

## BETWEEN NEOTRADITIONALISM AND NEW RESISTANCE - SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF ST. PETERSBURG

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In spite of the attention that Russia's Soldiers' Mothers received even in the western media, especially during the War in Chechnya, this institution has not yet been subjected to scientific analysis.<sup>1</sup> The present study is an attempt to reduce the gap in this area of research.

The starting point is the violation of the rights of the members of the armed forces in the Russian military complex as the immediate subject of engagement of Soldiers' Mothers. The ensuing examination of the Soldiers' Mothers organization in the transformation process serves to describe its political and historical categorization. Details regarding the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg are then dealt with in the following section. An examination of the gender-specific consequences of the formation of a civil society in Russia should help clarify the social climate of neotraditionalism in which this organization pursues its activity. It becomes clear that the key to success of this organization lies on the one hand in current social developments and, on the other, in the way in which the organization has been able to call into question the alienated structures of the military forces themselves.

### **Violation of rights in the Russian armed forces**

Russia's armed forces are the locus of innumerable violations of civil rights as well as human rights. The number of fatalities within the armed forces during peacetime is especially frightening. The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg estimate that every year between 6000 and 8000 soldiers suffer a violent death.

#### *Violation of rights during the call-up period*

The number of people liable for military duty who attempt to invoke the constitutionally documented right to perform civil service as an alternative to military duty has seen a dramatic rise in the past few years, in spite of the non-existence in fact of such an alternative.<sup>2</sup> The same is true of the number of those who are exempted or deferred from military service on legal grounds or escape drafting in other ways. The targeted manpower of the Russian armed

forces is very high, but only 85% of this target is reached (Žuravlev 1996a). In view of this situation, the drafting commissions and the military commissions in charge turn more and more frequently to illegal means to 'fulfill the plan'. Some of the drafting commissions also operate outside the legally specified drafting time periods, namely spring and autumn (Il'jušin 1996a).

In St. Petersburg, the drafting commission has its offices in a building that is the gathering point for recruits (*sbornyj punkt*), from which they are then brought to their place of action. By this tactic, the recruits are deprived of "a legally sanctioned opportunity to lodge a formal protest against the decision of the drafting commission within a period of ten days" (*ibid*). There are frequent cases where young men have been recruited without having first undergone the stipulated medical examination (Soldatskie Materi 1996:4). This is especially dramatic when one considers that independent physicians declare 60 to 80% of young males as sick and therefore unfit for military service (Soldatskie Materi 1995:9; cf. also Levina 1996) - a fact to which the State has reacted so far only by lowering the state of health criteria.

This negative situation is made even worse by the forcible recruitment of those liable for military service - young men in this age group are arbitrarily arrested by the police and without prior consultation with the drafting commission and (often with the use of physical violence) are taken to the collecting points and from there brought to their army units (cf. Amnesty International 1997, Soldatskie Materi 1996).

#### *Violation of rights during military service*

The extent of violation of rights which awaits the recruits in their units during their military service can only be understood by a critical examination of the informal hierarchical 'status system' (Akademija Nauk 1991:pass), the *dedovščina*, existing side by side with the official hierarchical command. *Dedovščina* can be meaningfully translated as 'rule of the grandfathers', a system in which those who have

been in the service for a shorter period are forcibly suppressed, exploited and systematically maltreated by senior servicemen. The structure of this 'rule of the grandfathers', officially declared as 'relations contrary to regulations', is facilitated by the Russian practice of two drafting periods per year. In a service period of two years this leads to the development of four generations of soldiers discharging their duties, parallel in terms of their military service but staggered in time. This system favors the build up of different groups that dissociate themselves from each other.

The spectrum of maltreatment and humiliation suffered under this system of *dedovščina* by those in the lower rungs of the hierarchy at the hands of the members of the upper rungs of the ladder, the so-called 'elders', is wide-ranging. Instances of men being kicked, beaten with belts and chains, strangled and raped have all been documented. In many cases, the soldiers suffer permanent injury from this mistreatment and some cases have even resulted in death (cf. Amnesty International 1997, Soldatskie Materi 1996). It would be appropriate in many of these cases to employ the term 'torture,'<sup>3</sup> in view of the structural character of this ritualized mistreatment and in light of the fact that it is tolerated by the superiors.

The long-known supply difficulties within the Russian armed forces make this problem even worse. A widespread practice in relation to this problem is the ordering of hunger periods by the 'elders' (IGFM/Wahnsiedler 1994:9). The consequences are dreadful. In some military districts, 40% of those in military service are underweight (ibid:7); several fatalities resulting from undernourishment have also been reported (e.g. Mironova 1996).

In many cases, desertion<sup>4</sup> represents the only chance of survival, since a complaint lodged with the superiors is mostly ineffective and might even lead to far more cruel mistreatments. In view of the heavy punishment for desertion, the recruits have no other alternative but to disappear or to apply for exemption or deferment from service on medical grounds.

The bodies of those who do not survive their military service are often handed over to the relatives either without any comments or with false information about the cause of death (cf. Fond 'Pravo Materi'/Marčenko 1996).

## Causes

The frightening situation in the Russian armed forces stands in need of a multi-causal explanation. In addition to the tradition of *dedovščina* reaching back to pre-revolutionary times, the specific conditions of life in the military service play a large role in the development of this phenomenon. The draftees spend two years in the armed forces. The military service is characterized by a barrack existence - e.g. not even a regular yearly vacation is provided for. Furthermore, shortage of food, inadequate provisioning with warm clothes, and poor medical equipment of military hospitals all contribute to the draftees' suffering.

An important factor that favors the existence of the *dedovščina* is the widespread belief that the practices described above contribute to the maintenance of discipline within the military service. This leads to a great amount of tolerance and thus to a lack of action by the superiors to prevent the occurrence of these incidents, which in civil life would be punished by several years of imprisonment. Last but not least, the informal inner-military ranking system gains an appearance of normalcy from the fact that - in the eyes of the superiors - the subsystem can engender a belief in a social equilibrium in which the suppressed manage to carry on under the hope that in a year at the most they can do the same thing to the newly recruited without fear of punishment. *Dedovščina* is thus an unquestioned constituent part of military service, looked upon as making an indispensable contribution to the socialization of the male (cf. Zdravomyslova 1995:2).

The key to the explanation of the extent of violation of rights in the Russian armed forces is the inadequacy of legal protection both at the level of verdicts and at the level of the laws themselves. Often there do exist legal regulations, but "regulations regarding their implementation and availability of subordinate officials are lacking..." (Prall 1994:38). Such a gap exists for instance in connection with the practice of torture,<sup>5</sup> a definition of which is lacking in Russian criminal law.

Furthermore, the existence of two jurisdictions in the Russian federation - a civil and a military - plays a central role (cf. IGFM/Wahnsiedler 1995:12) in this state of affairs. The existence of an independent military jurisdiction and its exclusive responsibility for inner-military incidents makes it easy for the military prosecutors and military investigators to

cover up the criminal actions they are supposed to investigate. For this reason, there is seldom a court case or trial for torture and even more seldom is the guilty party punished.

In Russia, the incorporation of the armed forces in the democratic structure is not yet complete. This results partly from an inadequate institutional separation of the general staff from the defense ministry as well as from a lack of an independent military inspection and the existence of a security council not supported by the constitution. In the words of Heinemann-Grüder (1993:25), "In spite of all the declarations of democratic intentions and publicistic efforts, the Russian armed forces embody ...a specific relic of pre-democratic conditions."

### **Russia's Soldiers' Mothers in a transformation process**

#### *The time of the perestroika (1986-1991)*

Only relatively recently have criminal actions and violations of human rights within the Russian armed forces become a subject of open discussion. They were strongly tabooed themes during the Soviet times and remained untouched for a long time even by glasnost' and perestroika

In 1989, the Lettish women's league published for the first time a list of draftees who died after being tortured or subjected to violence in the armed forces (Prall 1994:12).

In the same year, as a reaction to this list and to discussion in the media, relatives of those affected started to establish representative interest groups whose aim was the protection of the rights of those liable for military duty, of soldiers and of their families. The Moscow Committee of Russian Soldiers' Mothers started the ball rolling. Since then 100 regional groups of Soldiers' Mothers have sprung up. The organizations, fashioned after the Soviet civil rights movement, carried on the activity of legal protection strongly characteristic of the civil rights movement during the time of dissidence in the 1960s and 1970s; activities which were stopped by the members of the civil rights movement themselves during perestroika in the interest of building up new political structures (cf. Luchterhandt/Luchterhandt 1993:127).

Parallel to such interest groups, the Soviet State developed a special strategy as a countermove - the "formation of political pseudo-associations, in order not only to react, but also to manipulatively intervene in social

movements" (ibid.:147). State or state-controlled organizations were established with the aim of discrediting the citizens' associations. In the case of Soldiers' Mothers, the local military commission established pseudo associations with the same name who registered the names of people seeking help and then subjected them to further repressive measures (cf. Urban 1996). These organizations continued to exist even after the end of the Soviet Union.

#### *The new era: The Independent Russian Federation*

With the creation of an independent Russian Federation, there was a differentiation even among the authentic Soldiers' Mothers Associations, which became rigidly established with regard to positions adopted towards a possible cooperation with the military. Out of these differences, the independent legal protection organization of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg came into existence towards the end of 1991. Despite their differences, there continued to exist an intensive cooperation between the individual organizations, especially during the War in Chechnya.<sup>6</sup>

The war in Chechnya can be looked upon as a turning point in the involvement of the Soldiers' Mothers. It set in motion a mobilization to an extent never previously reached, not the least because the rights of the servicemen were being massively violated. Zdravomyslova speaks of "radicalization" of Soldiers' Mothers by the war. It initiated a development as a consequence of which pacifism, even if in different degrees, became the dominating ideology (Zdravomyslova 1995:4) and the practice of referring to human rights was pushed to the forefront. According to the same author (1995:4), the Soldiers' Mothers organizations were among the few that protested loudly against the invasion of Chechnya. The action attracting the greatest attention in connection with this was the "March of Motherly Sympathy," a peace march from Moscow to Grozny, which took place in 1995.

#### *The Role of Russia's Soldiers' Mothers in the transformation process*

The relevant organizations of the so-called social movement of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (cf. Zdravomyslova 1995:pass) can be characterized as movement organizations<sup>7</sup> and

are a part of the development process of Russia's civil society. By 'civil society' I mean a sphere of social interaction between the economy and the State in which the corresponding actors, most importantly free associations (such as unions and social movements), compete for political influence. A theoretical description of the role of Russia's Soldiers' Mothers in the transformation process reflects the dilemma of perestroika (Arato 1993:316): the development of Soldiers' Mothers organizations was conditioned no doubt by Russia's transformational process, but at the same time they actively contributed to the process by working for a civil society. Their primary contribution can be seen to be their work in the area of protection of civil rights, which contributes to the development of social awareness, which in turn is necessary for the development of a democratic transformation process. In view of the absence of an effective civil control over the armed forces, and (as one consequence thereof), the limited progress made in the process of democratization even to this day; the Soldiers' Mothers organizations, especially the Soldiers' Mothers organization of St. Petersburg, continue to contribute actively to a strengthening of civil society in Russia, by their involvement as citizens, and by their exemplary attempt to control the military. Thus they contribute to a progressive democratization of Russia.

### **The Organization of Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg**

The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg can be distinguished from other similar organizations in many ways. They are different not only in their uncompromising refusal to cooperate with the military, but also in the way they embed their concerns in a wider project of social and political transformation in all levels of society.

#### *The World-View of Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg*

This organization justifies its pacifist and antimilitary stand in the following way: "As long as this system [Russia's armed forces] continues to exist, in which a specific part of the society is excluded and enjoys no civil rights, so long the key to totalitarianism also continues to exist, and so long no reforms can take place with us" (Soldatskie Materi f). The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg draws the following conclusion; in addition to making demands for far-reaching military reform: 'the only means to

make free the path to democracy is refusal to serve in the army and desertion' (sic; citation according to Dornblüth 1996).

Such an open antimilitary stand represents in Russia a break with tradition and thus a provocation that cannot be underestimated. In contrast to the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg, many other such organizations have not carried through such a total break with tradition. Most of them articulate their protests while wishing to retain their own militarism<sup>8</sup> and their demands on behalf of the servicemen are restricted to having conditions enforced that accord with human dignity during military service.

Another striking characteristic of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg is their non-confessional religious orientation. Regular common prayers are an everyday feature, and worship of Maria, Mother of God, plays a central role. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that, on the one hand the worship of Maria is widely practiced by even modern Christians and on the other, Maria represents in certain religious circles a "call to (...) women, not to reconcile themselves to existing conditions, not to humbly yield to fate, but to resist injustice and repression" (Schreiner 1994:18).

The image of womanhood of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg is on the whole rather conservative. They see the essence of womanhood as substantially determined by the ability for motherhood and therefore accept traditional gender stereotypes as natural, or at least as facts given by socialization processes. At the same time, they attempt to make use of these role assignments by arguing that it is precisely the woman who is called upon to do her utmost for family, society and in extreme situations, for safeguarding life itself.

Contrary to the media description, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg are not 'feminist organizations' in the usual sense of the term - certainly not in the sense of personnel, since men and women work with soldiers' mothers- nor in their self evaluation. As a whole, their relationship to women's organizations and to feminism can be characterized as being pragmatic-positive.

In addition, it is also remarkable how they see themselves politically: the Soldiers' Mothers do not look upon themselves as being a political organization. They emphasize that their involvement is morally motivated. Nonetheless, their activity can be characterized as being of immediate political relevance - "not only

because they criticize the system, but also because they speak up for respecting the human rights of all persons, because they work as a group and through deliberately chosen means attempt to achieve effects with political relevance" (Hübner 1981:95).

#### *Objectives of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg*

The immediate objectives as laid down in the statutes of the organization consist of the "protection of life, health and civil rights of the military servicemen, of persons liable for military service and of recruits, as well as the members of their families, help to families of servicemen who lost their lives or were severely wounded or contracted diseases during the time of their actual military service" (Soldatskie Materi 1992). In addition, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg pursue other aims concerning the society as a whole.

Their self-declared primary aim is to "make a contribution to the development of a civil society" (Weizsäcker/Orlova 1996:55). Their goal is the control of the institutions of the State, in particular, the control of the armed forces.

The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg consider their contribution to the development of civil society as lying in the strengthening of family closeness by encouraging the members to join together and fight for the rights of their relatives in the armed forces. In this way, the organization tries to create in them an awareness of themselves as citizens of a new democratic Russia.

Another closely related aim is "to make a contribution to the transformation of Russia into a State under the rule of law, in which the rights and freedom of the people have the highest priority" (Soldatskie Materi 1995:4). This is an attempt to provide an answer to one of the most severe problems in today's Russia - the discrepancy between norms and reality, not only at the legal level, but also at the level of cultural tradition. Human rights are of course anchored in the constitution, but not in the awareness of the citizens.<sup>9</sup> It is for this reason that the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg see their task as one of educating and informing the citizens of their rights and also encouraging them to make use of and defend these rights.

At the pragmatic level, the organization aims at a reform of the armed forces through the

abolition of general compulsory military service and replacing it with a professional military. However, in keeping with their own pacifist attitude, they are not secretive about their wish to "abolish the army" (cited in Dornblüth 1996).

#### *Forms of Action of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg*

Provision of legal advice constitutes the major part of the activity of Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg. Three times a week, the organization offers legal support to those who refuse to do military service, those who wish to avoid it, as well as to deserters; both at the group as well as at the individual level.

The organization does not recognize desertion as a criminal offence; it even refers to a law according to which rules set down in the penal code may be violated with impunity in case of danger to life.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the organization attempts to get the person concerned to be referred to a military hospital in order to obtain a decree either freeing him from military service or returning him to it. Until the decree is given, the organization makes secret accommodation available and offers medical, psychological, and, as far as possible, financial help.

In order to obtain such referrals, it is necessary to make regular visits to the military units. These visits also serve as opportunities to ask the commanding officers of the units concerned to provide an account of acts of violence known to have taken place and to discuss difficulties regarding general provisioning.

The war in Chechnya necessitated an expansion of the organization's spectrum of activities. The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg constantly offered updated descriptions of methods by which people could get their relatives away from war zones if they so wished. Furthermore, they regularly published lists of those who were killed, injured, missing or taken prisoner in the War in Chechnya.

Members of the organization give support to the relatives of servicemen who fell in the war with the process of identifying the dead, during the investigation of the cause of death, and for undertaking legal steps for clarification of the incident.

Seminars and conferences are conducted to build up a network of Soldiers' Mothers organizations in Russia. The experience and knowledge of the St. Petersburg organization

are placed at the disposal of the regional organizations to help them enhance their ability to act.

Since its founding, the St. Petersburg organization has also collected witnesses to human rights violations in the armed forces. The positive consequences of this meticulous documentation can be observed in particular in the response it gets from abroad. The resolution passed by the European Parliament on the human rights violations in Russia's armed forces in 1995 can be cited as an example thereof.

In the eyes of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg, cooperation with international organizations is at present the only way in which pressure can be brought to bear on the Russian government. In the final analysis, this opinion is the consequence of the generally negative attitude of the Russian government towards NGOs generally and the innumerable acts of repression showered upon this organization in particular (cf. e.g. Vladimiro 1995).

#### *Success of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg*

The organization has achieved a great deal of success. According to a study in 1996, it stands out from other relevant human rights organizations in Russia for its effective work, (done jointly with the Moscow Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia), and for its stability in the face of significant social, political and economic changes (Halley 1996) – (which is due partly to the specific way in which it proceeds in its undertakings). This point will be analyzed in the following section.

#### *Strategies of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg*

On-site observations and a systematic evaluation of "gray" literature and newspaper articles on the organization as well as an investigation of the newspaper articles from a text-analysis point of view allow one to identify the following characteristic strategies in the worldview, objectives, forms of actions, and texts of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg.

First, there is the strategy of familization. The individual soldier or recruit is located in his immediate, narrow, social environment; namely his family. By doing so, the organization draws attention to a different and decisive aspect of his personality and social identity. This enables observers to break through

the apparent social isolation of soldiers; at the same time, attention is drawn to the suffering of the relatives of the soldiers concerned.

Thus, for instance, the Soldiers' Mothers directed their appeal during the war in Chechnya to "Soldiers! Officers! Sons!" (Soldatskie Materi 1994) and carried banners with the words "Who' is responsible for the death of our sons?". The official enemy is also familialized: "our sons must not kill and must not be made to carry in their souls the curses of other mothers" (1994a).

Next, there is the strategy of naming the offender-victim-constellation. In contrast to the officially staged anonymous threatening scenarios such as the threat to the territorial integrity of Russia posed by the armed Chechen forces, the organization drew attention to the actual victims of such abstract constructs.<sup>11</sup> The government and the military leadership were specified as offenders, and the "simple" soldiers (on both sides), the civil population and the families of those affected were specified as victims: "Our government needs children to be sacrificed in war" (c), "the generals... allow people to be killed in Chechnya" (citation in Valtin 1995). No attempt is made to hide the guilt of the Russian soldiers either: "It is shameful that...tens of thousands of peaceful people of different nationalities, old people, women and children, have been killed by shots and bombs of our sons." This sentence forms part of a prayer of the Soldiers' Mothers organization of St. Petersburg (Soldatskie Materi b).

A third strategy is the dramatization of motherhood.<sup>12</sup> Motherhood is seen as essentially determining a woman; responsibility for life per se is assigned to her. In addition, the symbolic position of the mother, which in the Russian context is invested with special authority, is instrumentalized. This is revealed not only by the name given to the organization and in the designation of the peaceful march as "the March of Motherly Sympathy", but also by the fact that during consultations, the majority of the clients, irrespective of their actual family status, are addressed as mamoch'ka, "mothers" by some members of the organization.

The strategy of shifting to the domain of religion is used to move problematic themes from a political level to a religious one, which then gives these themes a context of interpretation. This can be seen both in the religious connotation of the organization's symbol and in the description of the war in

Chechnya as an insult to God (cf. Soldatskie Materi b).

**Personalization:** Texts describing specific individuals (e. g. newspaper articles on torture in the armed forces) are published so that they and their sufferings are brought out of their anonymity and into the open. This strategy is closely connected with that of individualization by which especially strange or curiously fateful cases are highlighted in a very detailed way.

**Making appeals:** This is the strategy of appealing directly and immediately or indirectly via suggestive examples to the group aimed at, to do something or withhold from doing something. Sometimes, people are directly asked to act: "Mothers! Go to the troop units and ask the military authorities where they have taken our children, and why they sit at the telephone and deceive the parents"(c). And sometimes they are given indirect suggestions. It becomes clear that through a direct call to resistance a further objective is pursued: the making of appeals (as also personalization and individualization) is employed in order to minimize the distance, to build a bridge between those appealed to and those affected.

### **Theoretical Reflections**

To capture the social constellation in which the organization of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg acts, and to evaluate its specific method of action, it is necessary to clarify the relation of this organization to the beginnings of civil society in Russia.

#### *Neotraditionalism*

The change in social system and the associated birth of civil society in Russia went hand in hand with a radical change in gender relationships. Women carried and still carry to a disproportionate extent the costs of the transformation processes and are, in addition, confronted with a "reduction in freedom and civil rights for the female half of the society" (Penrose/Ruppert 1996:8). While it is true that the building up of a civil society created new chances for participation for the population as a whole, these were invested with different meanings which, during the period of a socialistic state, were devoid of significance or were of only limited significance. Now there are new mechanisms for exclusion via the condition of inequality between male and female citizens. Social gender has acquired relevance in the

context of the ability to lay claim to and make use of civil rights.

Traditionalism and patriarchal concepts did indeed continue to exist under state socialism. Despite the initial efforts of the State towards emancipation, they were reestablished under Stalin and subsequently reproduced at the State level. At the same time, the nonexistence of a civil society in the Soviet Union strengthened traditionalism and patriarchal concepts even in the so-called "second society". Einhorn (1993:12) described the situation in the second society, in which relatives and friends represented an indispensable social resource as follows: "Family and friends filled the space where civil society could not exist." A high degree of social regard was accorded to traditional family structures in socialistic states.

Nonetheless, in the course of Russia's transformation process, a qualitative change in the patriarchal concepts has taken place. As Pateman formulates it (1989), a process of return to a fraternalistic, "private" patriarchy from a paternalistic, "public" and welfare state patriarchy has taken place. "The civil society limited to the home and women was established, a process supported by the strong traditionalism already in existence" (Watson 1993:867).

At the ideological level, this process goes hand in hand with a change in the social norms regarding the role of women. In neo-traditionalist discourse, the working woman is looked upon as inferior to the mother and housewife, and demographically and economically motivated arguments from the 1970s and 1980s which pointed in the same direction are given a new lease on life. From then on, the practice was to fall back upon the till now tabooed, openly patriarchal, biological, or pornographically oriented norms (Schmitt 1997:253). There is an attempt to (re) construct patriarchal family structures and to reinforce the ideal of a woman sacrificing herself for the sake of the family. At the same time, Russia's tradition-rich glorification of motherhood is given a new and strong lease on life.

But in spite of all this, women should not be exclusively looked upon as victims in the context sketched above. In non-governmental organizations in particular, women are involved irrespective of the official political stance. Their involvement is marked by increasing "politicization" of private life. As Lewis (1993: 41) observes, it is true of Russia too that the growing political participation of women is related to a new political understanding - politics



is understood as an activity closely related to the problems of everyday life, that is, as something that cannot be separated from conditions for motherhood, care-giving, or equality between the sexes.

*The "standpoint of women" according to Dorothy Smith*

These experiences from the world of women constitute the starting point of Dorothy Smith in her formulation of "the standpoint of women" (Smith 1994, 1989:pass).

Her aim is to develop an effective strategy of resistance in the civil society as a sphere of conflict for social hegemony. Smith refers to the new kind of organization of power, which she describes as "complex objectified availability conditions" (1994:694). The basis of this can be found in history. As shown by Pateman (1989) regarding the development of industrial capitalism in Europe in the 18/19 centuries, the parallel new definition of civil society went hand in hand with a separation of the public from the private sphere. A naturalistic ascription of the responsibility for reproduction to women had as a consequence their exclusion from participation in public life and served to oust them from public awareness. The resulting social awareness of women is strongly rooted in interpersonal relationships mostly involving family members with different degrees of closeness and is, for this reason, also associated with a specific local loyalty. Men, on the other hand, have the ability to transcend local rootedness, since by virtue of the process of socialization, their physical presence is not indispensable for the care of the family and they are thus able to develop wider impersonal loyalties.

Smith makes this reference to history serve the purpose of clarifying her central concepts; the "availability conditions." She describes the development of these circumstances as a process analogous to that of differentiation and specialization of social awareness and action.

Smith understands the availability circumstances as textually mediated and textually supported systems. It is in these text-mediated systems that power in present-day society is generated and maintained. They play a decisive role in the society in the sense that with increasing development of availability conditions, organization is increasingly taken away from concrete persons and invested in

objectified forms. The result is a confrontation between a person and an organization, which enables the development of a completely abstract subject.

The availability conditions increasingly result in the formation of "internal, self-referring systems of text-mediated and text-supported practices and courses of action" (ibid:705) called "hyper-realities" after Baudrillard, which organizationally intrude upon the life of a person who has no power by himself to influence them. The stock market and also the armed forces can be cited as examples thereof.

In her blueprint for a new form of resistance, Smith stakes her standpoint outside of availability conditions. In view of the separation of public and private spheres in the structures of civil society, such a standpoint is to be established in the private, "local" (ibid:pass) and thus in that domain in which women as a social group have traditionally been located and are located even today. It is assumed that the institutionalized gender-specific division of labor and the associated structurally different position women occupy enable them to have a very special perception of social conditions, the "standpoint of women".

Since "the standpoint of women" is based on the realities of human experiences, it can problematize the abstract forms of social organization. It questions the extra-local and extra-personal constructs, and refers to and carries on arguments based on the local. It is suitable as a resistance concept especially because, as a consequence of the separation of public and private spheres, it remains unnamed in the existing availability conditions. In the availability conditions, the social, physical and local existence of the individual is ignored as a circumstance merely accompanying abstract functionality scenarios and the individual is simply made use of. These accompanying circumstances are, in the truest sense of the word, not taken into consideration. For this reason, a standpoint which has these as the starting point and which uses these as the bases of argumentation is difficult to deal with for governmental and commercial bodies.

**Theory-based Evaluation of the Strategies of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg**

Against this theoretical background, an evaluation of the specific modes of action of the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg in the military as well as in the global social context will be presented in summary. In connection



with the military, the closeness of the strategies of the organization to the "standpoint of women" appears to be decisive. In the context of the entire society, it represents the tense relationship between neo-traditionalism and new resistance.

#### *The "standpoint of women"*

The strategies of the St. Petersburg organization suggest an implicit concept the central points of which come close to Smith's "standpoint of women".

The armed forces of Russia exhibit aspects of a hyper-reality in the sense in which Smith uses the term; they are characterized by a separation between person and organization. The subject is made abstract, the person and the fate of individual servicemen are faded out. In the context of strategic-political interests, the only interest in the individual lies in his adding to the number of servicemen or in a specific predetermined function, as for example, during the time of drafting, in helping to meet the required number of recruits. A confirmation of this evaluation can be found in Levinson: "The Soviet army, the products of whose dissolution represent the armed forces of present-day Russia, established a very specific 'demographic' concept of war. The so-called living forces constitute only a kind of material to be used along with other materials like fuel, munitions, etc" (Levinson 1997:81).<sup>13</sup>

An extreme expression of these conditions can be seen in the indifference exhibited by the military leadership regarding the deployment of draftees in Chechnya immediately after being recruited or in spite of a severe illness. This example clearly shows that the military makes only an abstract calculation with "human material," since it hardly makes sense, even from a military point of view, to deploy ill and untrained recruits in action.

Even in peaceful times, the social, local, and physical existence of the individuals are deliberately denied or during the period of military service "suspended." The physical and psychological condition of those performing military service is considered something that can be simply ignored. For instance, the practice of handing over the dead to their relatives under the standard code "cargo number 200" is an expression of the hyper-reality character of the military attitude.

The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg resist this abstraction from the concrete subject in the armed forces and emphasize the local,

physical and social existence of the subject. From this point of view, they have been able to problematize aspects having the characteristics of hyper-reality in the Russian armed forces.

In its world-view as well as in its objectives, forms of action, and texts, the organization places the individual and his personal fate at the forefront. It refers to the responsibility and authority of women in the protection and saving of life, especially in their roles as mothers. By pushing the family into the field of vision, they focus attention on the social relationships of the affected people. Attention is explicitly drawn to their status as victims; the offender cannot hide behind legitimized constructs of anonymous threatening scenarios. The Soldiers' Mothers attempt thus to return to each soldier his individuality and to bring those affected from the abstraction of hyper-reality back to the local reality.

The Soldiers' Mothers employ strategies that can be captured with Smith's concept of the "standpoint of women." In agreement with this, the strategies of the organization are based on the realities of actual human experience and they problematize the practice of abstracting out a subject in the armed forces. By directing the attention of people to the most immediate social environment of the individual and thus making the physical-local and social existence of the subject visible, they question the existence and validity of extra-local and extra-personal constructs.

The implicit adoption of the 'standpoint of women', the reference to and arguing from the local offers the Soldiers' Mothers an opportunity to politicize the local: the 'standpoint of women' represents a form of resistance suitable for them.

This is expressed also by the far-reaching failure of actions taken by the government to discredit the work of the Soldiers' Mothers by founding pseudo associations. The attempt on the part of the State to take over the symbol of "Soldiers' Mothers" failed just as the strategy to gain influence over the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg by trying to get them to cooperate with the military.

An explanation for the failure of these attempts can be found in the methods employed by the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg, which are analogous to that of the "standpoint of women". The "standpoint of women" proves to be a promising resistance concept for the organization precisely because of the sharp separation between the public and private spheres introduced in the course of system

transformation. Against the background of such a separation, there is no provision for a political argumentation from the private sphere in the civil society. This makes it difficult for the State to adopt such a standpoint. The attempt to adopt the "standpoint of women" forces one to direct one's attention to the local and take note of the social, physical and local existence of the individual. This perception allows other aspects of human existence to gain a significance, which they are systematically deprived of in the logic of availability conditions.

*Tension between neo-traditionalism and new resistance*

A theory-guided evaluation of the methods employed by the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg throws light on the tension-laden relationship between neo-traditionalism and the new resistance.

The organization chose - as did other Soldiers' Mothers organizations - the emblematic designation "Soldiers' Mothers" and in doing so, confirmed a neo-traditionally characterized image of women. At the same time, however, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg broke with the corresponding role assignment in two respects: first, they rejected the image of a "soldier's mother" as the image of a "heroic mother"; secondly, their actions did not correspond to the politically passive role of women propagated by the spirit of the neo-traditionalism.

Thus, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg stand in contradiction to the traditional image of "the mother of soldier sons" (Enloe 1996:99). They refuse to play the role of the "victim mothers for the nation" (dies. 1996:99), demanded of women equally in times of peace and war. They keep away both in word and deed from ideologies that promote such identification patterns by their pacifist and antimilitary stance.

In their actions, they also break with the neo-traditional image of a woman banished to the private, supposedly apolitical world - as can be seen already in their demands for massive publicity. Their practice of resistance is not in conformity with the role assignment of neo-traditionalism and goes beyond the cliché that in an emergency relating to the children; a mother will do her utmost. This is expressed in the object of their criticism, the Russian armed forces: "these women have dared to oppose the

most powerful body in Russia: the Russian army" (Borisova 1996e).

The strategic reference to the private, in particular the familializing and the dramatization of motherhood, and the strategy of shifting the horizon of political issues to that of religion, however, do come close to the neo-traditional discourse on gender roles and family. By emphasizing the role of motherhood and family, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg employ neo-traditional role patterns. Their vehement dissociation from politics in spite of their political concerns is in conformity with the image of the woman located in the "apolitical" private sphere.

To the extent to which in these points the Soldiers' Mothers make use of the spirit of neo-traditionalism, their specific form of reference to the private fulfils also the function of legitimizing their practice of resistance and helps to ensure acceptance by the public. A form of resistance that gains legitimacy via the existing neo-traditional image of woman, morality and religion, cannot, in contrast to directly politically articulated protest, be interpreted by the State as something directed against the society itself.

In addition, the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg make symbolic capital out of the neo-traditional patterns of gender roles, which gives them ability to act in concrete situations going beyond the legitimate aspects. This manifests itself in particular in the dramatization of motherhood. The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg instrumentalize for their own purposes the symbolic position of the woman, invested with special authority in the Russian context. The mobilization of this symbolic capital of "mother" enables them (for instance, in dealing with the members of the military) to achieve success in implementing their concerns.

In summary, the implicit adoption of the "standpoint of women" and the shift between neo-traditionalism and new resistance by the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg has proved to be an effective strategy in the realization not only of the immediate objectives of the organization namely, the protection of rights, but also of objectives pertaining to the entire social context.

The extent to which parallels can be drawn regarding similar organizations with comparable concerns in East Europe and in Latin America remains to be investigated in future research. It would be interesting to make a comparison between Soldiers' Mothers and other

antimilitaristic organizations of Russia; furthermore, a scientific study analyzing the significance of the *dedovščina* in the development of the social character of the male in Russia is yet to be undertaken.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> The constitution (part 3, article 59) and the law on "the liability for military service" provide for the possibility of alternative civil service: both refer to a third law in the constitution that either does not exist or exists only in the form of two drafts, neither of which has passed a reading till now in the Duma.

<sup>3</sup> To designate these processes as torture is not only obvious, but is also in conformity with the definition of torture contained in the "UN agreement against torture and other cruel, inhuman or humiliating treatment or punishment" of 10. 12. 1984. This definition is as follows: "In the sense of this agreement, the term 'torture' designates every action by which great physical pain or suffering is intentionally inflicted on a person, for instance, to obtain a statement or a confession from him or a third person, in order to punish him for an offence committed in fact or presumed to be committed by him or by a third person, or to intimidate him or a third person or for any other reason, based on any form of discrimination, when such suffering or pain has been caused by the order of or with the expressed or silent agreement of a member in public service or by another person acting in his official capacity. The expression does not cover pain or suffering resulting simply from legally permitted sanctions, belong to them, or connected with them." (Article 1. (1) of the Agreement, citation according to Simma/Fastenrath 1992:226).

<sup>4</sup> "Leaving on one's own authority the unit or the place of service" (part 33, article 337 of the criminal code of the Russian Federation) or desertion are punished with imprisonment for five to a maximum of ten years.

<sup>5</sup> "The Law on the Status of Military Personnel of 22 January 1993 also fails to criminalize acts of torture against members of the armed forces" (Amnesty International 1997: 8); torture is treated as a part of "aggravating conditions" of other crimes.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the organization of Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg, the Moscow Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, which, in virtue of its name, is often, but incorrectly considered as the parent organization of the social movement of the

Soldiers' Mothers of Russia and the organization "the Right of the Mother", with headquarters in Moscow are relevant.

<sup>7</sup> NGOs, as movement organizations, are considered by Ansgar Klein (1996) as part of civil society. Their characteristic features are an orientation to the "logic of influence," "external communication" and an "increased use of means of symbolic politics". According to Klein, these are increasingly taking the "role of channelization and initiation of social and political protests" (ibid:7).

<sup>8</sup> I endorse the words of the World Council of Churches in its definition of militarization and militarism: "Militarization should be understood as the process whereby military values, ideology and patterns of behavior achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic and external affairs of the state, and as a consequence the structural, ideological and behavioral patterns of both the society and the government are 'militarized'. Militarism should be seen as one of the more perturbing results of this process. Having said this, it must be noted that militarism is multi-dimensional and varied, with different manifestations in various circumstances, dependent on historical background, national tradition, class structure, social conditions, economic strength etc." (citation according to Vickers 1993:49).

<sup>9</sup> "Most people believe that an individual is defenseless against the state and rights proclaimed in the constitution are regarded as mere declarations...more than half of the respondents, supposing that their rights had been abused, did nothing to protect themselves" (Abrakim 1996:14). Von Beyme refers to a study investigating the opinion people of different countries have regarding the respect their governments show for human rights in their own countries; according to this study, the people of Russia place their country at the very bottom of the scale, "which might correspond to the correct evaluation" (Beyme 1994:337).

<sup>10</sup> Part 8, article 39 of the criminal law provides impunity even for the violation of rules laid down in it "under extremely compelling circumstances", that is, when

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there is danger to life and limb, and when no other possibility presents itself.

<sup>11</sup> Jelzin, in his appeal to the people of Russia, justified his invasion of Chechnya by Russian troops by the need to protect the country from the “threat to the unity of Russia, and the security of its citizens”, posed by “armed extremists” from Chechnya and the “possibility of a destabilization of political and economic situation”(Jelzin 1996).

<sup>12</sup> The dramatization of motherhood by the Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg arises in part from their world-view, and the border between the practices resulting from their world-view and a deliberate dramatization of it is very fluid.

<sup>13</sup> The expression “living forces” (in Russian *zivaja sila*; Levinson 1997:81) corresponds to the use of the term “human material” in language of the German military forces.