the army and draft avoidance.⁵⁰

43 <http://nvo.ng.ru/printed/224476>

44 My translation

45 <http://www.barentsobserver.com/en/sections/security/soldier-beaten-healthless-pechenga>

One of the most famous examples that shocked Russians in 2006, was the case of conscript Andrey Sychev, whose legs and genitals had to be amputated as a result of *dedovshchina* (see e.g. <http://rian.ru/analytics/20060127/43220027.html>)

46 <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1094351.html>

47 <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=25023>

48 <http://www.gzt.ru/print/352413.html>, <http://www.networkeurope.org/feature/draft-dodging-russian-style>, <http://www.vz.ru/news/2006/2/27/24029.html>

49 <http://news.mail.ru/inregions/foreast/25/5919780/>, <http://www.newizv.ru/society/2003-11-13/2756-armija-golodnyh.html>

50 <http://rian.ru/society/20041215/760818.html>, <http://kp.ru/daily/25681/841024/>. About the difficult relations between the media and the army, see e.g. Renz's study (2006).

2.3 Avoiding the draft

Playing by the draft rules

How to avoid military service is an openly discussed topic in Russia, and the many ways to go about it, both legal and illegal, are commonly known⁵¹. Avoiding the draft does not necessarily imply illegal means. According to law, military service can be postponed due to family circumstances. These include: having a family member who requires nursing, being legal guardian to one's sibling, being a single parent, having one or more children or a child who is disabled, or having a spouse who is pregnant. Furthermore, deferment can be obtained for a variety of health reasons. Also enrolment in full-time education and employment in the public sector entitle to a postponement.⁵²

As many as 80 per cent of those, who are called up and appear at draft station, are granted exemption or deferment⁵³. However, it is often difficult or even impossible to tell whether a young man simply happened to, or whether he actually did everything in order to fit into one of the exemption or deferment categories. For example, many times academic ambitions are a secondary motivator for enrolment in postgraduate studies. In order to obtain deferments, fictive marriages are also arranged, while some decide to start a family at a young age merely to avoid being drafted⁵⁴. Others try to imitate chronic diseases⁵⁵. Some young men even prefer a white chit⁵⁶ to call-up papers, even though it means they will never be able to get a job in state institutions⁵⁷.

In order to avoid being drafted, young Russian men are also ready to take extreme measures. Some find a way to leave the country and stay abroad until they turn 27.⁵⁸ For others, committing a crime and serving time in jail is a more attractive option than doing military service⁵⁹. Moreover, the question about military service and how to avoid it affects many times not only young men themselves, but also their families⁶⁰. Mothers are often ready to do everything for their sons to avoid call-up⁶¹. I was, for instance, told by a Russian lady that the main reason for her remarrying and

51 <http://www.dv.kp.ru/daily/25682/841495/>

52 <http://pravomer.info/>, www.soldiers-mothers-rus.ru/

53 <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2008/12/29/in-russia-the-favorite-pastime-of-draft-dodging>

54 http://www.trud.ru/article/25-10-2007/213653_zhenilsja_na_starushke_i_izbezhaj_prizyva_v_armiju.html

55 <http://news.mail.ru/politics/1539342/>

56 In Russian, *belyi билет*. Grants exemption due to mental disease.

57 <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1888238,00.html>

58 <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20101013/160942293.html>

59 <http://news.mail.ru/inregions/siberian/42/2933175/>, <http://news.mail.ru/incident/2176955/>

60 The topic has been discussed also in the Russian cinema. The movie *Elena* (2011) examines the dilemma of how far the main character is ready to go in order to save her grandson from military service. In the end, she commits a murder to obtain the money needed for buying him off.

61 http://www.pressmon.com/cgi-bin/press_view.cgi?id=1225447

moving abroad with her son was that she wanted to secure that he would not have to serve in the military in Russia.

Hide-and-seek with voenkomat

In Russia, the call-up is organized biannually, in spring and autumn. Each region, city and district has its own draft quota. According to legislation, draft-avoidance becomes punishable only if a draftee has personally received his call-up papers but fails to show up draft station (Eichler 2012: 61). Hence, many take advantage of the draft system itself and simply make sure they are not at home during the spring and autumn drafts when military officials deliver call-up papers to registered addresses.⁶² The estimated amount of young men who every year evades the draft in this way vary from 100 000 to over 200 000, and the number is growing⁶³ (Zhel'vis 2011: 231; Klement'ev & Nikolaeva 2000: 72). The state being too weak and inefficient to control the situation, most of them manage to avoid military service (Caiazza 2002: 108), but some do get caught for 'draft-dodging'⁶⁴. Punishments vary from fines to up to two years in jail. In most cases, those found guilty pay a penalty, but every year also 800 to 1000 young men have to serve time in jail for illegal draft-avoidance.⁶⁵

Corruption

Often, draft-avoidance involves indisputably illegal actions. Corruption forms one of the most pressing problems in the Russian military in general, and the number of scandals has only been on the rise during the past years⁶⁶. Also conscription has become a "system ridden by corruption" (Lokhshin & Yemtsov 2005: 1), and news, for example, about military personnel selling exemption certificates are not a rarity⁶⁷. Moreover, the conscription system feeds corruption also outside the military. Resorting to falsified documents is a common way out from military duty. For a significant financial compensation, some doctors are also ready to issue medical certificates that declare a draftee unfit for service⁶⁸, and fictive educational institutions provide young men student status that guarantees deferment⁶⁹.

62 <http://news.mail.ru/politics/1539342/>

63 http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Military_Concerned_With_Evasion_As_Army_Draft_Begins/2176960.html, http://www.trud.ru/article/02-02-2010/235892_zhestkie_mery_dlja_uklonistov.html, <http://news.mail.ru/politics/4166523/>, http://www.gazeta.ru/news/social/2010/02/02/n_1452031.shtml, <http://www.moscownews.ru/russia/20120328/189570351.html>

64 <http://news.mail.ru/incident/1778032/>, <http://news.mail.ru/incident/1798491/>

65 http://www.trud.ru/article/02-02-2010/235892_zhestkie_mery_dlja_uklonistov.html, <http://news.mail.ru/politics/4166523/>

66 <http://www.aif.ru/sport/news/36196>, http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/distrikt/troms_og_finnmark/1.7952713, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/corruption-military-cosmic-proportions>, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/node/20927>

67 <http://vz.ru/society/2009/4/21/278604.html>, <http://news.mail.ru/incident/1881047/>

68 <http://news.mail.ru/inregions/ural/86/4009601/>, <http://ivanovo.mk.ru/print/articles/585127-novoe-delo-vrachey.html>, <http://www.aif.ru/health/news/26125>

69 <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20101013/160942293.html>

Bribery, as a way to avoid military service, has in fact become so widespread and commonly known that in 2010 a bill legalizing 'buying oneself off' was presented in the Duma, the lower chamber of the Russian parliament. The proposed price for not having to serve was one million rubles and the money collected would have been used to professionalize the army.⁷⁰ However, the law proposal was rejected. Neither did it receive popular support: according to a survey, two thirds of Russians objected the idea and thought it would only deepen social inequality⁷¹.

2.4 Reforms and prospects for the future

Length of service

As an answer to the worsening recruitment situation in the armed forces, the Russian government decided to reduce the length of compulsory military service, first to one and a half years in 2007, and then down to one year as of 2008. These changes were thought to make serving more appealing. They were also hoped to solve the problem of *dedovshchina*, which was seen first and foremost as an issue of misuse of senior position by those who were serving their second year. At first, the incentive did seem to work, as the amount of young men listing for service grew⁷². However, reducing the service time without cutting down the overall number of men in the armed forces meant that, in practice, more draftees were needed now. For example, in Leningradskaya oblast', the region surrounding the city of Saint Petersburg, the draft plan almost tripled compared to what it had been before 2008⁷³. Hence, the manning problem remained or even worsened in some cases. What comes to *dedovshchina*, some claim that the situation has merely exacerbated⁷⁴. According to the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, officers have now started to take the role of the 'older' bully more frequently⁷⁵.

Alternative service

Since 1993, the constitution of the Russian Federation has guaranteed a right to conscientious objection⁷⁶ (Horeman & Stolwijk 1998: 240; Sakwa 2008: 406). However, it was not until 2004 that the right was enshrined in actual legislation and conscripts could apply for alternative non-military

70 <http://www.rg.ru/2010/06/08/otkup.html>

71 <http://www.mk.ru/print/articles/516777-ot-rodinyi-ne-otkupishsya.html>

72 http://news.mail.ru/inregions/st_petersburg/91/3672636/, <http://news.mail.ru/society/1682732/>, http://www.trud.ru/article/02-04-2007/204223_sokraschenie_sroka_sluzhby_v_armii--sposob_borby_s/print

73 http://news.mail.ru/inregions/st_petersburg/91/2474348/

74 <http://www.mk.ru/print/articles/520932-novoe-krepostnoe-pravo.html>

75 <http://www.gzt.ru/print/352413.html>

76 Article 59.3. According to Coppeters (1992), the right to conscientious objection can be regarded as a question of political tolerance, and "freedom of thought, conscience and religion".

service. The law on alternative military service defined religious convictions and pacifism as legally approved grounds for refusal to bear arms⁷⁷. However, according to Sakwa (ibid.), it also "faithfully reflected the concerns of the military", and many consider it a punishment already because of the length of the service – 42 or 41 months⁷⁸. The amount of applicants has been only some hundreds every year, and most of them refer to religious grounds⁷⁹. Thus, the widespread unwillingness to serve in the armed forces has not been channelled into alternative service, nor is that likely to happen in the future.

Attempts to keep the conscription system alive

Further, in order to increase the amount of draftees, the number of deferment categories has been cut down several times⁸⁰ (Sakwa 2008: 406). According to the latest information, conscription laws might be further tightened in order to make evading the draft impossible. The bill "would make all eligible men between the ages of 18 and 27 obliged to collect their summons in person or be considered a draft dodger"⁸¹. The government hopes that these measures will help to put an end to the army's recruitment difficulties. Furthermore, thousands of women already serve in the armed forces on contract basis. Recently, it has been suggested that military duty should be extended to women, too⁸².

Following the example set by countries like the USA, France and Germany, the Russian leadership has promised transition to a professional army and to abolish conscription (Petrov 2003: 293; Sakwa 2008: 405; Eichler 2012). However, the reforms seem to take painfully long⁸³. For the moment, the armed forces cannot afford to increase the number of soldiers recruited on voluntary (contract) basis⁸⁴, and according to former president Dmitrii Medvedev's announcement, the army will continue to rely on conscription to fill the ranks at least the next 10 to 15 years⁸⁵. In the meanwhile, the government is doing everything to keep the conscription system alive.

In the government's view, the underlying reason for young Russians' growing unwillingness to serve in the military is the post-Soviet generations' lack of patriotism. Hence, it has tried to tackle the

77 <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=103351>, <http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/world/-spravka-o-patsifizme-/11738.html>

78 <http://rian.ru/analytics/20051010/41654816.html>

79 <http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/politics/-aljternativnyi-grazhdanskii-srok-/95215.html>

80 http://www.businesspress.ru/newspaper/article_mld_40_ald_378115.html

81 http://en.rian.ru/mlitary_news/20120328/172440775.html

82 www.rusnovosti.ru/news/238181

83 In 1996, Boris Yeltsin set the year 2000 as the goal when conscription would be abolished (Horeman & Stolwijk 1998: 239).

84 <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20101013/160942293.html>, http://english.ruvr.ru/2012_03_31/70249693/

85 http://en.rian.ru/mlitary_news/20110404/163367728.html

perceived problem through a state program called "Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Russian Federation"⁸⁶ (Nikonova 2010: 354; Sperling 2009: 218). Putin has underlined military service as a male duty, and according to Eichler (2012), the state leadership aims at "re-establishing a strong link between masculinity, military service, and patriotism".

Further, the patriotic education programs have sought to construct "continuity between Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods" with a particular focus on military victories, especially the Great Patriotic War⁸⁷ (Blum 2006: 2; Sperling 2009: 218-234; Sperling 2003: 236-241). Putin has been keen to emphasize the positive meaning of the Soviet past for today's Russia (Pirani 2009: 126-127; Arutyunova 2007: 82). The war of 1941-1945 is regarded as a connecting link between the Soviet and the post-Soviet, and emphasizing the heroism of the veterans is thought to motivate younger generations to serve (Shaburova 2005: 88-89; Arutyunova 2007: 82). Only time will show if the programs will manage to solve the problem of growing military service avoidance and save the conscription institution. So far, the Russian public has shown resistance to the government's attempts to (re-)militarise the society (Webber & Zilberman 2006: 196; Sperling 2009). According to Eichler (2006: 499), "[w]hile militarized patriotism has gained currency at the level of political rhetoric, this is not mirrored at the level of individual men, many of whom continue to avoid military service".

2.5 Summary

This chapter has sought to outline the context of the study. It has focused on the history of conscription in Russia, especially the Soviet period, as well as the problems that the institution is struggling with today. A special focus has been given on the contemporary issues of draft-avoidance. In the Soviet era, the mass army and compulsory military service were the government's main tools in consolidating the communist ideology and exercising control over the population. They were also the key means for building and asserting the country's power internationally. The conscription system was not merely maintained through coercion; myths and gender notions that promoted military service as a citizenship duty, necessary male rite of passage and 'school of life' were equally important.

Since the late-Soviet period, draft avoidance has, however, been growing rapidly. Due to violence

86 So far, the program has been adopted three times for the periods of 2001-2005, 2006-2010, and 2011-2015. For an interesting analysis of the government's patriotic education programmes and (re)militarisation of the Russian public, see Sperling (2009).

87 In Russia, the World War II, after Germany started its attack on the Soviet Union in July 1941, is also known as the Great Patriotic War. Of all the countries involved in the WWII, the USSR faced the greatest losses – according to the highest estimations, 27 million Soviet citizens died (Vihavainen 2008: 306).

and abuse of conscripts, both young men and their parents have legitimate reasons for being afraid of the consequences of the now one-year obligatory service. Some resort to illegalities, but many youngsters manage to avoid service by exploiting discrepancies in the legislation. Especially well-to-do families arrange their sons free from the military duty, something which is turning the contemporary armed forces into peasant and worker boys' weak and sick army (Zhel'vis 2011). The army's manning difficulties have caused increasing unease in the current state leadership and it has tried to solve the problem by resorting to old remedies; the attempts to construct military service as a gender practice and promote militarized patriotism are reminiscent of the Soviet period. According to Webber & Zilberman (2006: 175-176), "[t]he state-level and military institutional rhetoric on conscription has hardly changed since Soviet times: young men are still exhorted to do their patriotic duty [and asserted] that by doing so they will become 'real men'". However, society has changed radically since the disintegration of the USSR and the likelihood for the old strategy and call for militarised patriotism to work in the new reality is little. According to Webber and Zilberman (2006: 180-181), the government's expectation that the citizens "will dutifully oblige" any demand it makes "is completely out of touch with the nature of Russian society today".

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter focuses on methodological issues, especially the choice of study area, data collection technique and informants. It also looks at the field decisions with emphasis on the strengths and limitations of the chosen data collection strategy. I also reflect upon my own role as a fieldworker, as my social attributes – in particular gender, local language proficiency, age and nationality – are likely to have influenced the data collection process and its outcomes.

3.1 Study area

Saint Petersburg, situated in the Northwest of the Russian Federation, at the head of the Gulf of Finland, was chosen to be the study area. With almost 5 million inhabitants and position as a federal subject, St. Petersburg⁸⁸ is Russia's second largest and important city after Moscow⁸⁹. Peterburzhtsy⁹⁰ themselves like to emphasize their hometown's role as the cultural and intellectual capital of the country (Parland 2003: 27). Only a small minority of all draftees come from St. Petersburg and Moscow⁹¹ (also Mikhailenok 2006: 119). Hence, St. Petersburg offers an excellent example of a place where avoiding the draft has become a wide-spread practice among young men⁹².

In the Soviet planned economy, Leningrad was an important industrial center focusing mainly on shipbuilding, electrotechnology and war industry. After the break-up of the USSR, radical structural changes have taken place in the city. Massive cuts in the defence budget meant that, in the new context of market capitalism, other sources of income had to be created. This has led to growth in the service sector, food industry and retail sales, among others. (Helanterä & Tynkkynen 2002: 42-43). Like the whole country, the city has and is still going through economic and social transition processes. The post-Soviet reality has opened to both new possibilities as well as challenges: "[Y]ounger generations are coping admirably with the economic changes, but unemployment remains high and families and pensioners struggle desperately to make ends meet"⁹³.

88 St. Petersburg was founded in 1703. Until 1918, it was also the capital of the Russian Empire. Between 1914 and 1924, St. Petersburg was called Petrograd; in 1924, it was named Leningrad. The original name St. Petersburg was returned in 1991, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. (<http://gov.spb.ru/>).

89 <http://gov.spb.ru/>

90 Residents of St. Petersburg

91 <http://www.ng.ru/printed/23933>

92 Moreover, one practical matter guided the choice of study area: I was accepted for a summer internship position in two St. Petersburg-based NGOs, Side by Side LGBT International Film Festival and Coming Out St. Petersburg LGBT Organization.

93 www.Saint-Petersburg.com

Life in today's St. Petersburg is characterized by processes of cultural and economic globalization to a much greater extent than in many other parts of the Russian Federation. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the city has regained its position as both Russia's gate to Europe and Europe's gate to Russia. Many international corporations have established their offices in St. Petersburg in order to access the Russian domestic market (Helanterä & Tynkkynen 2002: 105). Moreover, the city promotes itself actively as a tourist destination and has almost five million visitors yearly, of which half are foreigners⁹⁴. The great majority of both leisure and business travellers are from Finland – Germany and the USA come second and third⁹⁵. Neither are the residents of St. Petersburg themselves any less eager to travel abroad. For example in 2011, the Consulate-General of Finland in St. Petersburg processed almost one million Schengen visa applications⁹⁶. As a consequence, many like to joke that the whole city has a Finnish visa⁹⁷.

Choosing study area is also about choosing perspective. Peripheries and centers always represent two different realities. According to Aitamurto, Jäppinen & Kulmala (2010: 31), the gap between the two is more pronounced in Russia than in many other countries. Further, research about Russia has been criticized for being geographically too much focused on the power centers on the European side of the country (ibid.: 30-31), and that can be seen as one of the weaknesses of this study, too⁹⁸. On the one hand, considering how widespread draft-avoidance is in the city, St. Petersburg provides a highly relevant context for the study. On the other hand, by exploring other perspectives this study could have gained different and perhaps richer insights into life in Russia. After all, the majority of Russians does not live in an international and "modern, rapidly growing commercial city" like the country's second capital⁹⁹.

Further, nicknamed as 'Russia's window to the West' (Helanterä & Tynkkynen 2002: 42), St. Petersburg is often described as Russia's most European city, which for many people means that it is not 'real' Russia. Statements like that seem to presuppose that 'Russianness' is an objective, essential and rather one-dimensional quality that a person or place has or does not have. However, my point

94 St. Petersburg is often described as a "cultural-historically unique Northern metropolis" (Helanterä & Tynkkynen 2002: 105). The historical center is world-famous for its architecture, numerous palaces and museums which have earned the city a place on the UNESCO world heritage list. Located on several islands in the delta of the Neva River and characterized by its many channels, it also holds the nickname Northern Venice. (See <http://gov.spb.ru/>).

95 <http://gov.spb.ru/>

96 <http://www.finland.org.ru/public/default.aspx?contentid=237997&culture=fi-FI>

97 During the past few years, Russian tourism to Finland has been breaking one record after another, turning some small Finnish border towns like Lappeenranta into shopping centers for Russian tourists. St. Petersburg is located about 130 km from the Finnish border.

98 Before setting off for St. Petersburg, my initial plan was to collect data also in other cities, and I had already established contacts in Archangel and Murmansk. However, my full-time internship tied me to St. Petersburg and I did not get a chance to leave the city for additional fieldwork.

99 www.Saint-Petersburg.com

of view is that Russia consists of a plurality of realities, and St. Petersburg – unique and 'real' in its own ways – represents one of them. Trying to explain Russia as a whole is, in fact, impossible: all we can try to do is to understand parts of the whole (Aitamurto, Jäppinen & Kulmala 2010: 31)¹⁰⁰. That is the premise also my study is based on.

3.2 Choosing a data collection technique: Fieldwork

De-emphasizing macro perspective

Studies on Russia have every now and then been criticized for relying too much on official documents as data sources, thereby reproducing the viewpoints of officialdom, power elites and privileging a macro level analysis. After all, they represent only one, limited perspective into the contemporary Russian reality (Aitamurto, Jäppinen & Kulmala 2010: 30-31). In Russia – a country of high power distance¹⁰¹, characterized by hierarchy, autocratic and paternalistic power relations, and a very pronounced gap between the ruling elite and ordinary people¹⁰² – it is very common to hear people say that the state authorities and society lead two different lives separate from each other. For example, the official, political discourse might embrace military values but the press and society show much more critical attitudes towards the army and military service (Webber & Zilberman 2006: 160-161)¹⁰³.

Thus, the choice of data collection method boils eventually down to the question about choosing what perspective(s) one wishes to highlight or privilege in the study. From the start of this project, my research interest has been in exploring and understanding the micro perspective of military service avoidance, that is, the viewpoints of ordinary young Russian men. The aim of this study is to emphasize how the young men themselves understand and explain the phenomenon of draft-avoidance and how they as social agents reflect, experience, manage and negotiate social life (see Bryman 2008: 438).

100 Haraway (1988: 590): "The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular."

101 Parikka (2008) has applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory on Russia. According to Hofstede (1991: 38), "[i]n the large power distance situation power is seen as a basic fact of society which precedes the choice between good and evil. Its legitimacy is irrelevant. Might prevails over right." A recent concrete example of high power distance was the way the current Russian leadership ignored the historically large protest waves demanding fair elections in autumn 2011 and spring 2012 and even ridiculed the participants.

102 According to Saari (2011: 3), the political's elite's alienation from society is only deepening in Russia.

103 Vladimir Putin has been accused of (re-)militarizing Russia through, for example, the Patriotic Education Programs. However, in order for any government policies to succeed, society needs to be responsive to them. In the Soviet Union, basic military training was a compulsory part of school curriculum. However, it did not prevent pupils from making fun of and ridiculing the classes and teachers who taught the subject. (Webber & Zilbermann 2006). Even if the political system discourages public discussion and open critique, it does not mean that people do not challenge and question the practices and ideas the government imposes on them.

Every study dictates its data collection technique. Kulmala & Saarinen (2010: 11-12), for example, recommend fieldwork if one seeks to gain insight into the lives of ordinary Russians and adopt 'a view from below' (see also Pilkington 1996: 4). Military service avoidance could have been studied from already existing written sources. However, I found the option problematic because, as Caiazza (2002) points out, in Russia "the young male citizens most directly affected by military service policy [are] largely absent from political discussions about it". This study aims at obtaining first-hand knowledge from the draft-avoiders themselves, not information and viewpoints mediated through, for example, an organization or the press. After all, it is the young men who form "an unconscious social movement" that has already affected Russia's military policy and the army as an institution (Webber & Zilberman 2006: 188).

3.3 Informants

Informant selection

According to Rubin & Rubin (2005: 64-65), informants "should be experienced and knowledgeable in the [research] area" and on the research issues. In the current situation, where only a small minority of those eligible for military service go to the army, a large part of young Russian men can be said to have "relevant, first-hand experience" (ibid.: 65) from military service avoidance. Because the aim was to reach so-called ordinary young men and at the same time obtain as variable data as possible, I kept the criteria for recruitment of informants simple: the interviewee had to be someone who had not done military service, and wished to avoid it. This way I hoped to be able to get in contact with young Russians with different backgrounds, perspectives and aspirations.

Number of informants

As I set off for fieldwork, I hoped to get about ten informants; by the end of the field period, I had reached eight¹⁰⁴. Obviously, a study based on such a small amount of informants does not produce a statistically representative sample. However, that is not even the purpose of this or any qualitative study. As Kvale (1996: 33) notes, in qualitative research "[i]t is not general opinions that are asked for". Rather, qualitative studies usually have a limited number of research participants because in that way, it is easier to guarantee that differences between them are not lost in generalizations (Oinas 2004: 216, 219). In other words, small number of informants can be an advantage: it allows the researcher to give space to the diversity and richness of the data, and focus on particularities.

104 The challenges that I faced in finding research participants will be discussed later in this chapter.

This exactly has been the aim of the present study. I was satisfied with the quality of the field materials, and felt that the main goal – to get good and in-depth data – had been reached. Despite the small number of informants, also data saturation started to become obvious towards the end of the fieldwork, as certain patterns and themes stood out from the material. As one of the research participants pointed out, it should not be a surprise that people who are products of the same time and same culture think similarly and say similar things. Furthermore, one young Russian man living in Tromsø offered to participate in the study in 2012. Hence, the total amount of informants became nine.

Gaining access

Many scholars underline the significance of personal relations for operating and successfully conducting research in the Russian context: access is often granted only if one is introduced by someone already inside the community, especially in the case of potentially sensitive research topics (Aitamurto, Jäppinen & Kulmala 2010: 34-35; Salmenniemi & Rotkirch 2008). According to Eichler (2012), "[f]or Russian men (whether sons or fathers) to publicly speak out against conscription is socially less acceptable and likely to be seen as unmanly". However, from my previous stays in Russia I had the impression that most people were comfortable and even eager to talk about military service avoidance in a private setting. Taking the prevailing situation into account, I considered that the best way to approach potential informants would be through common acquaintances and friends.

Researchers often make use of their social networks in order to find and gain access to informants (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 89). Applying this strategy turned out to have its advantages for my project, too. Firstly, there is always a power aspect to any research, and it is the researcher who holds a stronger position in relation to the informant (Oinas 2004: 222), which can cause discomfort. However, I believe that having my project and myself introduced to the informants by someone we both knew, and in an informal way, helped to diminish the feeling of hierarchy. My impression was that most of the research participants regarded me as their peer – we were, after all, more or less of the same age, young adults in more or less similar life situations, between studies and working life. Secondly, since draft-avoidance can potentially lead to legal consequences, it was crucial also in regard to security that the informants could trust me as a person and the motives of the research¹⁰⁵. According to Liamputtong (2008: 9), "[o]ften, potential research participants want to identify a

¹⁰⁵ At the beginning of every interview, I also told the informant that I needed not to know and would not write about *how* they had managed to avoid service but was interested in finding out *why* they had wished not to go to the military.

common person whom they themselves and the researcher know as a way for them to check the researcher's credibility and trustworthiness". Thus, having the initial contact facilitated by a third party was useful.

Nevertheless, finding research participants was to some extent challenging: everyone I contacted agreed at first but many were never able to find the time, or simply stopped replying. It can only be speculated whether they really were busy or just unwilling to talk about the topic with me. A friend of mine from a provincial town was convinced that the latter was the correct answer and wondered if I would manage to find any interviewees at all. In her opinion, not having been to the army was so shameful that no one would want to be open about it. However, if the topic is sensitive or not probably varies from person to person. My own experience was that I was surprised by the informants' openness. Moreover, they were convinced they had done nothing wrong and one of the research participants even stated boldly that there was no need to close the door to the hallway: in his view, he had nothing to hide and was prepared to share his opinions about conscription and military service with the whole world.

Furthermore, recruiting research participants through social networks can be a problematic method because it may lead to little variation. Even though the present informants do not form one big network where everyone knows each other, they are nevertheless in many ways quite a homogeneous group, a fact which again reflects the limitedness of my contact network. The homogeneity is visible, for example, in the participants' educational backgrounds: the with the exception of two informants, all were enrolled in or had completed higher education. Informants with other backgrounds would have had different stories to tell and viewpoints to share. However, one study can never present and represent all the possible sides of a phenomenon.

3.4 Interviewing

If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them? (Kvale 1996: 1)

Qualitative interview as data collection method

This study is interested in Russian draft-avoiders' "interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live" (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 36). These are all aspects that need to be verbally articulated in order to be conveyed to and made understandable for others. Hence, fieldwork and data collection in the form of ethnography and participant observation did not

seem suitable. As Bryman (2008: 466), puts it: "[T]here are issues that are resistant to observation". Instead, I found qualitative interviewing better suited to the study. Qualitative interview is an in-depth method that can grant access to deep knowledge and explanations, and help to "grasp the subject's perspective" (Corbetta 2003: 264; also Kvale 1996: 1). Through face-to-face discussions a subjective, unique, detailed and personal story can be told, and the focus is on how the interviewee understands and explains different phenomena, the world and his/her actions in it (Bryman 2008: 438). In other words, qualitative interview is an appropriate method for project that seeks to shed light on experiences, perceptions and meanings of a particular social group. Hence, it was chosen to be the primary data collection method in this study.

Conducting interviews

The interviews were conducted in St. Petersburg during August and September 2011; one interview was conducted in Tromsø in 2012, after the actual fieldwork period. All the nine informants were interviewed once. The interviews averaged an hour, with the shortest being half an hour and the longest one and a half hours. All of them were tape-recorded. Five of the interviews were conducted at the Center for Independent Social Research¹⁰⁶, located in the city center of St. Petersburg. The helpful staff allowed me to use one of the center's meeting rooms. Easily accessible, I found it an ideal space for one-to-one interviews. However, arranging a meeting during the CISR office hours was not always possible; two of the interviews were conducted in cafés at the interviewees' suggestion. Even though we managed to find tables away from other customers, loud music and people moving around us created disturbances hindering concentration, which is likely to have affected the quality of the data. However, fieldwork without compromises is not always possible. One of the interviews was also conducted online through Skype, and one at the interviewee's home.

I did not enter the interview settings with a clear or fixed hypothesis; the purpose and focus was on exploring the topic (Kvale 1996: 127) of draft-avoidance in Russia. In feminist interviewing, one main guiding principle is that informants should participate in defining and "deciding what is relevant knowledge about the research topic"¹⁰⁷ (Oinas 2004: 214). With this in mind, I chose to employ semi-structured interview model; that is, in addition to the predetermined list of topics I brought into the discussion, I encouraged the interviewees to introduce issues they considered relevant for the conversation (Bryman 2008: 438). As a consequence, each interview turned out unique. After every conversation, I checked the interview guide and modified, added and/or deleted

106 <http://www.cisr.ru/index.en.html>

107 All quotations from Oinas (2004) are my translations.

some questions, based on my evolving experience as interviewer.

In general, the informants showed keen interest in the topic, seemed motivated to participate in the project and volunteered information easily. In most of the interviews, the atmosphere was unhurried and relaxed. I was left with the impression that the interviewees felt that they had had the chance to express themselves openly and freely about the topics, which, after all, is one of the main aims of in-depth interviewing. Afterwards, one of the participants mentioned several times that the interview had been a very positive experience, and if requested again in the future, he would be willing to participate in similar research projects¹⁰⁸. Misunderstandings did occur during the interviews, but they were quickly resolved through further explanations. In one occasion, an interviewee appeared uncomfortable about a question, and asked me to move on to the next one.

In addition, simply because I was constantly asked what had brought me to the city, I ended up discussing the topic of the study with nearly everyone I met during the time I spent in Russia. In general, people showed curious interest in the project and almost everyone had views and stories from their family to share. I was told time and again that I had chosen an extremely topical and important theme to write about. Even though these random discussions do not form a body of primary data, systematically collected and analysed, I will occasionally draw upon and refer to them as well because they have helped to establish the context and widen my understanding about the topic.

3.5 Challenges and reflections

3.5.1 Language

Language is a fundamental tool through which qualitative researchers seek to understand human behaviour, social processes and the cultural meanings that inscribe human behaviour. [...] Failure to recognise and acknowledge the role of language and communication issues in cross-cultural research may impact on the rigour and reliability of the research (Hennink 2008: 21).

Language formed undoubtedly one of the main methodological challenges in the data collection. Having already spent an extended period of time in Russia as an exchange student, I was somewhat prepared for the challenge. I was confident that my language skills would be enough for conducting interviews in Russian. Nevertheless, not speaking perfect Russian, I was aware that I would not be

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. Kvale (1996: 116) about interview as a positive experience.

able to catch all nuances and subtleties in native-speakers' speech, and, as an unfortunate result, some details would go unnoticed (see Pietilä 2010: 413). However, I did not consider using any other language than Russian in the interviews. Firstly, because I thought it would help minimize the discomfort the interviewees might feel in the interview situation. Giving the interviewees the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue, I hoped to get as rich data as possible. Secondly, I regarded the fact that I myself might not understand everything as the lesser of two evils: I would anyway be able to go through the interview recordings later, transcribe them and translate the parts that I had not fully understood, which would compensate my weaker position in terms of language.

Moreover, the language question is not only about whether someone 'gets the point' or not. Through language, both closeness and distance are created and managed; language builds connections and helps reach towards other people. Learning a foreign language can be a way to show profound interest in the other person's world, and respect to their culture. Language and culture *are* inseparable. (Pietilä 2010). In a couple of occasions, Russian friends of mine have told me that because I do not make the usual grammatical mistakes of foreigners, they sometimes actually forget that I am not Russian. Not claiming this was the case in the interviews, I still believe that speaking Russian smoothed the communication and helped in building rapport by making me less of a total stranger and cultural outsider to the interviewees. Consequently, sometimes the interviewees seemed to take it for granted that I knew certain things, for example, about local politics.

All in all, there is no doubt that my still limited language skills made me less "attuned and responsive" (Bryman 2008: 447) as an interviewer. Had the interviews been conducted in English, I would have been able to react faster and better, pose more follow-up questions, ask for clarifications and more detailed elaborations – things that I paid attention to and found missing afterwards while transcribing the interviews. Also, I noticed later that, being fully concentrated on what was being said, I had hardly paid any attention to observing the interviewees' body language. The tape recorder registers laughter and tones, but cannot help call back gestures and facial expressions.

What is more, Russian is a very rich language and Russians are keen on using proverbs and expressions loaded with symbolism. As a foreigner who has not grown up in the same cultural context, understanding all the explicit and implicit meanings is difficult, if not impossible. However, only a couple of the interviewees spoke English with an adequate level of confidence. Thus, in the interview process, language formed both a bridge and a gap: knowing Russian granted

me access, but a limited one, creating an interviewer position 'somewhere in-between'.

3.5.2 Being a Finn

[H]aving insider status facilitates rapport and trust-building with participants, and being an outsider allows the investigator to maintain a critical perspective (Sallee & Harris 2011: 427).

Rubin & Rubin (2005: 36) write: "Because the interviewer contributes actively to the conversation, he or she must be aware of his or her own opinions, experiences, cultural definitions, and even prejudices." After conducting the first couple of interviews, I became quickly aware of my 'Finnishness' – I started to notice how my own background had affected the presuppositions I held and the questions I was asking¹⁰⁹. I have grown up in a country with universal male conscription where the majority of young men – around 80 per cent – serves in the armed forces (Kantola 2011: 20). Since the institution touches every family, practically everyone in Finland has an opinion about conscription, including myself. Moreover, conscription is a theme that divides people; I remember especially well how discussions heated up in the last years of upper secondary school as the time came for boys to decide between the army and alternative service. Some even go to jail as a protest against conscription.

Societies with universal conscription have many things in common. As a Finn, I have – like Russian children – grown up surrounded by state-sponsored propaganda seeking to promote 'willingness to defend the fatherland'. When a Russian interviewee told me of having been afraid of his father's reaction and rejection when he decided he did not want to join the army, I remembered Finnish dads, ashamed of their sons who chose alternative service instead of military. Nevertheless, to avoid the draft in Russia is very different from avoiding the draft in Finland. In order to be able to start understanding the Russian situation, I realized I should drop the assumptions¹¹⁰ and opinions that made sense to me in the Finnish context.

Having become aware of my own departure point, situatedness and presuppositions, I tried to use them as basis for reflection: sometimes I briefly explained the Finnish conscription system to the interviewees, which often led to fruitful elaborations. The purpose of this was not to create comparison between the two countries but to reflect further on the specificity of the Russian

109 "In science, becoming aware of one's own views and presuppositions is not merely an epistemological or ethical question for the researcher but also a very concrete starting point that shapes the interview." (Oinas 2004: 221, my translation).

110 In Finland, for example, not going to the army is usually considered a pacifist act.

situation. According to Pietilä (2010: 415, 417), even comparison is not necessarily bad; the point is to make it visible. As Kvale (1996: 124) notes, "[i]n the interview, knowledge is created inter the points of view of the interviewer and the interviewee". Thus, there is no need to play down interculturality or the fact that researcher and interviewee always represent two different perspectives. What is crucial is to become aware of the situation and its many consequences.

Further, listening intensively to and transcribing someone else's speech makes illogicalities that we all have in our thinking stand out much clearer than they would in a casual everyday conversation. Sometimes the interviewees simply seemed inconsistent in their views and contradicted themselves. However, Holliday (2002: 10) reminds: "Researchers cannot put themselves above other people." Even ambiguity in the interviewees' statements might merely reflect the existing "contradictions in the world the subject lives in", not be a sign of a person's obscurity (Kvale 1996: 31, 33). Maintaining a critical perspective as a researcher does not mean comparing, evaluating or judging the interviewees' stories. On the contrary, good qualitative research becomes impossible if the informant cannot "trust that the researcher will handle her/his story with respect" (Oinas 2004: 224). I acknowledge that as a non-Russian, my understanding of the processes through which the informants' views and opinions have come into being is incomplete at its best. Neither do I know or understand everything that has affected their choices. Thus, my task as a researcher is to present and reflect upon – with respect and honesty – what the interviewees told me.

Moreover, my background is likely to have affected the way I was received by the interviewees. As mentioned earlier, the majority of foreigners visiting or living in St. Petersburg are Finns, and many of the city's residents travel regularly to Finland. Thus, Petersburgers have a perception, as well as a bunch of stereotypes, about their Western neighbours. Finnish journalist and writer Jussi Konttinen says he has always felt welcome in Russia and calls the image Russians have of Finland unrealistically positive (Helsingin Sanomat, 19.02.2012). I share Konttinen's experience: travelling and living in the European part of Russia, I have been met with curiosity, warmth, and only good-hearted joking about 'the Finnish slowness and quietness'. I have talked with Russians about painful topics like the World War II, about fathers and grandfathers who fought and died on the Karelian front¹¹¹, but have never met bitterness nor prejudices towards me as a Finn. My experience is that I was well received also by the interviewees: they did not seem reserved nor doubtful of me or the purposes of the study. On the contrary, I was more often than not surprised of their openness and

111 During the World War II, the Soviet Union and Finland were twice in war with each other: in 1939-1940 and 1941-1944. In Finland, the memory of the wars still provokes a lot of bitterness and even russophobia.

how much more they actually told me than just answering the questions I posed.

According to Pietilä (2010: 415-416), in a cross-cultural interview setting informants might consciously or unconsciously take the role of a representative of their own country and culture. This can have various consequences. Firstly, many things may be clarified much more thoroughly to a foreigner than to a compatriot. At times I too was given detailed accounts on 'how things work around here' and many of the interviewees seemed to enjoy 'explaining things to a foreigner'. Being a cultural outsider can thus be an advantage for the interviewer: it might make the informants talk about and reflect on many taken-for-granted issues that would be otherwise ignored.

Moreover, some interviewees can take a defensive position and try to avoid talking about unpleasant issues in order not to put their country in a negative light. Also the opposite might happen: participants can end up "ventilating their thoughts" about life in their home country and be extremely critical about everything there. (ibid.). I experienced both when interviewing for the study; some informants tried to gloss over the problems in the military, while others had almost nothing positive to say about anything in Russia. Consequently, interpretation of the data will have to be a balancing act between the two extremes.

3.5.3 Cross-gender interviewing

Positioning is, therefore, the key practice in grounding knowledge (Haraway 1988: 587).

One of the starting points and assumptions of this study has been that conscription and its avoidance are gendered phenomena. However, gender should not be thought of merely as an object of study or a variable in analysis; it is also part of the research process itself, and a very significant factor that shapes the interview situation. As Edwards (1990: 482) reminds us, "[c]haracteristics such as class, sex, and race belong not just to the people who we conduct our research on or about, but are also characteristics of the researcher". Hence, I recognize that not only the cross-cultural but also cross-gender nature of interviewing in this study, that is, young Russian men being interviewed by a young foreign female, is likely to have affected the data collection process and its outcomes¹¹².

¹¹² I share Hearn & Kimmel's view that, unlike some have claimed, men do not have a privilege to study other men. Neither does being a man make one automatically more suitable to conduct research on masculinities: "Studying men cannot be left only to men. Men's knowledge of themselves is at best limited and partial, at worst violently patriarchal." (Hearn & Kimmel 2006: 61). However, it is nevertheless important to pay attention to and reflect upon the possible effects that the researcher's gender has.

Oinas notes (2004: 220) that the researcher should not fall into speculating or trying to guess "what the interviewee thought, felt or experienced". I cannot say if being interviewed by myself was more or less pleasant for the informants than talking to someone else – for example a man, someone older or younger, someone who had been to the military, or Russian – would have been. Nevertheless, some facts allow me to suppose that, from my own perspective, being a female interviewer probably had some advantages. Firstly, I experienced that it was relatively easy for me to take and maintain a neutral position to the research topic because the question whether I myself had been to the military was not relevant. Thus, the fact that the military is considered a male realm possibly worked to my advantage; at least to a certain extent, I could position myself outside the whole institution of conscription and the debate around it, since I was not compelled to take a stand in the same way as, for example, a young (Finnish) man would have to.

Secondly, in Russia, it is typically women who defend their sons, grandsons, brothers, boyfriends and husbands against the abuses of the military and help them to avoid the draft, while male family members tend to remain passive or even show disapproval. In other words, I represented the gender that is, in general, considered to be understanding and supportive of young men's choice not to go to the army. It is, therefore, possible that cross-gender interviewing diminished "the need to live up to [traditional] masculine expectations" (Sallee & Harris 2011: 426) among the interviewees¹¹³. However, it should be noted that it is not only other men who question and threaten the masculine identity of young Russian army-avoiders. One of the interviewees told me that it was, in fact, girls, mostly "less educated and from the villages", who had criticized him for not having been to the military.

The fact that my gender, among many other factors, is likely to have affected the way the informants expressed themselves can lead one to doubt if another researcher would have managed to obtain more 'authentic', 'pure' or 'truthful' data. What studies like Sallee and Harris' (2011) show is that qualitative interviewing should not be romanticized as an ideal or unproblematic data collection method. Qualitative research interview is not merely an instrument of knowledge acquisition but also "a construction site of knowledge" (Kvale 1996: 2, 42). It is a two-directional, interactive process (Babbie 2010: 318, 320; Bryman 2008: 436, 438; David & Sutton 2004: 87; Oinas 2006: 220) where the interviewer's personal qualities as well as the interviewee's conscious

¹¹³ Sallee and Harris (2011) have studied how researcher's gender may influence "data collection and rapport building with male participants" in masculinity studies. According to their findings, those who were interviewed by the male researcher were "more open" but also at the same time more "conscious about fulfilling expectations of traditional masculinities", while "[s]peaking with a woman allowed some of the participants to engage in thoughtful reflection about masculinities" (Sallee & Harris 2011: 416, 425-426).

and unconscious expectations of what the researcher wants to hear play a role (Aitamurto, Jäppinen & Kulmala 2010: 41; Sallee & Harris 2011: 410). In fact, our behaviour is always context-bound (Cornwall 2009: 10). Since our identities "as women or men are not fixed or absolute, but multiple and shifting" (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994, quoted in Cornwall 2009: 10), we constantly shift our subject-positions according to the situation we are in (Hollway 1984, quoted in Cornwall 2009: 10).

In interview, only one out of an endless number of potential stories is told (Oinas 2004: 220), and the choice of the story depends on how the informant experiences the interview situation and the interviewer. According to Oinas (2004: 220-221), "all narratives are momentary, situated and aimed at a particular audience". Thus, there is no 'authentic', 'pure' or 'truthful' data. In Haywood & Mac an Ghail's (2003: 17) words, "the micropolitics of the interview do not distort the collection of real facts as there are no existentially real objects"¹¹⁴. No interview material is an unmediated representation of social reality and the interviewee's experience but a product of interaction between two embodied social beings in a particular space and time. What remains for the researcher to do is the task of grounding the study or being aware of and reflecting upon the factors that influence the data collection process. I acknowledge that, like any other perspective, my study is a partial, limited and situated (see Haraway 1988).

3.6 Summary

This chapter has focused on the methodological issues of the study. Data collection was carried out in St. Petersburg, a city where most young men never enter military service. In order to highlight the micro perspective of draft-avoidance and emphasize the views of ordinary young men themselves, I chose to deploy qualitative in-depth interviewing as the primary data collection method. Altogether, eight semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in St. Petersburg in August and September 2011, and one in Tromsø in 2012. The informants were recruited through social networks, which had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, having the initial contact facilitated by a trustworthy third party that both the interviewee and I knew from before is likely to have made building rapport and trust easier. On the other hand, there is little variation what comes to, for instance, the research participants' backgrounds. Since qualitative interviewing is a two-way process, had I, the interviewer, been someone else, the informants would probably have chosen a different way to talk about themselves, their lives and their views. Nevertheless, my

¹¹⁴ Epistemologically, this study positions itself in the tradition of social constructivism (e.g. Burr 1995). According to Alasuutari (2001: 114-115), talking about 'truthfulness' is irrelevant, because cultural and social studies are not about researching and establishing 'facts'; the purpose is to explore and understand socially constructed meanings.

impression was that being a foreigner and woman who new Russian was rather advantageous than disadvantageous.

Chapter 4. Conceptual framework

This chapter attempts a conceptual framework to the study of draft-avoidance in contemporary Russia. Firstly, it discusses the concept of gender as a social construction of masculinity. Notions about masculinity are central in shaping men's identities and are manifested in how men behave, make choices and exercise agency. Moreover, masculine identity can prove to be disempowering or empowering; that is, transformative. Thus, in order to highlight the informants' views and explain draft-avoidance in today's Russia, this study draws further on the concept of empowerment. I approach empowerment through three interrelated dimensions: agency, critical consciousness and identity. With the choice of concepts I seek to suggest that gender identity has transforming potential at the individual and social level.

From the beginning of this project, it has been clear to me that the analysis of military service avoidance should include a gender perspective. The reason is simple: the conscription system does not just touch Russians in general, but young Russian men in particular. This thus makes both conscription and its avoidance gendered phenomena. The further choice of the concepts of empowerment, including its three dimensions, is based on findings from the fieldwork. In other words, instead of taking one strict conceptual framework as its starting point, the study has rather allowed the empirical data to guide the selection of additional related concepts. In this way, I hope to best conceptualize the perspectives of the interviewed Russian draft-avoiders and, eventually, highlight the research questions. As Rubin & Rubin (2005: 210) point out, "[m]ore important than borrowing concepts and themes from the literature is finding those that emerge from the interviews".

The concepts of masculinity and empowerment both speak to issues related to social change. Empowerment entails change by definition; it refers to liberation from the condition of disempowerment. In the Russian context, on the other hand, masculinity notions have been intertwined with, if not inseparable from, wider transformation processes in the society. As Clements (2002: 12) explains:

What is certain [...] is the centrality of conceptions of the masculine in Russia's past. Tsarist bureaucrats, Stalinist economic planners, intellectuals and social reformers from the eighteenth to the twentieth century understood that they could not change Russia unless and until they changed Russian men. Fundamental to this task was defining what Russian men were and what they should become.

4.1 Gender and Masculinity

The term gender refers to "the social and cultural construction of 'biological' sexes"; that is, how culturally produced meanings are attached to human bodies (Järviluoma, Moisala & Vilkkö 2003: 1; Connell 2002: 10). Defined as above, gender might seem to be a limited perspective for a study that seeks to highlight and understand a phenomenon that affects not only individuals but the Russian society as a whole, which is undergoing complex post-Soviet transformations. However, the concept of gender is not an isolated object or limited to human bodies. On the contrary, it reaches beyond them; gender *is* "an aspect of a larger structure", which has explanatory power and offers a useful platform and focus from where to analyse changing social processes (Goddard 2000: 3; Connell 2001: 30).

Further, this thesis concerns itself more precisely with gender as a cultural construction of masculinity. Whitehead & Barrett (2001: 15-16) define masculinity as "those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine". In other words, masculinity refers to what it means to be a man or what are appropriate male ways of life in a certain context (Buchbinder 1994; Haywood & Mac an Ghail 2003: 154).¹¹⁵

Masculinity as an element of gender also provides a useful analytic tool for understanding social phenomena and change (Connell 2000: xix). This is because it helps to explain why men act the way they do. Thus, masculinity is not only about abstract meanings and socio-cultural gender constructions, but it is also manifested in the very concrete ways of "talking and acting as males" (Whitehead & Barrett 2001: 21). As Whitehead (2002: 43) puts it: "[W]hile masculinities may be illusory, the material consequences of many men's practices are quite real enough" in everyday life.

To examine masculinities, as socio-cultural constructions that arise from particular historical circumstances, means taking into consideration that they are not fixed but constantly in the making, and that the understandings of masculinity are informed by contextual everyday practices and vice versa (Connell 2000: 13-14; Whitehead & Barrett 2001: 8). In other words, if the social context changes, it will also affect masculinity ideas and practices (Whitehead & Barrett 2001: 8). New conditions produce new ways of managing the everyday life, which is reflected in notions about

¹¹⁵ It should be noted that applying the concept of masculinity is not about describing and dividing men into groups according to some certain masculinity model they appear to represent. That would easily lead to categorizing and labeling people, and eventually only creating or reinforcing stereotypes, which is in stark contradiction with the original principles and purpose of Gender Studies and Critical Men's and Masculinity Studies (e.g. critical deconstruction).

how to be and act as a man in that context. This means that social, political and economic changes can lead to a situation where old notions about gender can be questioned, renegotiated, and reconstructed (Connell 2000: 13-14).

Gender, masculinity and identity

The concepts of gender and masculinity are closely interlinked with that of identity. Identity refers to "that which gives us a sense of self, which tells us who we are and what we do" (O'Hagan 2009: 28). In other words, our self-expression and actions are informed by our identity¹¹⁶. Moreover, gender is one of the main factors that shape and organize our identities: our sense of self is to a considerable degree based on our interpretations of what it is to be a woman or man in that specific social context where we find ourselves (Goddard: 2002: 4; Woodward 2003: 43; Guttermann 2001: 61).

Further, masculinities as socially accepted ways of being male are crucial to male identity work because they can help men to consolidate and validate the otherwise shaky, unsteady and "fluid" sense of self (Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 20). Thus, masculinities provide men something to anchor their identities on and relate role expectations to, tangible enough perceptions of who I am and how I am supposed to lead my life in this particular time and place as a man.

Identity is a relational construction. It means that in mirroring oneself against 'the Other' and "recognizing that which is different, the self begins to define itself" (O'Hagan 2009: 28; Goff & Dunn 2009a: 2). Gaining a masculine sense of self is often about distinguishing oneself from women and that which is culturally defined as feminine; to be masculine is to be not-feminine. However, equally important for male identity work is how men through association and differentiation relate to other men (Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 20). It is with other males that men compare themselves; men admire and identify with some men while rejecting others as anti-heroes, and simultaneously coming to terms with who they themselves are. Hence, masculinity and masculine identity are relational constructions that emerge from association of difference (Barrett 2001: 78).

Moreover, it is especially in different mileposts in the individual's life that our personal identities are formed and reformed, negotiated and renegotiated. For young men, taking a stand on military

¹¹⁶ Hence, the concept of identity encourages the consideration of agency. The concept of agency will be discussed later in this chapter.

service can be a significant moment for personal identity work because at the same time it is about – consciously or unconsciously – taking a stand in relation to multiple and competing masculinity ideals and practices. (Pilkington 1996: 1-2).

Masculinity and the Russian context

Taking into account the particularity of the socio-cultural context, especially the influence of the Soviet legacy is important when examining masculinity in today's Russia. Precisely, because the State is often involved in the construction of gender roles and ideals (Connell 2000: 30). In Russia, for example, it has been notably active and authoritarian when trying to shape men and notions about proper masculinity – with the purpose of creating "loyal obedient, cooperative subjects" (Clements 2002: 11-12; Friedman & Healey 2002: 224; Kay 2006; Tartakovskaya 2005)¹¹⁷. In the strictly hierarchical Soviet society, the position a man held in relation to the State defined his social standing and life perspectives (Meshcherkina 2000: 105-106). In order to be acknowledged as a man, one had to serve the State (Ashwin 2000: 1; Tartakovskaya 2005: 128; Koukarenko 2007) and in this system being a worker and a soldier formed the core of officially recognized proper manhood (Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2002). Failure to fulfill these roles which the State assigned to Soviet men, meant risking social ostracism and one's manhood stripped away sociologically.

A gender identity can be empowering or disempowering for individuals. The identity that the ordinary Soviet men were encouraged to embrace and express as servers of the State and defenders of the Fatherland, was the identity of a kind of oppressed heroes who were expected to set the needs of the society above their own interests. This subordination to the system that did not allow independence, self-sufficiency or individual autonomy, provoked a "feeling of frustration among men concerning their gender identity". (Koukarenko 2007: 99-101). Hence, the Soviet period produced a male identity that lacked a sense of fulfilment, a masculine self-expression that was disempowering.

However, the developments of the late 1980s¹¹⁸ and finally the break-up of the Soviet Union weakened the State to the extent that it lost the controlling role it had had in the construction of gender roles and identities (Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2002; *ibid.* 2003b: 56; see also Tartakovskaya 2000: 135). The socio-political and economic transformations created space to

117 In chapter 2, a somewhat detailed account was given of how soldiering was connected to the idea of manliness in the Soviet period.

118 In the second half of the 1980s, Perestroika, the reform of the economic and social system initiated by the last leader of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev, together with the Glasnost policy that was to make the Soviet government more open and democratic started transforming the socio-political environment.

renegotiate social practices, including gender roles and ideals. As a counterreaction to the state-propagated image of an ideal Soviet man, a new masculinity model emerged. It drew on "the normative models of a 'real man' that were unattainable during the Soviet period" and emphasized independence, liberalism, autonomy, professionalism, civil rights and democratic freedoms. (Koukarenko 2007: 105). According to Connell (2000: 12), "[m]asculinities are often in tension, within and without. It seems likely that such tensions are important sources of change." Similarly, the inner tensions and frustration the official Soviet masculinity and masculine identity had produced led to change and the creation of new notions of what it means to be a man.¹¹⁹

Today Russia is characterized by a competition between old and new ideas about gender, femininity and masculinity (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2003a: 19-20). On the one hand, the notions about masculinity that were created and continuously reinforced during the Soviet period have not disappeared (Kon 2002: 234). Soldiering particularly is still widely considered to be the basic civic duty of all men (Caiazza 2002: 5), and the idea is kept alive by the ones in power¹²⁰. Those who question or criticize the conscription institution are met with speculations about their manliness (Shaburova 2005: 94).

On the other hand, however, the Russian society has in many ways changed profoundly since the late 1980s and such values of market capitalism as individualism and independence continue to strengthen especially among the youth (Petrov 2008; Skutneva 2003; Ashwin 2000: 18; Meshcherkina 2000: 109; Ruchkin 1998). Now, many young men see career success as the marker and expression of manliness (Semenova & Utkina 2004: 130). For them, coping socio-economically on one's own without relying on help or recognition from the state is natural.

Large-scale draft-avoidance is a good example of how the post-Soviet changes have paved the way for traditional masculinity ideals and practices to be questioned and restructured. If joining the military and becoming a soldier was a gender practice, which was taken for granted in the Soviet times, it is now repeatedly contested and negotiated in the new Russia. The consequence being that draft-avoidance has become so commonplace.

119 There were, of course, not only one but a plurality of Russian Soviet masculinities. The focus here is on the normative models that were propagated by the state. (see Koukarenko 2007: 97).

120 For example through the Patriotic Education Programs

4.2 Empowerment

Another theoretical concept that this thesis draws on is empowerment. In recent years empowerment has become a popular term in development policy discourse, and it has been applied especially in studies about women and other socially disadvantaged social groups like poor people¹²¹.

This study, however, is not a study about empowerment in development context. It only takes as its starting point the consideration that "men can also feel powerless". Thus, there is no reason why the concept of empowerment could not be applied in studies on and about them, too. (Cornwall 2009: 12). Further, this study does not focus on a socio-economically disadvantaged group of young men. In fact, the young men that were interviewed for the study are generally economically better-off than the majority of those who join the army¹²². Nevertheless, the concept of empowerment is relevant in highlighting the interviewees' gendered experiences in the context of change and continuity.

In order to avoid an overtly development-oriented perspective and to "envision a more nuanced model of empowerment", Carr (2003: 12-13) suggests the consideration of critical consciousness, identity, and agency. In this thesis, I thus define empowerment through these three, closely interrelated dimensions. The processes of empowerment can occur through many different pathways, and this approach that focuses on consciousness, identity and agency, represents one of them.

The term empowerment has multiple meanings:

[S]elf-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capable of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability (World Bank 2002: 10).

Many scholars connect empowerment first and foremost to the ability of individuals or groups to exercise choice in a meaningful and purposeful manner. For instance, Kabeer (2001: 19; 1999: 435) defines the term as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". Strategic choices are those "life choices which

121 See e.g. Cornwall's (2009) critique of disregarding "the 'other' gender", that is, men's experiences and problems in the Gender and Development discourse.

122 As for example Lokshin & Yemtsov's (2005) study shows, it is the poor families and young men who carry "the burden of conscription" in today's Russia.

are critical for people to live the lives they want". This means, for example, making decisions about profession, marriage, and family (Kabeer 1999: 437).

Furthermore, I find it useful to examine the processes of empowerment through disempowerment because the two are "inescapably bound up with" each other (Kabeer 2001: 18-19). In other words, empowerment implies managing and overcoming the condition of disempowerment (Kabeer 2005: 13-14). It can hence mean, for example, resisting power relations, pursuing one's goals despite of opposition from others, challenging old notions and customs, taken-for-granted truths and practices that did not seem negotiable before (Parpart, Rai & Staudt 2002a: 6; NORAD 1999: 4; Kabeer 2001: 21).

Empowerment can be both individual and/or collective (World Bank 2002: 10). Draft-avoidance is clearly a phenomenon and, thus, has a collective dimension. In this discussion, however, the focus is on the individual and personal rather than on collective empowerment; as this study is specifically about individual choices in today's Russia and not, for example, about an organized movement. Studying empowerment at the individual level directs attention to features like self-reliance and internal strength (Moser 1993: 74-75), as well as the sense of or ability to exercise autonomy (Parpart, Rai & Staudt 2002b: 240; Malhotra & Schuler 2006: 78; Narayan 2006: 3).

4.2.1 Agency

Agency is often defined as one of the key components of empowerment (e.g. Kabeer 1999: 435; Malhotra & Schuler 2006). It refers to "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (Kabeer 2001: 21). This involves making choices and being able "to transform these choices into desired actions" (Petesch, Smilovitz & Walton 2006: 40). Hence, agency points to the core idea of empowerment – expanding the ability to make choices means expanding the ability to act as an agent who strives towards the realization of self-defined goals and thereby actively directs her/his own life.

Further, social agents do not operate in a vacuum but in a constant negotiation with their surrounding environment or social structures (e.g. laws, rules, norms and values). To exercise agency, to work towards the realization of certain self-defined goals entails overcoming structural impediments. The constraining aspects of social structure can be "experienced as *sanctions* of various kinds, ranging from the direct application of violence, or the threat of such application, to

the mild expression of disapproval”. For example, in the Soviet period, army-avoidance was met with harsh sanctions; a man who did not complete military service was condemned to life on the outskirts of the society, without access to education or hope of a decent job. However, structures as ”systems of generative rules and resources” do not only constrain; they also cultivate, trigger and enable agency. Moreover, through their exercise of agency, individuals can contribute either to the reproduction or transformation of their surroundings. (Giddens 1984: 25, 171, 175; Giddens 1976: 127 quoted in Loyal 2003: 74).

Choices that merely reflect others' expectations do not increase the individual's ability to shape and control her/his own life and are thus not empowering (Freire 1974: 7; Narayan 2006: 4; World Bank 2002: 10). Exercising agency implies that choices made are truly the individual's own, not prescribed from the outside (Freire 1974: 4). This, on the other hand, is possible only if ”the actor is able to envision alternative paths of action” (Petesch, Smilovitz and Walton 2006: 42), gaze beyond those paths that are taken for granted and offered to her/him by others. In other words, it means being capable of taking a critical stand to the prevailing social order and imagining alternatives to it. This brings us to the concept of critical consciousness.

4.2.2 Critical consciousness

The term critical consciousness refers to what the World Bank (2002: 10) defined as 'awakening'. Many scholars see the emergence of critical consciousness as central to becoming empowered. Kabeer (2001: 25) defines it as ”the process by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it”. Even though Paulo Freire did not use the term empowerment when writing about critical pedagogy for liberation from oppression, many empowerment scholars ”have built on Freire’s (1970) foundational claim that intensive reflection of oneself in relation to society, that is conscientization, is a necessary precursor to engaging in social change” (Carr 2003: 8-9).

According to Freire, developing a critical consciousness means to take an active role in relation to the world – instead of being a passive receiver, one becomes a reflective participant, who is aware of her/his own temporality and context. Instead of being an object, a person becomes a subject, an agent who is capable of adapting to the reality but in a reflexive way, with ”the critical capacity to make choices and transform that reality”. (Freire 1974: 3-4).

In Freire's (1974: 15-16) view, critical consciousness is especially needed in periods of social change and transition, as it helps people to relate to what is happening around and to them and act as agents despite the instability and unpredictability of the times. Kabeer (2001: 25), on the other hand, sees change as something that enables the emergence of critical consciousness:

[A] more critical consciousness, only becomes possible when competing ways of 'being and doing' become available as material and cultural possibilities, so that 'common sense' propositions of culture begin to lose their 'naturalised' character, revealing the underlying arbitrariness of the given social order.

In the Russian context, it can be said that the late- and post-Soviet transformations opened both materially, socially as well as culturally new ways of doing and being a Russian man, new masculinities. The old social order no longer appeared to be the only possible reality because it simply stopped functioning: a man could no more depend upon the State socio-economically, but had to get by on his own. Yet the old has not disappear completely. However, the fact that it has now 'lost its naturalised character' has enabled the development of critical consciousness as what was previously taken for granted can now be questioned, and what had to be obeyed, can be flouted.

4.2.3 Identity

Identity is the last of the three dimensions through which empowerment is approached in this paper. According to Kabeer (2005: 15), "[e]mpowerment is rooted in how people see themselves – their sense of self-worth". Identity is at the core of empowerment (Staples 1990: 38, quoted in Carr 2003: 17) firstly because it is the foundation of agency. Making strategic and conscious life choices implies that you know who you are and what you want. Secondly, the processes of identity construction are closely connected with the emergence of critical consciousness. Developing critical consciousness does not only allow people to see the world around them differently but also to explore new ways of defining who they themselves are and what is their position in the society (Carr 2003: 15). Hence, identity construction and developing both critical consciousness and ability to exercise agency are mutually constituting processes.

Further, gender identity is closely linked to both empowerment and disempowerment. Kabeer (2005: 14) writes that "[g]ender often operates through the unquestioned acceptance of power". This means that by internalizing ideas about masculinity and femininity, people do not only construct a gendered identity but also come to accept their own position, even inequality and subordination (ibid.). In this way, gender identity can be either empowering or disempowering – depending on

whether it encourages or discourages independent choices and an autonomous life.

As discussed earlier, the dominant Soviet masculinity ideals tried to consolidate a submissive male identity in order to secure that men became and remained loyal servers of the State. According to Kabeer (2005: 14), people "are likely to accept, and even collude with, their lot in society, if challenging this either does not appear possible or carries heavy personal and social costs". This happened to a large extent also in the Soviet society – until the reforms of 1980s opened for the questioning of male roles and practices assigned by the State and as also army-avoidance was no longer met with such harsh sanctions as before.

4.3 Summary

This chapter has sought to outline the conceptual framework of the thesis. Firstly, in order to understand and explain why young Russian men seek to avoid compulsory military service, I have introduced the concept of masculinity. Masculinity refers to socially constructed notions of how to be and what it means to be a man in a specific cultural context. This thesis concerns itself with masculinity because it is a central component in male identity building processes and further, masculine identity guides men's self-expression and actions, the choices they make in a changing social system.

Further, I have also chosen to use the term empowerment as an analytical lens to illuminate the Russian draft-avoiders' perspectives. Empowerment is here understood as the expansion of people's ability to exercise choice, which means being able to direct and control one's own life. I approach empowerment through three interrelated dimensions: agency, critical consciousness and identity.

The three dimensions of empowerment are mutually constituting. Firstly, agency is a manifestation of self-definition or identity, which again is gendered. Secondly, agency is founded on critical consciousness, the ability to critically consider the prevailing social order. Critical consciousness again effects individual's identity work because it enables her/him to question the condition of disempowerment and, consequently, imagine and take new subject positions. Further, both the concepts of critical consciousness and agency place an acting and reflecting individual at the heart of processes of empowerment.

Taken together, empowerment, agency and critical consciousness speak to the challenging of power

relations and the issues of change and social transformation (Kabeer 2005: 14). In the Soviet period, values and beliefs about masculinity were used to legitimize the subordination of men to the needs of the State. Through the case of draft-avoidance, this thesis seeks to direct attention to how masculinity can take transformative forms, that is, enable men to analyse, question and act on the structures that constrain them (see Kabeer 2005: 15). This question will be further examined in the next chapter, as I move on to the dialogue between the theory and the empirical material in data presentation and analysis.

Chapter 5. Data presentation and analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the field data. It begins with focusing on the informants' background information, as such issues as education, occupation and where people live and have lived are likely to affect opinion and attitude formation and maintenance. It also looks at social networks vis-a-vis military service, because people's immediate social surroundings can be expected to have an impact on their life choices and aspirations, as well as identities. Further, the chapter attempts to tap into the interviewees' individual reflections on why they had wished to avoid military service. Hence, in this section, by looking at the interviewees' narratives¹²³ through the theoretical concepts laid out in the previous section, the study seeks to explain draft-avoidance.

5.1 Informant presentation

5.1.1 A note on informant protection and anonymity

We are products of the life lived: everything we have done and experienced influences our thinking and actions today. This is why scientific efforts to understand and explain human experiences usually begin with the informants' background information in time and place. At the same time, however, the informants' privacy and security have to be taken into serious consideration, despite the need for detailed background and contextualization of information.

Military service avoidance is a potentially sensitive topic (Eichler 2012), and for an individual man, noncompliance with the draft regulations can have grave legal consequences. Even though I did not ask the interviewees if they had circumvented or broken the law, the security aspect of the research topic should not be disregarded. The present interviewees have, in one way or another, engaged in struggle with the conscription system. Participation in this study should not put anyone in any kind of danger nor in an uncomfortable situation. Hence, the interviewees were assured confidentiality and anonymity, and I have sought to keep the promise to the best of my abilities. Firstly, in order to guarantee anonymity, fictive names have been provided. Secondly, I have chosen not to attach all personal details to each interviewee. In other words, some background information is given without reference to individual informants. I am aware that the effort to keep the interviewees' identities covered reduces the possibility to contextualise their narratives. However, every study has to determine its presentational approach (Silverman 2005). The one that I have chosen for this study is

¹²³ The interview extracts are my translations and virtually verbatim. Only some minor editing has been done for better understandability and coherence.

a compromise, a balancing act between my aspiration to do good research, on the one hand, and the effort to protect my informants, on the other.

5.1.2 Background of informants

Education and occupation

For the study, a total of nine men were interviewed. Table 1 presents all the interviewees with their educational and occupational backgrounds. Seven interviewees had or were enrolled in higher (university) education and represented the following fields: information technology, financing, programming, economics, administration, social pedagogy and psychology, and music. One of the interviewees had secondary vocational education as a cook, and one was in the process of applying for higher education. Seven of the informants were working; two of them had jobs that did not correspond to the education they had. One was still a student.

Age, civil status and living arrangements

The interviewees were aged between 18 and 31¹²⁴. One of the interviewees was married with children, while the others were either single or seeing someone. Two of the informants lived alone; one was living together with his girlfriend, and others lived at home with parents and siblings or shared a rented flat with friends.

Seven interviewees out of nine were currently living in St. Petersburg. Five were originally from St. Petersburg, and two from a minor provincial capital, Pskov, situated about 20 kilometres from the border to Estonia and 290 km from St. Petersburg. One interviewee was from and currently living in Samara, the sixth largest city in Russia, situated in the South East. One was from Murmansk, a city located in the northwest of Russia, on the Kola Peninsula, close to Russia's borders with Finland and Norway, with a population of about 300,000.

One interviewee was currently living in Tromsø, Norway. Also three other interviewees had lived abroad due to studies and/or work during their adult life, including the following countries: Germany, the UK, Spain, and the USA (see table 1). Living in another country is an experience that can be expected to affect individual perceptions and attitudes in a profound way. Exposure to another culture, lifestyle, values and social system is not only likely to shape young men's consciousness, but also to lead to comparisons, and, consequently, viewing one's home country from

¹²⁴ Some of the interviewees had been in draft age before 2008, when the conscription law was changed and the length of obligatory service was reduced to one year. Hence, some of the interviewees talk about two years instead of one when referring to service.

a different perspective (e.g. Byram & Feing 2006; Dolby 2004). As Dima indicated: *"I have lived long and many times outside Russia. That's why I know what to compare with."* Two informants had lived in other parts of the former USSR when they were young.

The background issues are captured in the table below. Summing up, the present interviewees' educational and occupational choices suggest that the young men are well integrated into the modern market system. Further, it can be said that almost half of the informants have embraced an international and mobile lifestyle.

Table 1. Interviewees' educational and occupational backgrounds, and experience from living abroad

Pseudonym	Education	Specialism / field of occupation	Had lived or was living abroad
Anton	Higher	Programming	
Dima	Higher	Commerce, information technology	x
Ilya	Higher	Financing	x
Maksim	Higher	Social pedagogy, psychology / student	
Misha	Higher	Music	x
Oleg	Higher	Financing, marketing / construction worker	x
Sasha	Special secondary	Chef / consult	
Viktor	Secondary	Applying for higher education	
Yurii	Higher	Economics, administration	

Source: Fieldwork 2011, 2012.

5.1.3 Influence of social networks

As Meshcherkina (2000: 105) writes: "[N]o individual can be seen as atomised – every situation in which s/he finds her/himself has been partially created by wider social factors". In other words, people's choices are to a considerable degree influenced by their social environment. In the case of draft-avoidance, too, the young men's decisions have been affected by the expectations of their families, friends and immediate social environment.

Despite the massive reductions that the armed forces have been through since the break-up of the USSR, the military remains a major employer with a personnel of about 1 million people to date¹²⁵.

¹²⁵ <http://en.rian.ru/infographics/20091204/157098191.html>

Hence, a great many Russian families have some kind of a connection to it, with the present interviewees being no exception. Several interviewees had older brothers who had served. In addition, Anton's father was a reserve officer and Ilya's a professional soldier. Almost all the interviewees indicated that their fathers expected them to serve. These family expectations were exemplified by Yurii as such: *"Because like everybody says, it's the second school where they make youngsters men. [...] I had a feeling that father would have liked it"*. Further, Ilya had been anxious of his father's reaction and tried to avoid discussing the topic with him. However, the service question was not eventually so important that it would have turned into a conflict and damaged the relationship between the two:

My dad's a professional soldier, and from his side there was a problem. He.. we did not tell him openly that with mom we.. work against voenkomat. But he guessed. I was of course afraid that it will ruin my relationship to him because he even suggested some options to me. That through his connections I could go to serve at the Black sea, that it would be good there. But everything's OK with him now, we get along perfectly well.

Indeed, earlier studies by Kay (2006) and Eichler (2012) have shown that militarized notions of masculinity have not lost their meaning among men who have done military service or work(ed) in the armed forces. The interviewees' fathers had grown up and served in the Soviet period when, as Yurii put it, *"the military had a totally different character than now"*, and soldiering was a central component of male identity. This helps explain why they had hoped that their sons too would pass the so-called 'second school for men'. However, even though many of the interviewees had clearly acted against their fathers' will and expectations, none of them reported that this had led to harsh sanctions. Hence, the field returns appear to confirm Lokshin and Yemtsov's (2005: 16) previous finding that *"[p]resence of professional military personnel in the family shows no statistically significant influence on the probability to serve. This may suggest that having their children enlisted as rank-and-file soldiers is not an attractive option even for the families of military officers."*

The interviewees' mothers, on the contrary, never wanted their son to serve. Anton exemplifies this in the following: *"Mom was ardently against service in the military"*. Dima grew up surrounded by women who, according to him, had a negative attitude towards military service: *"Everyone was in favour of me not going there."* In many cases, like in Ilya's above, mothers help young men with the draft process and facilitate service avoidance. Usually this means collecting medical documents that prove that the son has one of the illnesses that guarantee a postponement or deferment of military service.

According to Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2002), saving men – whether it is the husband from alcoholism or the son from abuse in the military – is often seen as women's social duty in Russia. Women's (re)productive role thus implies that they provide active care and protection for the family members. In Caiazza's (2002) view, this gender expectation is also the reason why the Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers has won public support and sympathy for their cause; the activists have managed to utilize traditional ideas about motherhood and women, which suggest that mothers are supposed to be protective of their sons. Hence, it is not surprising that the interviewees' mothers and, in some cases, also girlfriends, had taken the role of defender and protector of the young men's interests.

According to Freire (1974: 7), "[c]hoice is illusory to the degree it represents the expectations of others". What was strongly emphasized among the interviewees was that the choice whether to serve or not had been their own, despite both resistance and support among their family members. In Anton's words:

Yes, there are mothers [who do not want their sons to serve], but you understand, one does not want to feel like some kind of a mama's boy. That your mom defines your destiny. To join or not to join the military, I always made the decision myself.

Furthermore, what comes to wider social networks, most of the informants had had only a few, if any friends, class mates or acquaintances who had served. As a rule, the topic – to serve or not to serve – was not discussed among peers because, as Ilya stated, the answer was clear: *"Everybody knows already that no, I won't go to the army"*. Also Maksim indicated that not doing military service had become a normalized practice among his friends and acquaintances: *"Usually the question that is discussed is how to avoid it. [...] It's already like an established fact that the army is, that it's a no."*

Taken together, the majority of the informants reported that they had gotten their families and social networks' support to their decision not to serve. According to Maksim: *"Most of my friends and relatives they all understand perfectly well that there's nothing good in it [military service], absolutely nothing."* In the interviewees' immediate social environment, it was the fathers that still, to a considerable degree, nurtured the traditional notion of soldiering as a masculine ideal. However, their opinion or an interviewee's anxiety about losing his father's acceptance were not enough to actually motivate any of the interviewees to serve. Mothers were those whom the interviewees usually sought support during the recruitment process. Hence, the immediated social

environment did not punish but rather supported and encouraged the interviewees' choice not to serve.

5.1.4 Attitudes towards the armed forces and views on military service

In general, the present interviewees demonstrated mixed views and attitudes towards the armed forces and military service. None of them had done military service, and all expressed unwillingness to serve. However, while some had been determinant and even desperate to avoid being drafted, others gave a more indifferent impression of their position towards military service. For Misha, *"it had always been clear"* that he did not want to serve. Maksim stated that *"I can't imagine myself in that place, to be honest. That is, it's the kind of social institution where I can't see myself. I can imagine myself anywhere, even in war, but not in the army."* Yurii, on the contrary, indicated that the issue of military service had not been of great significance to him: *"I did not set myself a goal when I was born not to join the army. For me it was somehow all the same. If it turns out well, I won't go. If it doesn't, I will."* Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite the indifference expressed in the quotation above, Yurii had not remained passive but taken active measures to avoid service.

Further, one of the interviewees worked as a volunteer in the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, being the only informant who had decided to take an active stand, join together with like-minded people and become an activist. Majority of the interviewees viewed the issue of military service as a private matter and dealt with it correspondingly; that is, on their own. This is particularly explained by Sasha as such: *"To a certain extent, I took it passively. They [voenkomat] don't disturb me, I don't disturb them, well, everything is fine then."*

It is noteworthy that several of the interviewees had, in fact, been willing or interested in joining the army in some point, but changed their mind as they came to draft age and the actual recruitment process started. For example, Anton had been wanting to go to the military as long as he could remember. However, after the draft station misplaced his personal documents, his view changed drastically:

That was the first time I had to face bureaucracy in our country. And coldness, namely military coldness, when a conscript's personal history can be lost and the conscript becomes useless. None of my attempts to restore my case were successful. [...] I really wanted to go to the army but my wish was destroyed by our administrative authorities, our government, our corruption, coldness and so on.

Anton's narrative above demonstrates how the military's perceived inefficiency, inhuman bureaucracy and corruption, that lead to disregard for individual, often contribute to young men's unwillingness to serve. Another factor that made military service less attractive in the interviewees' eyes, was the abuse of conscripts. Many of the interviewees mentioned *dedovshchina*, violence against new conscripts. Also stories about conscripts who had been forced to *plough a vegetable garden* or *build a summer cottage for generals*. Hence, the field returns suggest that awareness about unreasonable and arbitrary practices in the army also plays a central role in the formation of the negative attitudes towards military service.

The interviewees stated that military service had had both a positive and negative influence on their relatives, friends or acquaintances, who had served. Even though the field returns were dominated by negative perceptions, many interviewees highlighted also positive influences of military service. Recurrent issues ranged from developing one's physical condition, learning to use a gun or parachuting to making life-long friends. Thus, to some extent, army life was considered fascinating, interesting and exciting by the interviewees. This was expressed, for example, by Ilya in the following way: *"Somewhere deep down at heart I actually maybe wanted to become a soldier. Watching movies, and they have it cool [laughs]. But that's somewhere deep down at heart."*

Like the draftee-respondents of Klement'ev and Nikolaeva's (2000) survey study, the present interviewees' perceptions about military service were contradictory. This can perhaps be explained by the gap between, on the one hand, the images, representations and myths of army life and the Russian/Soviet soldier, (re)constructed in popular culture and official discourses and, on the other hand, accounts from people who have really served in the Russian military. As Kvale has noted (1996: 33): *"The contradictions of interviewees [...] may in fact be adequate reflections of objective contradictions in the world in which they live."* From Ilya's narrative above, movies made military service seem 'cool'. However, the letters his brother had sent home from the army gave a totally different impression: *"It was really tough. [...] From his letters it became clear that all of it was totally useless."*

Further, it is worth noting that none of the informants was categorically against the military. This observation is illustrated by Yurii as such: *"Naturally, we have to have an army"*. Anton's view, which according to Kay's (2006: 66) earlier observations is shared by many contemporary Russians, was that: *"I am for military service, but I am for service in a normal army."* Thus, the field returns confirm Eichler's (2012: 81) previous claim that *"men who evaded the draft are not necessarily*

antimilitaristic". Of all the present interviewees, only Maksim considered himself a pacifist. However, subscribing to the idea that war is inevitable¹²⁶, he indicated that a certain degree of political realism was needed: *"Well, a pacifist as I understand it, that is, people who are against war. Against violence, against war. Of course. It's my position. But absence of war is already a utopia."*

Without an exception, all the interviewees called for a professional army where service would be on voluntary (contract) basis. Several informants emphasized that everyone, who served, should be dedicated professionals, not merely an unmotivated mass of people forced through a training regimen. Hence, none of the interviewees objected to military service as such, but to the fact that it was obligatory; that is, that the conscription system was *coercive*. In the field data, conscription was referred to as a *human rights violation*. This perception of conscription as being unjust was further emphasized by comparisons with slavery and serfdom. For example, Viktor saw the conscription system as merely a way to make money on people by using them as free work force, echoing the view of the majority of Russians (Mikhailenok 2006: 113). In other words, the state was seen to exploit people through obligatory military service. Furthermore, many interviewees saw the military as a producer of obedient and uncritical citizens, something which was seen to serve the interests of those in power. In Ilya's words: *"It's probably useful for the government that they teach people there.. not to think but just perform some monotonous operations."*

5.2 Defining one's self

As discussed in the previous chapter, identity as self-identification "tells us who we are and what we do" (O'Hagan 2009: 28). Hence, the present interviewees' choice not to join the army can be understood as a manifestation of their sense of self. Further, Goff & Dunn (2009b: 244-245) argue that:

Even though identity is a social construction, it is not whatever we want it to be. A limited reserve of discursive resources constrains the ways in which identities evolve, suggesting that domestic history and material circumstances, among other things, fix the parameters within which identities can develop.

This implies that also the present interviewees' identities are contextual products; they are both

¹²⁶ The notion of inevitability of war, introduced by Lenin, had a strong influence on Soviet thinking about war and peace. On the official discursive level, the USSR declared pacifism and its mission for world peace. At the same time, however, some wars were interpreted as inevitable, justified and progressive, which served as a rationale for the militarization of the country. (see Vigor 1975).

limited and enabled by the specific historical and cultural context, and the material opportunities and challenges that the young men are faced with. Further, the interviewees' self-definitions are anchored in existing notions of masculinities, that is, accepted ways of being a male in the new Russia. In other words, in coming to terms with their sense of self, the interviewees make use of discourses and masculinity models that are available in their social setting (see Connell 2000: 12).

In the subsequent section, I will discuss what kind of elements were central to the interviewees' self-identification and how they have played a role in draft-avoidance.

5.2.1 Capitalist masculinities

In a market society, life centers around work, and work is a socially legitimate masculine activity. Surviving the competition for the best jobs requires acquisition of competence, something which is manifest also in masculinity notions (e.g. Lehtonen 1995: 118). According to Koukarenko, (2007: 105), with the transition to the market system, professionalism has become one of "[t]he new discursive means for constructing masculinities" in the post-Soviet Russia (see also Eichler 2012). This was evident in my field returns, too; many of the interviewees emphasized the meaning of education for them, and identified themselves as professionals. Also several of those who did not explicitly refer to themselves as professionals, underlined the importance of work, as well as being good at what they did and successful in that field they had chosen.

What is noteworthy from the viewpoint of draft-avoidance, is that the interviewees' self-identification as career-making professionals appeared to happen at the expense of military service. For example, for Yurii it was clear why he was investing in career: *"Yes. Because in general, the military is for one year, but work is for the whole life."* Further, in several field narratives, professionalism served as the main rationale against joining the army. This was indicated by Dima and Misha in the following terms:

I am not a professional soldier; it's not what I do. I have my thing, that's what I work with. And that's all. (Dima)

Somebody has to defend the motherland, but it has to be done by soldiers who get money for doing it. Those who defend have to be professionals. I don't consider myself a professional. (Misha)

Hence, in the field narratives, professionalism and military service were constructed as two incompatible, mutually excluding paths, even ways of life, and joining the army conflicted with the

interviewees' self-identification as professionals.

Furthermore, a goal-oriented businessman is often seen as one of the most dominant masculinity ideals of the new, capitalist Russia (Meshcherkina 2000). This was, however, not how any of my interviewees referred to themselves even though almost half of them had education in typical business fields: economics, marketing, financing, commerce. That notwithstanding, most of the interviewees emphasized certain emerging male attributes that are central to capitalism; being motivated, and goal- and future-oriented. This was exemplified by Oleg in the following terms:

If there are some concrete goals towards which one strives, it's not important what they are but he will already be something more than many other people. [...] That's what in my view, from my point of view a real man has concrete goals and results.

Oleg described the emerging masculinity ideal further: *"The characteristic of a man is success. [...] Now, money is the measure."* Indeed, as Ruchkin (1998) points out, money is one of the main values of market society. Consequently, as Oleg's narrative highlighted, being a man in a capitalist system is, to a considerable degree, about striving for success and making money, the two being closely tied together. Also Sasha, who did not have higher academic education and stressed less the meaning of professionalism than many other interviewees, identified himself as a money-maker: *"I simply think that I am supposed to live, make money for myself and my family and try.. to live well.. by more or less honest means. And that's about it."*

Considering the socio-economic reality in today's Russia, it is hardly surprising that the interviewees prioritized work over military service. On the one hand, the country's economy has witnessed a remarkable growth during the past years, as a result of which there are more billionaires in Moscow than in any other city in the world. However, at the same time, a large part of the population is struggling to make the ends meet.¹²⁷ If richness is striking in Russia, so is poverty, too. Hence, prioritizing work is to a certain extent a question of survival. It is about trying to make sure that one does not end up on the less fortunate side of the society in the competition where there is a lot to lose. However, as some interviewees pointed out, the chances for huge success are also much greater in Russia than, for example, in Northern Europe.

As for example Sasha's narrative above demonstrates, through work the young men are striving

¹²⁷ <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/Russlands-milliardarer-blir-yngre-6352427.html>,
<http://www.aftenposten.no/innsikt/Russisk-rikdom-ikke-for-alle-6534659.html>

towards the 'good life' which, to a significant degree, entails financial security and material comforts. In Anton's words: *"a good car, a house, holidays abroad, and so on"*. The qualities that were mentioned in the field narratives and that the interviewees identified themselves with – professionalism as competence, goal- and future-orientation, investing in work and career – are a response to the challenges and opportunities of the market society. Expected to guarantee success, embracing and idealizing those qualities is part of the survival strategy.

5.2.2 The family man

It is noteworthy that even though the interviewees' identities were, to a considerable degree, anchored on capitalist notions of masculinity, the ideal of money and career making professional was also met with certain reservations. For example, Ilya stated that he *"did not necessarily agree"* with the general attitude in the society that stressed making money, and buying a car and an apartment as the criteria of manliness. Also, Anton stood out as an exception. In several occasions, he emphasized the meaning of the private sphere and family. He stated that outer measures, such as position or success in the public realm of work, were of secondary importance to him; he wanted first and foremost to be a family leader and a man whom others could count on:

You know, a real man is first and foremost a person who can give protection to his near and dear ones. Different kinds of protection, physical, material, emotional protection. Who can be a real leader of the family, the head, and is ready to maintain that family. That's probably what for me is an example of a real man. Here it's not important what kind of a status he has, his standing in the society, whether he's been in the army or not, education. [...] Being that kind of a man is what I want to aim at.

During the Soviet period, the state took control over people's private lives, which meant that Russian men were stripped of their traditional role as the head of family. However, as the Soviet system collapsed and with it the social safety net provided by the state, men were expected to fill the void and take over the traditional male duties of breadwinner and leadership. Hence, the post-Soviet era has witnessed a return to traditional gender notions, which has included the restitution of the patriarchal role to men. (Ashwin 2000: 18-20; Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2007; Tartakovskaya 2005: 133). Now, as a result, "the household is an important sphere in which men [can] potentially gain a sense of efficacy and identity". Further, according to Ashwin & Lytkina, "there are few other tasks in the urban Russian household that are seen as masculine" as that of breadwinner. (Ashwin & Lytkina 2004: 189).

Anton's narrative reflects this shift, and the on-going rehabilitation of traditional family values. In

other words, his masculine self-identification is strongly informed by neotraditionalist discourses and practices. According to Ashwin (2000), "women seem to be looking for two things from men: financial security, and emotional and practical support within the family". These are the gender expectations that also Anton indicated he sought to live up to – at the expense of military service.

5.2.3 Embracing individualism

Further, the field narratives reflected yet another value that is characteristic of market society, as well as capitalist notions of masculinities; especially individualism. In the Soviet era, the army was a central institution in consolidating collectivism, that is, "the priority of common interests over individual interests" (Gudkov 2006: 46). Consequently, "the experience of military service was one of subordinating oneself to the collective, respecting hierarchies, and following orders" (Eichler 2012: 25). Hence, individualism represents the opposite to the logic and official values of Soviet society as a whole, and the military in particular. As expressed in the field narratives, the ethos of individualism implies that individual needs, wants and aspirations are taken as the starting point for every pursuit, while the needs of the state and society are a distant second.¹²⁸ Oleg's words captured the attitude: *"To be honest, if I saw some practical personal benefit in the army, I would go there."* Maksim stated similarly that: *"I just did not see in it anything productive from my own viewpoint."* It was namely this perceived lack of personal benefit that made the interviewees call military service *useless, a lost year or a sheer waste of time.*

Embracing individualism and the idea that a man is allowed, and even supposed, to follow his own aspirations and live for himself, and not for the state, offered thus the interviewees yet another rationale for not doing military service. As Maksim stated: *"I just don't want to, so why should I serve in the army?"* Misha suggested that it would be for the benefit of everyone if the issue of military service was considered first and foremost from the individual's perspective: *"I believed that I can use those two years on something else. And not just for myself but, I don't know, and for others, because why should you do what you don't like?"* Further, he added that the military as an institution that aims to make everyone fit the same standard contradicted the values he had been socialized to from little:

I don't like that [...] they try to equalize everyone. That you are like everyone, you are simply flock, you're a pawn. I've always liked the idea that everyone can be something special and individual. And to say, from childhood I was raised to think that you don't have to be like everyone else. Well, maybe this also was a reason [for not wanting to join the army].

128 See also Webber and Zilberman's study (2006).

Also other interviewees named the military's inability, or unwillingness, to take individual needs into account as a problem. They claimed that not everyone could eat the same food and do exactly the same exercises without somebody falling ill or getting hurt. Hence, the 'mass' nature of military service was seen to be the underlying reason for the numerous scandals and problems that the Russian armed forces have struggled with in the post-Soviet era. For Maksim, this was one of the main factors that made the military as an institution highly unattractive for him, and he demanded that the army should be more individual-oriented.

The field returns thus support Petrov's (2003) previous claim that one of the explanations for growing draft-avoidance can be found in the rise of individualism, that is, the changing value system and young men's tendency to emphasize personal profit at the expense of the state's interests. Furthermore, what was important from the present interviewees' perspective was that embracing an individualist masculinity notion allowed them to oppose to the collectivist and submissive mentality of 'server of the motherland', which the state tries to impose on them. In other words, individualism appeared to liberate the men from the imperative of common interests. As Viktor stated: *"Everybody should live for themselves, not for the motherland."*

5.2.4 Self-made men

Another central element in the interviewees' narratives was their self-identification as independent, autonomous, self-reliant and self-sufficient men. According to Koukarenko (2007: 105), the idea of a self-made man has been important for post-Soviet masculinities; indeed, in it culminate all the main qualities that are required from a successful man in the new market society, where dependence on the state is no longer possible (see Meshcherkina 2000). This is further explained by Dima in the following terms:

Life is harder now, in a whirl. And work is harder, it's not like in the Soviet Union when you knew for sure that after finishing studies you'll be sent somewhere and you'll work there peacefully 10 or 15 years, if you had to do anything at all. You knew your life clearly, life was calm. Now it's not like that.

Dima's statement illustrates how the social contract between the state and citizens, which existed in the Soviet period, is no longer applicable (Eichler 2012: 80). Instead, the new market society forces one to rely on oneself, to be economically self-sufficient. As Ruchkin (1998) observed already 15 years ago, responding to the post-Soviet changes and transition to capitalism, young Russians have embraced the ideal of self-reliance. This was clearly indicated also in my field returns.

My interviewees appeared to have responded to the challenges posed by the market system by making a virtue of their ability to cope alone. They particularly used the narrative of how much harder life was now compared to before to construct a self-image of a self-made man, which appeared to give them a sense of dignity. This was noticeable especially in the ways they reminisced about the period when they took their first steps towards independent life. Several informants argued that, if before military service was the rite of passage into manhood and adulthood, now the qualifying test for many young Russian men had the transition from one's parents' house to self-sufficiency and independence. This was exemplified by Ilya and Anton in the following terms:

That's a school [of life] when you move to a new, unknown city, where there's nobody waiting for you, where nobody needs you but somehow you have to try to develop there. (Ilya)

Now the school of life is... somewhat different. For me the school of life was when I left home at the age of 17 and started to provide for myself on my own. I had great difficulties finding accommodation, finding a job... I was studying so there was not much time. I also had to organize my private life, I wanted to have some kind of a love.. For me this period, let's say from 18 to 20 years, these two years were my school of life during which I understood a lot, from which I got a lot. (Anton)

Viktor's comment indicates that, for him and his peers, self-sufficiency and independence are the ultimate parameters of manliness. At the same time, he questioned the common claim that the military turns 'boys' into 'men':

Where did they get that nonsense from that the army makes a man?! How?! Just explain to me in detail how.. That you are separated from your mom, like they say, you live independently.. I'm hardly 18, I provide for myself, I don't take money from anyone, I live totally independently. So what are they talking about? (Viktor)

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that, in the interviewees' narratives, self-sufficiency was used as a justification for their demand for autonomy from the state's interference with their private lives, as well as an argument for not having to serve in the army. For example, as Viktor boldly stated: "I don't owe anyone anything. [...] Why should I serve anyone? I am a free man!" Also Sasha's experience was that he "had not gotten anything from the state." Hence, he was convinced that the right to control his life was his own, not the state's: "In my opinion I belong first and foremost to myself and not to Russia even though I am a Russian citizen."

5.2.5 Empowering male identity?

Post-Soviet Russia has witnessed a growing influence of western norms and values, which has had a

significant impact on gender notions (e.g. Ashwin 2000: 18; Eichler 2012: 67). This is evident also in the present field data. As the discussion above demonstrates, the interviewees' identities are to a significant degree reflective of capitalist notions of masculinity that emphasize professionalism, goal-orientation, individualism, success, money and material well-being. Equally, their sense of self is informed by the liberal values of independence, autonomy, self-reliance and self-sufficiency, which were discouraged, even taboos in the Soviet era (Koukarenko 2007; Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2007). Hence, the field returns appear supportive of Semenova & Utkina (2004) and Eichler's (2012) previous claims that the new, emerging masculinity notions undermine or have replaced the military as a crucial element for constructing and expressing male identity.

Gender identity can be particularly empowering if it supports independent choices and an autonomous life. The masculinity notions that the present interviewees had embraced and looked up to did not encourage submissiveness, obedience and passivity. Precisely, because they were substantially oriented towards own decision making, independence and autonomy, both in personal, economic and political issues. Furthermore, the interviewees' self-perception appeared to give them a basis from which to challenge old power relations; that is, men's expected subordination to the needs of the state and the collectivity. Hence, supportive of individual initiatives and pursuits, the interviewees' sense of self can be seen as liberating and empowering.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, work was a "legitimate sphere for [men's] self-realisation" and thereby central to masculine identity in the Soviet era (Kiblitckaya 2000: 98; Ashwin 2000: 12-13). Also the present interviewees emphasized the meaning of the sphere of work for them. However, the fundamental difference between the Soviet and the contemporary Russian seems to be that whereas men served the state through work before, now it has become a means to gain and express self-reliance and independence. In other words, the interviewees were not working for the state, but for themselves. This made work an expression of individualism, not subordination to the collective. Through their work, men felt liberated and unencumbered by the demands of the state. In this calculation, military service was seen as opposite to real work¹²⁹. For example in Dima's view, being a soldier was easier than *"selling flowers on the street"*.

5.3 Othering conscript soldiers

As discussed in chapter 4, identity is a relational construct. In other words, people define

129 For comparison, see Ahlbäck's (2010) study about conscription resistance in interwar-Finland.

themselves as being similar or different only in relation to other individuals, groups and ideas (e.g. Connolly 2002). This makes self-definition a boundary-marker in relation to others. In terms of male identity formation and definitions, the boundaries often relate to and concern other men. The present interviewees routinely compared themselves to their peers who were going to or had already done military service. While explaining why they think some young men join the military, they did not only outline what set them apart from young men who serve, but also justified their own draft-avoidance. The subsequent section thus discusses how the interviewees specifically viewed and compared themselves with those who are drafted, and how simultaneously identities are constructed and defined in everyday life.

5.3.1 Uneducated, ignorant and submissive

In the field narratives, conscript soldiers were described first and foremost as *uneducated* or *poorly educated* – something which is not surprising since the majority of draftees do not have higher education (e.g. Lokshin & Yemtsov 2005). Enrolment in higher education guarantees a deferment, making it one of the main division lines and boundary markers between those who serve and those who avoid the draft. However, being uneducated was not seen merely as a lack of formal (higher) education, but doubts were also raised about the draftees' intellectual abilities. For example, in Maksim's view, those who are not clever enough to study, are drafted:

What is the army now? People who do not study go there, who were not accepted to study. It's kind of clear that in our time entering any institution of higher education is not that difficult. It's not that difficult. In any case you can study. Let's say that not the most intelligent people find themselves there [in the military].

Moreover, the interviewees depicted those who serve as *poorly informed*, particularly in terms of their own rights as citizens. This was exemplified by Ilya in the following terms:

Many are convinced that everything is decided for them, that the state says, and you have to go. It does not even cross their minds that they have some rights, that the way they are used is totally against the law. [...] Well, in this sense poorly educated people.

Indeed, according to Webber and Zilberman (2006: 190-191), the vast majority of draftees come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and are thus "least likely, in principle, to be aware of their rights and the means by which they can go about protecting them". Nevertheless, it was further implied in the field narratives that being poorly informed about their rights was, at least partly, the draftees' own fault. As Viktor stated: "*They are simply people who don't think much.*" In other

words, conscripts were depicted as people who did not, in general, reflect on their circumstances or exercise critical thinking, and this was seen to be the main reason why they 'ended up' in the army; ignorance led to a submissive mentality and an accepting attitude towards military service. Several interviewees stated that the submissiveness, obedience and passivity were only reinforced by the experience of military service. According to Viktor, he had seen many young men return from the army *"with downtrodden heads"*.

However, the interviewees indicated that they themselves were the opposite. They did not take for granted that the state had the right to demand them to serve. They disliked to be told what to do and were not willing to submit to others' rule and follow orders, in or outside the military. Hence, a boundary marker was established between the interviewees and those young men who did not resist the draft. This was particularly exemplified by narratives from Sasha and Maksim as such:

I am not some kind of a cyborg that is programmed to protect the motherland and die. That is, you have to at least think for yourself. (Sasha)

There [in the military] you have to do what you are told. Always. That is, they always decide for you. You will never decide for yourself. There are people who like that, for whom it is easier to live like that. And they go there deliberately. But I am not one of them. (Maksim)

In his study on military service resistance in South Africa, Conway (2008: 134) argues that "[m]any objectors considered their self-reflexivity and attitude towards conscription as a privilege that was denied other white South African men". Also the present interviewees indicated that they saw their own position and ability to avoid military service as advantaged. After all, they were aware of and demanded their rights as citizens, and exercised critical thinking towards conscription. At the same time, those young men who did military service were depicted as disadvantaged and disempowered by their condition. Their lack of information and reflexivity translated into a submissive attitude towards the conscription system. Indeed, access to information is crucial for empowerment (World Bank 2002). Many interviewees noted that, according to their experience, if people were only given enough and the right information, they understood that they could not be forced to serve. This again would lead to the abolition of the conscription system. As Viktor stated: *"If you explain everything knowledgeably in detail, people will understand [that conscription is wrong]."*

5.3.2 Unfit for the market society

Moreover, young men, who were drafted and served, were further described by the interviewees as people who do not know what they want and who have not found their place in life; they do not have goals of their own, lack initiative, and simply *"do not want anything more"*. In other words, draftees were seen as people without self-direction, that is, aspirations, ambitions and dreams of their own making. This was understood to be the yet another reason why some ended up in the military. According to Oleg, *"those who do not have any concrete goals join the military. If they had a goal, they would not want to waste their time on it. That's it."*

Further, in Dima's view, military service produced people who had difficulties in operating in the civilian life, the 'real' life. His observation was that those, who had been in the army, were good at fulfilling simple tasks assigned by others, but less capable of creative and independent thinking. However, he underlined that self-direction and the ability to think independently and creatively were the most basic needs if one wished to get by, or even more so, to become successful in today's Russia. In other words, the experience of military service was seen to undermine young men's chances to harvest the promises of the new market-based society. This was particularly exemplified in the following narrative:

I have an acquaintance, both a relative and an acquaintance, who was in the army. He was relatively lucky, without any kind of help or anything. He matured, he... became stronger and obtained manly qualities of character. But he's having a really hard time now. That is, he finished the service this year, and now he's having a hard time. He.. Because the army is understandable. The army is clear, understandable, predictable and unproblematic as a matter of fact. If you don't run into some kind of trouble, it's unproblematic. And there.. you do not practically need to think. The army denies you the possibility, the wish to think. You have everything according to a schedule, clearly according to a script, you know the questions and the answers. In life, it's not like that. [...] That's why it's now so difficult for him to make up his mind about going to college, work and the rest. That is, he got used to a simple and comprehensible life. (Dima)

In the Soviet planned economy, people's destinies were decided for them. As Meshcherkina (2000) has noted, the new competitive society requires initiative, resourcefulness, alertness and decisiveness. The market system rewards those with ambition, and to be a man is to be an achiever. In the view of the interviewees, a soldier's qualities were not only seen as corresponding poorly to the requirements of today's society; in fact, they were seen to be contradictory. A soldier, as someone good at monotonous performance of certain routine tasks, as well as receiving and following orders, but lacking aspirations of his own, was somewhat the antithesis of a successful and admirable Russian man and the masculinity ideals that the interviewees had adopted.

5.3.3 Ridiculous and pathetic boys

Another way the informants created distance between themselves and those who are drafted was by pointing to how little respect and honouring the contemporary Russian Armed Forces and soldiers evoke. According to Dima, 23rd February, the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland, is commonly taken as a joke and people celebrate it as Men's day, an equivalent of 8th March¹³⁰ that does not have any relation to the military. Moreover, the interviewees stated that, during celebratory military parades or other holidays dedicated to the armed forces, participating soldiers were seen as being merely ridiculous. Instead of arousing admiration and being looked up to as heroes of the fatherland, they were perceived more like losers who had achieved little in life; *"people who do not have anything in their lives besides the army"*. This was particularly exemplified by Ilya in the following narrative:

I don't know if you saw the 2nd of August, the Day of the VDV¹³¹? It's a kindergranten, really. Grown men drinking beer and lying in the fountain, taking a bath there.. Well, they went to the military, and it seems to be the only meaningful experience they've had in life. And now they of course recall everything that was good there, that it was cool to be in the military, new friends, that everything was great there. And every year they wait for this day in order to drink themselves unconscious, and then destroy something. Well, it's not serious, it's ridiculous. The whole city, everywhere people laugh at them.

5.3.4 Soldier – the unadmired Other

Male identity work is often performed through association of difference with other men. In the narratives presented here, the interviewees' attempt to differentiate themselves from conscript soldiers became clear. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the armed forces has lost a lot of its old prestige and glory, and so has the role of a soldier – something which the statements from the present interviewees also echo.

According to Russian sociologist Igor Kon (2002: 239), the image of the contemporary Russian soldier is that of a weak and helpless boy, bullied by his seniors and protected by his mom¹³². Even though several interviewees insisted that they did not see military service as an important social marker, something which defines a person's value, their views on conscripts were far from complimentary¹³³. In fact, draftees seemed to represent a kind of antihero to the present interviewees, which was captured by Dima in the following words: *"You can say that those who*

130 The International Women's Day is one of the most popular holidays in Russia.

131 The airborne troops, considered to be the elite unit in the Russian Armed Forces.

132 I was once told by a young Russian woman that in girls' eyes, a guy who had "dodged the draft" often appeared cooler than those who had served. Nevertheless, none of my interviewees referred to service avoidance as a "cool thing to do".

133 Of all the interviewees, Anton had the most positive attitude towards military service and the armed forces in general. He was the only one who underlined of being proud of those young men who wanted to serve voluntarily. In fact, his perceptions were more negative towards those who avoid service than towards draftees.

haven't managed, who haven't succeeded, who haven't been lucky in life, they find themselves in the army". Taken together, in the interviewees' narratives, draftees were described as lacking all the qualities that the new socio-economic context requires from those who want to prosper.

Connolly (2002: xiv) has noted that identity "is always connected to a series of differences that help it to be what it is. The initial tendency is to describe the differences on which you depend in a way that gives privilege to you." Against this background, the unflattering accounts that the interviewees gave on those who serve become understandable. Usually, though not always, we strive for positive self-identifications that empower us; that is, rather than wanting to put ourselves down, we seek dignity. For the same reason the present interviewees also sought to demonstrate the righteousness of their viewpoint and choices. Simultaneously, those, who did not resist the draft and served, lost status and became devalued and othered. Furthermore, according to Meshcherkina (2000: 106), "[i]n post-communist Russia, horizontal relations between individual men have assumed a far greater importance, and now men who want to succeed have to define their position in relation to their peers". Hence, the field narratives can also be seen as reflective of competition between young men.

5.4 Empowerment or disempowerment?

As discussed in chapter 2, in the Soviet period, the military had an important function as a 'social lift' that enabled both horizontal and vertical mobility opening new life prospects for young men from all social backgrounds (Mikhailenok 2006: 106-109; Gudkov 2006: 41). Many of the present interviewees did note that military service can still have a positive influence on lives and provide opportunities for social mobility for some people. This was expressed by Ilya and Anton in the following ways:

In villages, as far as I understand, persists the conviction that in the army you can, that the army is a way to break away from your village. That is, many stay, sign a contract, and start accordingly to earn good money, leave to serve in an other part of the country. (Ilya)

[...] then there's those people, who do not have choice. That is... well, for example.. you turned 18. You were not accepted to study. Finding a job without education is difficult. So where will you go? You'll join the army. There's nothing shameful about that. At the same time, you understand that after serving one year, you can stay on contract basis and link your destiny to the military and also get paid well. (Anton)

Yurii also indicated that for someone without education, the army could offer the easiest channel to

a decent job. In addition, he pointed to the fact that the military's benefit system for contract soldiers can help one to realize a dream that for many Russians seems unreachable today – getting an apartment of one's own.

Asked if they thought that they themselves could have achieved something by joining the army, the interviewees' responses were, however, totally different from those above. In other words, the interviewees, like many contemporary Russians, rather saw military service as a 'depriving factor' (Mikhailenok 2006), inimical to personal achievement and general efforts at the 'good life'. One of the main fears the interviewees articulated was connected to the risk of losing one's health, both physical and mental. This was conveyed by Maksim, Viktor and Ilya as follows:

Now, to serve in the army is to cripple oneself. (Maksim)

It [the army] creates softheads and invalids. What kind of people come from there?! Broken! Broken... They have to be fixed... (Viktor)

My biggest wish... is that I would return from there physically healthy. (Ilya)

Anton was, yet again, an exception. He underlined that he viewed the army as something "totally normal", and was convinced that, had he served, he "would not have brought [with him] anything negative from there".

Another factor that the interviewees associated with military service was moral, personal and professional degradation. For example, Ilya, based on what his older brother had told him after returning from the army, said that:

Also morally it was difficult that.. [the seniors are] younger than you, well it's visible that they are closer to kids, and, you know, they are already aggressive towards you, as if they knew something about life and try to teach someone something.

Furthermore, Ilya went on to describe the army as an environment without any intellectual stimuli. Freetime would be spent in front of the television, watching news from government-controlled channels, surrounded by people whose company he doubted would be inspiring and self-fulfilling. Summing up, in Ilya's view, the army was a place where "it is difficult to remain educated", because all the knowledge and skills you have acquired would be "intensively hammered out of your head" and replaced with unhelpful information for civilian life. Similar perceptions were

articulated also by several other interviewees. Hence, the field returns appear to support both Kay (2006) and Klement'ev & Nikolaeva's (2000) previous claims that military service is often regarded as a waste of personal resources and a useless experience from the viewpoint of civilian life. According to Dima, the problem was that *"the army is not a preparation for the future life"*. Taken together, the present interviewees' considered the time spent in the army to undermine the acquisition of employable skills, the building of career, relevant networks and the search for concrete job opportunities.

Moreover, the fear of personal degradation was connected to the perception that the army was an institution that denies conscripts opportunities for self-realization. This was particularly expressed by Maksim as such: *"Simply... in the military you are not allowed to express yourself, fulfil yourself somehow."* Also Yurii saw this to be the main issue underlying many young men's negative attitude towards military service. He urged the military to take people's personal interests, especially skills development, into consideration. In practice, this could mean that, for example, an engineer would not have to serve as an ordinary soldier but rather perform task corresponding to his education. In Yurii's view, if the army managed to assure young men that they could continue to realize themselves; that is, to develop themselves professionally and follow what they found interesting also in military service, it would help address the current recruitment problems. He continued that:

When I want to serve with my head, when I want to serve by doing my favourite thing, when I know for sure that after completing my education I can learn and not lose skills in the military, then people will sign up.

Summing up, the common perception that, instead of preparing young men for the future, military service destroys their life prospects (see Mikhailenok 2006), was dominant among the interviewees. It was only those, who, in the interviewees' eyes, *"do not have other exit"* and have little to lose that could make something positive out of military service. The interviewees failed to see that the army could teach them anything useful or provide any new opportunities for them. It was, rather, the opposite; the interviewees feared that they would be deprived of what they already had or were about to achieve in life. Even this was shared by Anton, who was the most positive of all the informants towards military service:

I think many in this country share my opinion that it's at the age of 18 that you should join the military. While, let's say, you don't have anything. When you have nothing in your head nor behind your back. But to go to the army when I'm 23, when I already have a stable private life and intensive path of development, it does not make any sense because in one year you basically lose everything. That's why I basically don't want to go to the army now.

5.4.1 Oleg's story

Furthermore, it is not only the actual experience of military service that the interviewees described and anticipated as disempowering. The mere existence of the conscription system was, in fact, experienced as a constraint to young man's ability to make choices and thus direct his own life. Oleg's story is particularly illustrative.

Oleg finished school at the age of 16. Since recruitment to the armed forces starts at 18, he could have taken one year off before entering the university. However, instead of encouraging their son to first explore and then choose the path he was interested in, Oleg's parents pressed him to apply for a study program that was relatively easy to get admission to – only to make sure that he would avoid military service:

When we were applying for the institute, when we met [with friends], there were often jokes about the topic, that if you're not accepted, you'll join the army and serve two years there. And with relatives it was the same: if you don't get in, you'll go to the army, so you have to get in. Personally, I think that that kind of position is somewhat wrong. [...] Parents should tell their kids: you have to choose what you like and strive towards it because the earlier you define it, the better it will be for you yourself. Here the attitude was different. To get accepted anywhere, just to avoid the army.

Oleg explained that the main reason for quickly enrolling in a study program was fear – the fear of him losing the sharpness to perform well at the entrance exams. Ultimately, what his parents and he himself were afraid of was being recruited to the army. According to Oleg, due to this fear, youngsters have a lot of pressure on them after finishing school, something which prevents them from *focusing and concentrating on what they really want*.

It was easy to see that Oleg was somewhat bitter. The fear of ending up in the military and pressure from the family had forced him to choose a path that he could not claim ownership of. The ability to lay claim to a decision means self-control, and empowerment. Now he thought he had education in an unexciting field. He indicated that he wished things had gone differently:

It's total nonsense! It's five years of life wasted on those studies. Thank God it of course wasn't the worst program that could have been.. But to be honest, now I would probably have taken one more year off. I'd rather taken some courses, because nobody would have hired me, I wasn't 18 yet. I would have finished a supplementary course, would have taken lessons with a private tutor, and then specifically decided where I want to go [to study] and tried to get there. And if by then I wouldn't have gotten accepted, then I would have gone there where I managed to.

Asked if the question about military service had changed his life or its direction, Oleg responded:

Of course, it has changed. Because undoubtedly there was a chance to enter some place else, where I would have wanted more. Where the place could have been more to my liking. And not only to my liking but where I could have established some interesting and important contacts. [...] Right after school, that was the year when I could have decided where I specifically want to go. Though I strongly doubt, because at that moment it was really difficult to do. But that option, that possibility remains, so it's possible that the army, the necessity to take a quick decision somehow influenced.

From the narrative above, Oleg had experienced conscription as a hindrance to exploring the world and taking life chances, following dreams and setting on something he really wanted. He felt his choices and decisions had been unjustly restricted.

Furthermore, following Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002a: 4), individual empowerment takes place within structural constraints; it implies being able to negotiate and manoeuvre impediments, and not allow one to be held back by difficulties. Despite the obstacles and challenges that he had met on the way, Oleg had continued to pursue his own goals. After finishing studies, he had moved to St. Petersburg to follow his passion. Finally, he had found out what he really wanted to do in life: *"I like drawing, I know how to draw."* Now he was working to earn money to come closer to the realization of his dream, something which was neither prescribed by his family nor the state. Rather, he himself made the decision:

It's not my dream to work in a construction firm, but now it just went that way that first of all one has to think of money. But at the same time it's money that can be used on my real dreams. To go to a course, let's say in drawing. I know a specific course where I want to go. [...] The most important thing is not to stop.

In the words of Kabeer (2001: 18): "People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be *very powerful*, but they are not *empowered* in the sense in which I am using the word, because they were never disempowered in the first place." Oleg indicated that managing to avoid military service had, on the whole, helped to expand his ability to act as an agent, that is, to exercise choice and strive for self-defined goals. The fact that the problem with the army had been 'completely solved' during the college years meant that Oleg could no longer be drafted. This had earned him a new freedom to do whatever he wanted because, unlike many other graduates under 27, his choices were no more influenced by the fear of being called to serve. Now, Oleg was taking back what he felt he had missed during his years in college. At the same time, he expressed deep satisfaction over having managed to avoid service and successfully negotiate for himself a life he liked better:

”During these two years [in St. Petersburg], I have broadened my horizons a lot more, I have mixed with a huge number of people. Of course, I would not have gotten all this from the army.”

Taken together, the conscription system and military service were constructed in the field narratives as disempowering traps. However, exercising agency and becoming empowered implies that one continues to pursue self-defined goals despite the environment's opposition and discouragement. As the narrative above demonstrated, Oleg had managed to expand his ability to make strategic life choices, and strive towards the life he himself wanted. Also Misha's narrative is illustrative of how maneuvering structural constraints, that is, mastering the situation and managing to avoid the draft, can give one a feeling of satisfaction:

Life was more interesting when I was running from the military. There was excitement in life. Till the age of 27, there was an excitement, a risk that somewhere I could be caught, that somewhere the summons could be handed to me, and I'd have to show up at voenkomat. The risk was still there. There was the excitement of not getting caught. When I turned 27, the excitement was no longer there. It got a little boring [laughs].[...] But of course, in Russia, the military is not a merry thing.

5.5 Finding and following one's own path

Besides the issue of masculine identity, the interviewees' narratives suggest the consideration of agency. Identity, the sense of self, informs individual self-expression and actions. In other words, it can be said that the way men act and exercise agency is a manifestation of their masculine identity (see Whitehead 2001: 21). As discussed earlier, the interviewees had adopted a self-identification that encouraged an active, autonomous and goal-oriented way of life.

In the subsequent section, I will discuss how the interviewees expressed a strong desire to define the direction of their lives, as well as demonstrated the ability set goals, make conscious choices and act according to them; in other words, how they exercised agency, and how this related to their draft-avoidance.

5.5.1 Service avoidance as a conscious choice

Exercising agency is about making strategic life choices, setting goals and being able to pursue them (Kabeer 1999; Kabeer 2001). The field narratives demonstrate that for the interviewees, service avoidance had been a conscious choice, which involved careful consideration of different alternatives and opportunity costs. For example, Dima noted that he had seen the military first and

foremost as one of many professions. Choosing one's profession, on the other hand, meant to him choosing a life style, something that he claimed one should do consciously. In his opinion, his *"head worked better than the body"*, and, consequently, he saw no reason to serve. The decisive factor had, however, been the estimation that *"I had and have more prospects outside the army"*. Oleg had considered the military as one among many possibilities. However, it was not the option that won. Also for him, life outside the army had appeared to offer better and more attractive possibilities:

I had these thoughts, 15 percent that I could [join the army] because in principle it does give you something. But then I understood that I can get a lot more in the civilian life. Because I knew that those two years I would not be working as a shop assistant.

Also Yurii stated that, in most cases, draft-avoidance was a rational choice: *"The majority of those guys who refuse from military service, they don't refuse because of fear of going there. Most of them have other priorities at that moment."*

According to Misha, if he had been drafted, a plan B would have been implemented. He told that he would have applied for the military language training center, well-known for its high level of foreign language tuition. For a young man who was keen on traveling, had already lived abroad and was interested in foreign cultures and languages, the option had its pros. However, the need to resort to the alternative strategy never arose, and now he had already passed the draft age. Looking back at the years when his future still was uncertain, Misha stated: *"Life could have gone in a totally different way. But I'm glad it went the way I wanted."*

5.5.2 In search of interesting and meaningful life

Furthermore, many of the interviewees talked at length about the importance of being able to devote oneself to something which one truly enjoyed and was good at. Both Misha and Ilya's narratives demonstrate this aspiration well:

I think that a person should occupy himself with what he wants and longs for. I never had an urge towards the army, or military service. (Misha)

Well, I think what is important to achieve is that you will work with or do something which will be interesting for you. [...] Those people are interesting who started the first job but already think about the next one, where and how. They have some kind of a plan in order to live in their own way. To go for what interests them. (Ilya)

Further, Ilya indicated that he disliked the idea of choosing what everyone else chose, in his words, following *"a standard life pattern"* with a job, a car and a wedding. In his view, many people lived *"totally without any aspiration to make life interesting. I studied, I have to work, and that's all. [...] And then [many years later] perhaps, they realize that I'm not in the right place"*. Finding oneself doing the wrong thing in the wrong place, that is, leading an uninspiring life, was something he hoped would not happen to him. Like Ilya, Oleg underlined the importance of setting goals as a way to self-realization, actualization and achievement. He indicated too that following one's passion was what made life meaningful and satisfying: *"Somebody finds a job, a simple one, is not happy with it, works there, and that's about it. There's no more to it than that. In general, I don't understand what they are living for."*

Joining the army, on the contrary, would have meant accepting an uninspiring path determined by someone else. In other words, compulsory military service stood in stark contradiction with the interviewees' search for a fulfilling life. For example, Yurii had been interested in information technology as long as he could remember. He was very curious about it and enjoyed learning new things: *"It interested me and I simply had to devote myself to it."* Military service would have meant two years away from what he saw as his career, his life path.

Taken together, the field narratives suggest that the interviewees understood the question about military service as closely linked with important life choices. By avoiding the draft, they had thus sought to actively direct their lives into a wanted direction. Further, the narratives above suggest that solving the question about military service can become a significant milestone that encourages or even forces young men to address the following questions: Who am I? What do I want to become? What kind of life do I want to lead? Being able to answer these questions meant that one did not need ready-made answers, like the military. As Oleg stated: *"A person has to have some kind of a passion, and then he simply won't need the army."*

All the interviewees demanded that the choice whether or not to serve should be a personal decision, not dictated by the state. The right to refuse from service was justified with liberal-democratic ideas and values, namely *freedom of choice*. Moreover, the freedom to choose was not seen merely as a question of saying 'yes' or 'no' to military service. The interviewees connected it to the wider issue of individual's right to decide what kind of a life he wanted to live. In other words, they insisted that everyone should have the possibility to make important decisions and thus determine the direction of his/her own life, and making military service voluntary was part of

guaranteeing that that right was respected. This was particularly exemplified by Yurii in the following terms:

They take you to the military at the age of 18, age of consent. Age of consent doesn't only mean that a person can smoke and drink but that he also has the right of choice, right to vote. He can choose the president. If he can choose a crank like that who rules the country, why can't he make the choice about what he wants? [...] After all, our country is still somewhat democratic. [...] Everybody makes the choice for himself and, after all, at 18 you can allow yourself to make the right choice.

5.6 Forgetting about the past

Being aware of one's own temporality and context are key elements of critical consciousness (Freire 1974). In the interviewees' narratives, this was manifested in active reflection on their time and place in the contemporary society, especially in relation to the Soviet. Being aware of what had changed and what it meant was one of the key themes of the field discussions.

As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, state officials, who have been alarmed by the growing draft-avoidance, have tried to reinvigorate young men's willingness for service through patriotic education programs¹³⁴. The project has put a special focus on commemorating the Great Patriotic War. Simultaneously, a great effort has been made to build a link between the heroic Soviet-Russian past and the military today.

Against this background, it is noteworthy that all the interviewees were very clear and insistent about one issue: one should not confuse the past with the present. Hence, the interviewees rejected the government's attempts to construct a continuity between the Soviet era and contemporary Russian. They underlined that it was important to distinguish, on the one hand, between the victories and glory of the Soviet army and veterans, and today's armed forces, conscription system and soldiers, on the other. In Sasha's words: *"They talk about which soldier? The soldier that in principle does not exist anymore. It was the Soviet soldier, a soldier that was in the Soviet time."* The majority of the interviewees regarded the Victory Day as an important – if not the most important – holiday that should be respected. However, they emphasized that no parallels should be drawn between the contemporary Russian and the Soviet army. As Dima explains:

We talk about the 9th May¹³⁵, talk about the parade there in the Red Square and so on. But it is like a totally different thing.

134 See chapter 1 for more discussion

135 The Victory Day, the end of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945).

As if it does not have anything to do with us. [...] The holidays are about an other army, not about the contemporary, the one we have now. [...] Practically all my relatives were in one way or another touched by the war.. But still, for me it's an other army.

Many interviewees underlined that the new, Russian time required professional armed forces instead of a mass and corrupt army. Yet again, the informants noted that the times have changed and the rules that held sway in the Soviet society were not applicable anymore. In their opinion, there was no way back to the old times when each and every male citizen uncritically did military service.

5.7 Resisting traditional gender expectations

Social agents operate in constant negotiation with their immediate surroundings (Giddens 1984). Often this requires that the individual comes to terms with the constraining aspects of social structure. The informant young men had not only experienced structural constraints in the form of conscription legislation and draft practices. They had also met disapproval and criticism due to their choice not to join the army. Often their conduct had been condemned with reference to traditional gender norms and expectations. However, as discussed earlier, critical consciousness is one of the key aspects of empowerment processes. Only through critical reflection and challenging of common sense propositions, and old notions and practices, which are often gendered, individuals can resist subordination and become empowered (Kabeer 2001). Indeed, challenging and questioning old 'truths' about masculinity and compulsory military service was a central theme in the field narratives. It will also be the focus of the subsequent section.

5.7.1 Questioning the male duty

In the Soviet period, men became full citizens through military service (Tartakovskaya 2005: 146). However, the citizen-soldier model has been called into question in the post-Soviet era (Eichler 2012: 139-140). Beliefs and values play an important role in legitimating suppression and injustice (Kabeer 2005: 14). Hence, a process of empowerment often begins from calling them into question. Problematizing and challenging the traditional notion of compulsory military service as 'a male duty to the motherland' was an important part of the interviewees' argumentation against conscription. Some, like Misha, rejected categorically the idea of a duty and the state's right to demand sacrifices from the population: *"I don't think I owe anything to my motherland"*. Also Viktor stated that *"there is no duty to the motherland. Of course not. Because.. what is a motherland? We are all individuals. [...] I don't like that kind of concepts in principle, like 'duty to the motherland', 'use for the fatherland'.."* In Ilya's view, the idea that an individual was tied or belonged to one country, was

remote and outdated. The world had changed; thus, such concepts as 'duty' had no meaning in the new context:

Well, some years ago there was a popular phrase that... Well, a duty to the motherland, but I haven't taken anything from the motherland [laughs], so I don't owe anything. In general, it's a dubious duty that you were born on this territory, that you owe.. Now the world is like that that you can travel wherever you want. And it does not mean that when you have arrived, you right away have to serve there, fulfil a duty because they've accepted you there. Well, I don't know, it's of course doubtful.. a duty..

The statements above reflect on-going changes in and struggle about the understanding of what it means to be a (male) citizen and member of the society in today's Russia. The interviewees sought to define citizenship in liberal-democratic terms; that is, first and foremost through rights that, in their view, belong to the individual automatically. At the same time, they rejected the idea that men earn full citizenship through military service.

Other informants focused more on redefining the content of the notion of duty. They questioned the presupposition that the only way to help and be of service of one's country was through military service. As Yurii stated: *"You shouldn't say that a person who has not served cannot be a hero of the fatherland"*. Maksim saw his work with socially disadvantaged children as a much better way of making a contribution to Russia's future than *digging ditches or shoveling snow* for a year. According to Dima, the problems in the military and conscription system were far from being the most pressing issues in the Russian society. Consequently, claiming that a decent male citizen was the one who had served in the army was, in his opinion, not justified:

What is it, to fulfill one's duty to the motherland? [...] I am a distinctly Russian person. And one can help one's country in different ways. Who helps more, who less is not even something to argue about because everyone looks at it differently. [...] It's not necessary to help the state by sitting somewhere in a barrack.

5.7.2 Of course, I am a man!

Despite the opening up of the society and diversification of gender roles, the Russian power elite still seeks to strengthen traditional markers of masculinity, especially military service. Those, who have not served, are met with suspicions about their manliness, something which, according to Conway, is typical for militarized states. (Shaburova 2005: 94; Conway 2008: 128; Webber & Zilberman 2006: 175-176). Not only the current political leadership but also many ordinary people continue to subscribe to the traditional views that, in order to become a 'real' man, a youngster should serve as the military is a school of life for men. According to Maya Eichler (2012):

Every year hundreds of thousands of young men in Russia must confront the following dilemma: should I risk life and limb by heeding the draft call, or avoid the brutality and pain of Russian army life but take the chance of being seen as less of a man?

Many of the present interviewees had indeed met negative attitudes with regard to their decision not to serve. For example, the father of Anton's ex-girlfriend, a professional soldier of high rank, had turned cold towards him after finding out that he had not been in the military. However, Eichler's dilemma seems somewhat exaggerated. Rather, the field narratives suggest that many young men in Russia have moved beyond the question; several of my interviewees simply refused to recognize the dilemma Eichler (2012) refers to. They did not seem hesitant about whether they should have served or not, but stood firmly behind the decision. Also, the political leaders' rhetorics that seek to link manliness and soldiering, and make young men feel uncomfortable for not having served in the army, had had little influence on them, or the influence was the opposite of what had been intended.

Majority of the present interviewees stated that they usually disregarded people who made traditionalist claims about military service and manliness. They were seen as people whose opinion did not bother or matter – old grannies or uneducated girls from the countryside. As Oleg explained:

Well, perhaps a couple of people said that a man has to serve in the military, for example like that. But I was not interested in their opinion, to be honest. [...] It seems to me that people who talk like that understand and take this question very superficially. It's a very primitive position.

Also Sasha stated that some people's attitude towards him had changed after they had found out that he had not served. However, he stated that it did not disturb him: *"But in principle it.. it does not really bother me because.. what is important is that I have remained myself and stayed alive and everything is OK with me in general."* Considering that being of draft age coincided with the Chechen wars, he thought that joining the army might have meant a life and death issue.

Furthermore, the claim that every man should join the army and that becoming a soldier was an integral part of manhood and male socialization was rejected by the interviewees as *ridiculous, absurd, propaganda*, and old-fashioned. It was seen as *an opinion of masses*, something that people say and repeat without serious reflection beforehand. Maksim called it *"a vestige of the Soviet times"*. Also in Viktor's view the gender expectation was a product of the Soviet era and part of the wider militarization processes of the society: *"It was in the [Soviet] Union formed that the idea that a man has to serve was formed. Well, it was a constant state of war. They simply brainwashed*

people well, that you have to...”

In Dima's opinion, talking about military service as “*some kind of a masculine question*” was totally irrelevant:

If we understand it so that you did not serve [thus, you are not a real man]. It's exactly the same as if you don't have an iPhone, you're not a human being. That would be exactly the same as you didn't serve, thus you're not a man [laughs]. I am a man. [...] To say that if you didn't serve, you're not a man.. well, I think it's mostly propaganda.

Many, like Misha, simply ridiculed suspicions about their manliness: “*If it's a girl who says to me that you're not a man because you haven't been in the military, I'll tell her: come on, let's go, I'll show you! [laughs]*”. Also Anton rejected the idea that military service makes 'men'. He referred to an issue that has been of public concern in Russia lately and damaged the reputation of the armed forces; namely the growing number of ex-convicts, drug addicts and mentally ill in the ranks (Zhel'vis 2011):

I don't think that today the military is the measure of a real man. Well, because.. there are people who have been in the army, but cannot call themselves and we and society can never call them real [men] because they are people who.. well, some of them, for example, are leading an asocial way of life, some a criminal way of life, that kind of people can hardly be called real [men]? I don't think so.

Taken together, the idea of military service and soldiering as markers of manhood was actively challenged and questioned by the interviewees. In the field narratives, the informants questioned common sense propositions about gender and masculinity, as well as the state's contention that military service is a necessary practice through which one becomes a man and a full citizen. The interviewees thus showed that they were not passive recipients of cultural knowledge but actively participating in the construction and re-definitions of what it means to be a man in today's Russia.

5.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have focused on presenting and analysing the field narratives. The results indicate that, among the present interviewees, both the conscription system and military service were seen as disempowering traps. Firstly, the fear of having to serve undermined individual men's possibilities to direct, shape and exercise control over their own lives. Secondly, the military was perceived as a degrading institution that denied individual agency and self-realization, as well as deprived young men of what they had without giving anything back – in the worst case leaving them with

psychological problems and/or physically disabled. In the view of the interviewees, the army molded youngsters into an obedient, uncritical and passive mass that was unable to function successfully in the new, competitive market society. In other words, military service was seen to disempower individual, for the benefit of the state and the ruling elite.

However, the present interviewees demonstrated both willingness and capability to resist the conscription system that they experienced as unjust exploitation. In the process, cultivation of critical consciousness played an important role. This entailed challenging traditional gender expectations and masculinity notions, which sought to define military service as a male citizenship duty and an essential milestone from boyhood to manhood, and that are crucial for maintaining the conscription system. Moreover, the interviewees were critical towards the state official's attempts to construct a continuity between the Soviet and Russian periods, and to continue to maintain a mass army with reference to history, especially the Great Patriotic War. They insisted that there was no way back to the old days, and that the only justifiable and up-to-date solution to the conscription crisis was transition to a professional, contract-based army. Moreover, the field returns indicated that draft-avoidance had been a conscious choice, and, thus a demonstration of agency. In other words, instead of submitting themselves to the demands of the system, the interviewees had decided to resist the draft and strive for the realization of self-defined goals, at the same time demanding the right to do so.

Furthermore, Connell (2000: 12) has pointed that masculinities "come into existence as people act". Hence, draft-avoidance can also be seen as an expression of the interviewees' masculine identities. As Goff & Dunn (2009a: 2) have noted, identities are "constantly evolving in response to changing circumstances". Already the educational backgrounds indicated that the present interviewees had embraced and were well integrated into the market system. The analysis of the field narratives showed that the interviewees' self-definitions were indeed shaped and informed by the emerging masculinity notions and values integral to market capitalism. At the same time, they rejected the identity that the state tried to offer them as servers and defenders of the fatherland. Identities can also empower. The interviewees' self-identifications encouraged them to follow their own dreams and aspirations; to live for themselves and their families, not for the state or the collective; to be independent and strive for autonomy and self-sufficiency. In the context of the new Russia, the soldier represented qualities that had become unwanted; a relic of the Soviet era, a masculinity model that the changes of the past decades had turned into an anti-ideal.

Chapter 6. Summary and concluding remarks

It is known that real social revolutions do not happen on barricades but in souls and in consciousness.

(Ruchkin 1998: 96)¹³⁶

Introduction

This thesis has attempted to answer the question of why young Russian men try to avoid compulsory military service. It has sought to provide insights into young men's reflections and viewpoints for a better understanding of draft-avoidance. The study has been based on nine qualitative semi-structured interviews. To explain draft-avoidance, it has drawn on a gender perspective, particularly the concept of masculinity. The term empowerment, including the supplementary categories of identity, agency and critical consciousness, has been chosen as a theoretical lens to further illuminate the interviewees' views on conscription and experiences of draft-avoidance.

Findings

The analysis of the field narratives has demonstrated that the present interviewees' viewed the conscription system as a relic of the Soviet era. Further, conscription was also seen as unjust and violating human rights; a suppressive and disempowering institution through which the state and the ruling elite exploit and consolidate their control over the citizens. Propaganda, lack of knowledge and critical thinking, as well as other young men's lack of self-direction and agency were seen as factors that helped maintaining the system. Especially noteworthy was that what the present interviewees opposed to was not military service as such, but namely its compulsory nature.

The interviewees voiced a strong striving towards a fulfilling and interesting life. For them, this meant in particular being able to express and realize themselves by 'doing their own thing', for example, through work. Compulsory military service was seen to contradict with this aspiration and prevent one from leading a self-directed and satisfying life. Further, the interviewees rationalized and justified their draft-avoidance also with reference to professionalism, that is, claiming that becoming a soldier simply was not their path of life. Also the individualist claim that everyone should be free to decide about their own lives and not be forced to sacrifice personal benefit in the name of common interest was an important part of the interviewees' argumentation against conscription. Further, they saw their economic self-reliance and independence from the state as a

136 My translation

valid argument for not serving. The interviewees' social networks were largely supportive of their choice not to join the army, and the field narratives indicated that avoiding service had in fact become a normalized practice in their social context. There were no striking differences between St. Petersburg, Samara, Murmansk and Pskov.

The analysis of the field narratives has shown that the interviewees' had to a considerable degree internalized emerging masculinity ideas, typical of market economy and capitalism. At the same time, the interviewees' sense of self encouraged them not to accept but resist subordination to the state, and can thus be seen as empowering. Hence, gender identity can have a transforming potential both at the individual and social level. Against this background, the state's attempts to enhance willingness to do military service by paternalistically telling young men what to think and do¹³⁷ are likely to fail, at least among the present interviewees' reference groups. The interviewees' idea of masculinity and masculine identity were crucially about personal autonomy; that is, being and, feeling that, they themselves were able to define what they did. This was irreconcilable with the compulsory nature of military service. In the case of draft-avoidance, the paradox is that the same independent and self-sufficient male identity that appeared to be empowering also partly explains why young men do not unite to fight against the conscription system that they perceive as unjust and exploitative. The market system and its values encourage people to become more self-centered. Consequently, everybody focuses on minding his own business and taking care of himself.

In draft-avoidance, also critical consciousness played a central role. The interviewees demonstrated a critical attitude not only towards the conscription system but also to beliefs, gender stereotypes and expectations that have been used to justify and maintain universal male conscription both in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. Taken together, the present interviewees showed that they were reflective and conscious actors, thereby making draft-avoidance a manifestation of their ability to exercise choice in a meaningful manner. By avoiding military service, the interviewees appeared to have expanded their ability to live the lives they wanted, which is a manifestation of agency and the core of empowerment.

Furthermore, draft-avoidance appeared to manifest how people take their destinies in their own hands and exercise control over their lives in times of social transformations characterized by fluidity and uncertainty, in relation to rules, behaviours and organisational arrangements. Specific examples are the blurred meanings and definitional struggles over concerning gender roles,

¹³⁷ See e.g. Putin's speech from 2006 (Blum 2006: 2).

gendered citizenship, the relationship between individual and the state (Zdravomyslova & Temkina 2003a). The state officials interpret the issues in one way, and (young male) citizens in another, which creates a conflict situation. Draft-avoidance calls for a renegotiation of the relationship between the state and citizens and redefinition of the cultural content of gender, particularly masculinity.

Economically, Russia continues its integration into the international capitalist system (Eichler 2012). This means that it is not only part of the global flow of goods, but ideas, values and lifestyles as well. As the study has also shown, people's self-identifications are more and more tied to the market economy, liberalism and democracy, as they take advantage of the freedoms and promises of globalization. However, many recent developments indicate that officialdom is trying to impede change and move the country politically back to the past, in the direction of the Soviet Union (e.g. Saari 2011)¹³⁸. Since Putin's return to power in spring 2012, the grip on citizens and civil society has been tightened even more. In the past half a year, for example, several bills restricting freedom of expression, association and assembly have been passed in the State Duma (Roberts 2012a; *ibid.* 2012b).¹³⁹

Analytical contributions

Coexistence of continuity and change

Analytically, this study has sought to contribute to understanding of social transformation by providing insights into change from the Soviet era to Russian. At the same time, it is reflective of and brings evidence to the on-going debate that there is no clear cut distinctions between change and continuity (McLeod & Thomson 2009: 8). Instead, there is coexistence of the past and the present; that is, change and continuity are not mutually excluding (*ibid.*: 8, 124; Kulmala & Saarinen 2010: 13). Even today, more than twenty years after the disintegration of the USSR, Soviet ideas and practices are still strongly present in the contemporary Russian. A typical example of the old in the new is the conscription system, and certain gender notions that support it, which represent the logic of the authoritarian and militarized Soviet society (Gol'ts 2005: 203), not of liberal democracy.

Further, this study has sought to contribute to understanding of social change as a gradual process. The fall of the Soviet power was abrupt, but profound social transformations are not; the old does

138 According to Gudkov (2006: 47), today's Russia has "a post-totalitarian semi-authoritarian regime".

139 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/06/back-soviet-future>

not vanish overnight. Today, Russia could be described as being in a transitional period, which is characterized by the coexistence of change and continuity. The old values have not disappeared completely, and neither have the new values permeated all segments of society. It is namely this coexistence of change and continuity, modernity and tradition, that seems to be creating contradictions, tensions and conflict. This is manifest in the deepening crisis of the conscription system and growing draft-avoidance. Hence, if social research focuses only on "either explaining continuity or explaining change" (McLeod & Thomson 2009: 8), it might overlook certain issues of conflict that rise namely from the coexistence of and contradictions between the two. If social change and continuity were separate, compulsory military service and, consequently, draft-avoidance hardly were such problematic questions in today's Russia.

Moreover, it is the present interviewees, as well as other young men, who are caught in-between the processes of continuity and change. They face contradictory demands and expectations; the market system emphasizes individual achievement, while the state demands subordination and collectivity. Draft-avoidance is their way of managing the situation and the challenges that the individual meets in a transitional society.

Is empowerment only good?

Most studies drawing on the concept of empowerment are normative in the sense that they assume empowerment to be desirable and positive. For example, Narayan (2006: 16) writes that "[e]mpowerment has intrinsic value. It is an end in itself." Moreover, empowerment is a value-laden term; it celebrates the wanting, striving, aspiring and acting individual. It can, however, be questioned whether this should be taken as a universal model for human actualization and fulfilment, or does it simply represent a Western and capitalist ideal (e.g. Mäkinen 2012).

Furthermore, we can and should ask if empowerment always is merely a good thing (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2006: 137). The study has shown that, from time to time, becoming aware of oppression and seeking change can be painful for the individual, but those who refuse to withdraw from their position, can also make considerable personal gains. This, however, is only one side of the story. Empowerment, like any other social process, has a context. Consequently, it is important to consider the present interviewees' individual perspectives also against the wider context of draft-avoidance. Indeed, draft-avoidance liberates many young men. However, it simultaneously deepens the stratification of Russian society as a whole, as someone else has to carry the burden of compulsory military service (Mikhailenok 2006; Lokshin & Yemtsov 2005; Petrov 2003). Those

who do not have the resources needed to negotiate themselves free from service, find their agency and voice inhibited and are prevented from pursuing their interests and aspirations (see Kabeer 1999: 438). In other words, someone's liberation can be someone else's trap. Hence, praising draft-avoidance as a merely desirable manifestation of empowerment would be context-blind.

Nevertheless, individual actions and draft resistance do undermine the conscription system as a whole, as they have already forced the state to change its defence policies (Webber & Zilberman 2006: 188). Hence, individual draft-avoidance can be seen as an important starting point for social change, and time will show if it is to force also profound structural transformations (see Kabeer 2005: 16). At least Viktor was optimistic about the future and believed that with time, individual actions will create enough pressure on the government and lead to abolishment of conscription:

In the end, the authorities will have to change. It's like with serfdom. In the middle of it, it did not cross anyone's mind that they did not have to be serfs. Everyone thought that we will always be serfs. But then simply the national, the societal consciousness matured and everyone understood that I don't have to be a slave. That's how it is with the army, too. [...] People will understand that they don't owe anyone anything.

The importance of first person accounts

As noted earlier, young men themselves have been largely invisible and silent in the public discussions and protests concerning conscription. Instead, the Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers has been regarded as their voice, something which also previous academic research has tended to strengthen by giving priority to 3rd person accounts. In this study, on the contrary, the departure point has been that, in order to understand draft-avoidance and the problems related to compulsory military service, it is important to obtain first-hand knowledge from draft-avoiders themselves. Asking people about their lives and opinions does not only help to understand them and "grasp the subject's perspective" (Corbetta 2003: 264). It is respectful and fosters their agency, as 1st person accounts vocalize social actors.

The study has sought to contribute to in-depth knowledge about how people experience and manage transitional periods and social change by giving direct insight into young men's life worlds and reflections. In this, qualitative interviewing has been a crucial method. It has allowed tapping into first-hand experiences and self-expression and, consequently, to complement the previous research about draft-avoidance in Russia with new perspectives, particularly empowerment. In doing so, the study has thus brought evidence about how masculinity notions are intertwined with personal and social transformations, as well as the importance of first-person accounts in relation to the study of

social change (see e.g. Kulmala & Saarinen 2010: 13). Furthermore, recognizing that all perspectives are valuable and that it is important to look at military service avoidance from different angles and bring several viewpoints together, it has striven to contribute to a better and more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

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