



Russian civil society is often described as weak and Russians as politically apathetic. However, as a surprise for many, tens of thousands of people gathered on the streets of Moscow to protest the fraud in the parliamentary elections in December 2011. Nevertheless, this 'awakening' did not last for long as Vladimir Putin took hold of the Presidency again in 2012. Since then, the Russian State Duma has passed new legislation to restrict civic and political activism. This, together with the fragmentation of the opposition movement, has hindered large-scale and sustained mobilization against the government. In 2013, the number of protests has plummeted when the risks of demonstrating are high and the benefits to participate in political activism appear non-existent.

Why is it impossible for the Russian opposition to find a common voice and to sustain contentious action? This book analyzes how political opportunities and restrictions in contemporary Russia have affected the opposition activists' activities at the grassroots level. The book examines Russian civil society, contemporary activist strategies, and democratization from the perspective of the young activists participating in the liberal youth movement *Oborona* (Defense) in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Before its dissolution in 2011, *Oborona* was an active participant in the Russian opposition movement, and thus it is an interesting case study of the living activist traditions in Russia.

The research illustrates how the Soviet continuities and liberal ideas are entangled in Russian political activism to create new post-socialist political identities and practices. In Russia, the group of dissenters is small, and the political elite in power do not leave much room for voices of dissent in order for the opposition to grow and diverge. However, the study argues that one of the reasons of *Oborona's* demise came from inside the movement: The group's solidarity was based on personal ties instead of political connectedness. Furthermore, the movement suffered from the lack of common ideological goals and leader-centeredness. The research suggests that these problems can be found in Russia's liberal opposition in general and explain why it is inefficient to mobilize large amounts of people for public demonstrations and to sustain protests.

The research draws on sociological theories on identities, social performance, and politicization as well as class, gender and generation studies. The data is derived from thematic interviews and participant observations amongst Russian youth activists and it was collected in Moscow and in St Petersburg during the period of 2009–2011.



PERFORMING POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN RUSSIA – THE CASE OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT OBORONA

Laura Lyytikäinen



# PERFORMING POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN RUSSIA

## THE CASE OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT OBORONA

LAURA LYYTIKÄINEN

Department of Social Sciences  
University of Helsinki  
Finland

# **Performing Political Opposition in Russia**

*The Case of the Youth Movement Oborona*

Laura Lyytikäinen

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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# ABSTRACT

This book examines Russian civil society and democratization from the perspective of the oppositional youth activists in Moscow and St. Petersburg. It takes the Russian youth movement *Oborona* (Defense) as its case study. Before its dissolution in 2011, the movement was an active participant in the ‘non-systemic’ opposition, and thus it is an interesting case study of the ‘actually existing’ activist traditions in Russia. The book analyses how youth activists use the tools applicable in today’s Russia to resist and reinterpret the cultural models of youth activism imposed on them by the authorities. The research shows how in Russian political activism, the Soviet continuities and liberal ideas are entangled to create new post-socialist political identities and practices. The study’s findings reflect the opportunities and restrictions for activism in Russia in general, and demonstrate the specificities of Russian liberal activism as well as the reasons for the lack of wider oppositional mobilization in the country.

The research draws on sociological theories on identities, social performance, and politicization as well as class, gender and generation studies. The data is derived from thematic interviews, informal discussions, participant observations, and selected readings of central Internet and social media sites. The interview data consists of 38 interviews with the activists of youth movements and it was collected in Moscow and in St Petersburg during the period of 2009–2011.

In the *Oborona* movement, the activist identity is constructed in the intersections of the Soviet intelligentsia and dissident traditions, and international influences. On the group level, the activists’ sense of solidarity relies on friendship and *obshchenie* (communication and being together) instead of a political connectedness. Also the movement practices tend to emphasize the sense of unity by silencing individual voices and political affiliations. The movement *Oborona* tries to find its own way between the western ‘imported’ understanding of democracy and civil society and the dominant symbolic order of ‘sovereign democracy’. The book argues that both the state’s official view on democracy and *Oborona*’s liberal-democratically oriented interpretation are tied to the political symbols of nationalism and the strong state and its unifying leader, which can be seen as a continuation of the centralized power relationships of the Soviet state.

Furthermore, *Oborona*’s repertoire of action brings together the ideals and norms of the activist identity and discursive frameworks of the movement. The book argues that the protest ‘performance’ and its actors remain distant from the audiences and this reflects the wider problems of the political opposition and especially the liberals in Russia.

The research suggests that the same weakness of collective political identity, lack of common ideological goals, leader-centeredness, and personified power that the case study illustrates are found in the Russian liberal opposition in general.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Russians have often been described as politically apathetic and Russian civil society as almost non-existent due to the nature of ‘managed’ democracy that is seen as suppressing independent civic activism in general, and especially criticism of the Kremlin, in particular (see e.g. Rimskii 2008; Petukhov 2008; Howard 2002). Until recently, only a small number of people have engaged in opposition activism and protests in Russia, and their activities were seen as dangerous because of the strong police suppression of protest events. Several commentators have seen passivity and apathy as emblematic of Russian society as a whole (Rimskii 2008, 14–15; Petukhov 2008) and, until recently, Russian youth has often been portrayed as apathetic and cynical (Blum 2006; Horowitz et al. 2003; McFaul 2003). In December 2011, the Russian opposition got a boost of strength when tens of thousands of people gathered on the streets of Moscow to protest the recent parliamentary elections that they saw as falsified in favor of the United Russia Party. These anti-government protests have been the largest since the *perestroika* era, and many commenters have interpreted the electoral protests of late 2011 as a sudden awakening of Russian civil society (e.g. Alexandrova 2011; Whitmore 2011).

The Putin government has managed to stabilize the Russian economy during the 2000s, and the President’s approval rates have been up, steadily in the 60 or even 70 per cent. However, the global economic crisis and the growing middle class, which the Putin government’s policies have helped to engender, mobilized people to demand their political and social rights in late 2011. People’s anger started to grow after the Prime Minister at the time, Vladimir Putin, and President Dmitry Medvedev announced in September 2011 that they will ‘swap places’. This kind of announcement, three months before the elections, was interpreted as the country leaders being too arrogant, and the opposition seized the opportunity to mobilize people’s dissatisfaction. The real trigger for people to take their disappointment to the streets was the parliamentary elections in December 2011, which were reported as falsified in many ways. The year 2012 saw turmoil in Russian politics when continuing demonstrations forced the government to recognize the protesters on the streets. In the summer of 2012, newscasts (even more so in the West than in Russia) were focused on the anti-Kremlin performance of the Pussy Riot punk collective and their sentencing to time in jail. Many public figures, artists, journalists and celebrities, such as TV personality-socialite Ksenia Sobchak, actor Aleksei Devotchenko and writer Boris Akunin joined the protests and voiced their opposition to Putin. Journalists and scholars talked about breaking the Putin era social contract that had guaranteed the citizens’ economic stability, personal economic freedom, and a feeling of security in exchange for their political loyalty (Babaeva 2012; Oxford Analytica 2012). This contract has been interpreted to mean that people could act freely in their private lives and manage their business relatively freely, as long as they have not voiced their grievances or criticism towards the state in public discussion.

However, after the turbulences of 2012, the year 2013 began much quieter and the revolution still awaits its conductors. The year 2012 brought many political changes and

restrictions on civic and political activism as President Putin took presidency again – with a possibility of ruling for 12 more years. By the end of 2012, the opposition’s rallies started calming down, partly because of the state’s grip strengthening with the demonstration laws and over the foreign funding of NGOs, as well as with regular arrests and criminal cases against the protest leaders, such as the anti-corruption blogger and lawyer Aleksei Navalnyi and the Left Front leader Sergei Udal’tsov. According to OVD-Info, an independent organization monitoring protests and political arrests in Russia, there were over 5,000 politically motivated arrests in Moscow during 228 protest events between December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and December 2012 (OVD-info 2012). Of these arrests, more than 1,000 were during authorized pickets. The respondents of the OVD-Info’s surveys have reported unnecessary violence from the police side during the arrests and detentions, as well as violations of the detainees’ rights such as the right to attorney or the right to urgent medical attention. Some activists have fled the country to avoid criminal cases that can put the participants of the demonstrations in jail for up to ten years, for violently resisting arrests and violence towards state officials. These cases were mainly against the participants of the May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 rallies against Putin’s inauguration on Bolotnaia Square, which turned into a violent conflict between the police and demonstrators. In this so-called ‘Bolotnaia 6 case’ hundreds of protesters were arrested, 26 people were investigated, and 12 people were put on trial. The majority of the accused face sentences from eight to thirteen years of imprisonment. Ten accused were sentenced to 2.5 to 4.5 years in prison in February 2014 (Gessen 2014). The Bolotnaia 6 case has become known for its massive investigation that is said to involve numerous violations of Russian law and the rights of the prosecuted (see e.g. Lally 2013.) Also the European court of Human Rights has requested information from the Russian state of the conditions of the detained (Interfax 2013).

In January 2014, the government dropped investigations of some of the accused as a part of the government’s larger campaign on amnestying convicted activists, such as the Pussy Riot members and the former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky. However, many commentators saw this campaign as a ‘PR stunt’ for polishing Russia’s leaders’ image before the Sochi Olympic Games, but not as a sign of a freer civil society (e.g. Euronews 2013). During the Sochi Olympic Games in February 2014, the government took a strong stand in restricting dissent in the Olympic city and elsewhere in Russia. During the Games, the first Bolotnaia 6 case prisoners were sentenced in Moscow and hundreds of protesters were arrested outside the courtroom for staging an unsanctioned protest in support of the Bolotnaia prisoners. The sentences and arrests are seen as a sign that the government does not allow dissent in Russia under Putin’s new rule (Gessen 2014).

Besides the government’s strengthening grip on the political opposition, the fragmentation of the opposition and its lack of coherent and unifying political program also hindered large-scale and sustained mobilization. The opposition has managed to agree on one thing – they are against Putin, but have not been able to agree on what to do next. The opposition has not been able to formulate a concrete, alternative vision of a future ‘without Putin’, not to mention a convincing alternative as the future leader who would overthrow the Putin government. As the news blogger Brian Whitmore put it: ‘It (2012) was the year everything changed. It was the year nothing changed’ (Whitmore 2012).

During the year 2013, the opposition was struggling with its inner conflicts. The coalition of western-minded liberals, imperialists, nationalists, anarchists, and communists was too difficult to keep together when the only thing they could agree on was their opposition to Putin. Clashes escalated in February 2013, when one of the leaders of the 'For Free Elections' demonstrations, Sergey Udal'tsov, got into a fistfight with other opposition activists from the oppositional coalition known as the 'Other Russia' in a memorial service for their fellow protester who had fled criminal charges to the Netherlands and ended up committing suicide after a negative response to his application for political asylum (Moscow Times 2013).

Why does it seem impossible for the Russian opposition to find a common voice and to sustain contentious action? This research engages with this conundrum by analyzing Russia's civil society and protest culture from the point of view of youth activists participating in an opposition movement. According to Jasper (1997, xi), '[p]rotest movements are a good place to look for collective moral visions, with the good and the bad they entail'. He claims that in modern society, social movements are 'one of the few places where we can see people working new moral, emotional and cognitive sensibilities'. I argue that understanding these moral visions is significant for understanding and analyzing the political culture and democratic practices of a society. I approach these questions by analyzing how activists' self-understanding and group solidarities are negotiated and performed in the restrictive political environment of Russia and how successful the activists are in mobilizing people for to support their cause. I engage in the debates surrounding Russia's civil society development, political culture, and political participation, through a case study of the Russian youth movement *Oborona* (*Rossiskoe molodezhnoe dvizhenie Oborona*, 'Defense'). Oborona activists have participated in oppositional activities from 2006 to 2011. This opens up an opportunity to see the political dynamics in the country from the perspective of the politically marginalized – the young, active, oppositional youth in post-Soviet Russia. I suggest that examining this activist group offers a fresh perspective on Russian political culture by showing who is able and willing to engage in civic activism in Russia, and how. Furthermore, Oborona activists have actively taken part in the previous waves of demonstrations, which built the basis for the wider, ongoing protest movement that started in December 2011 (see Robertson 2012; Volkov 2012). Therefore, by examining the activities, opportunities and challenges of this group, which shares the general goals of the wider 'non-systemic' democratic opposition in Russia, my findings contribute to the analysis of the challenges that the political opposition is faced with in today's Russia.

My research contributes to the discussion on Russian civil society and democratization, by demonstrating how political opportunities and restrictions in today's Russia affect the activities of the opposition activists, as well as illustrating the specifics of Russian civic activism on the grassroots level. My research demonstrates how the Russian political opposition, and especially its young activists, has been actively protesting the government in the previous years. Recent research has shown that the 2011–12 protests are not a sudden awakening of civil society in Russia, but that society has been slowly but steadily changing in the 2000s, when the organizational and cultural apparatus for protests was also developing (Robertson 2012; Volkov 2012). This already existing apparatus was



put in to action after the electoral fraud in December 2011. According to Robertson (2012, 2–3), various oppositional groups, who had organized several protest waves, such as the anti-government ‘Dissenters’ Marchers’ (*Marsh Nesoglasnykh*) and the Strategy-31 (*Strategiia-31*) demonstrations demanding the state to respect citizens’ constitutional rights, were heavily involved in organizing the post-electoral rallies as well. I show that among these organizers and protesters there were also many young people organized in various oppositional movements from different spectrums of the political credo, who have been actively participating in the street demonstrations but also, and perhaps even more importantly, they have been innovative users of the Internet and various social media sites, which has been very important in mobilizing people during the recent electoral protests (Lonkila 2012). Furthermore, according to Volkov (2012, 5–6), social tensions were already observable in 2010, especially in relation to the growing dissatisfaction with the police forces. Volkov also sees the tightening cooperation between civic and nationalists groups in recent years as a sign of the general radicalization of protest activism in Russia (see also Chebankova 2013).

My research engages with the wealth of scholarly writing on Russian civil society and the democratization process in the country. The key themes of these studies are state-civil society relations (Evans, Henry, and Sundstrom 2006; Chebankova 2013; Howard 2003; Kulmala 2013; Richter 2009a; Richter 2009b; S. White 2008), western funding of Russian civil society initiatives (Henderson 2003; McIntosh Sundstrom 2006), women’s NGOs and the role of gender in democratization (Kay 2000; Hemment 2007; Salmenniemi 2008), and recently, how the Internet and new technologies shape activism (Lonkila 2012; Lonkila 2008). However, even though youth have played an important role in many political struggles, for instance in the ‘Color Revolutions’ in Central Europe and in the former Soviet Union countries (Kuzio 2006; Lavery 2008a), youth political activism in Russia has attracted little attention until very recently (However, see Pilkington 2002; Omel’chenko 2005). The existing studies on youth political activism in Russia have mainly dealt with the pro-Kremlin youth movements, such as the *Nashi* (Atwal 2009; Lassila 2011a; Lassila 2007; Blum 2006; Hemment 2009), while youth opposition activism has been studied less thoroughly (however, see Gromov 2009a; Loskutova 2008; Horvath 2011; Robertson 2009; Sperling 2012; Lyytikäinen 2011; 2013). My research contributes to this discussion by showing how youth are also actively organizing against the current government and how Russian oppositional youth activist practices are diverse and constantly evolving.

In many studies, Russian civil society has been characterized as weak because of the low levels of participation of citizens in non-governmental organizations, the persistence of personal support networks as alternatives to civil society organizations, citizens’ distrust in public institutions and civil society organizations, as well as civil society organizations’ dependence on foreign funding. Furthermore, Russian NGOs are described as having little or no influence on political processes and decision-making. (Crotty 2009; Evans 2002; 2006a; Howard 2003; Knox, Lentini, and Williams 2006; McFaul, Petrov, and Riabov 2004.) This research, by contrast, contributes to the scholarship studying the actually existing grassroots activism and activists’ experiences. This book contributes to our understanding of Russian civil society by showing how and why activists engage with

oppositional politics, which questions they choose to politicize or not, and how these choices are related to the Russian political culture. Furthermore, I show how the discursive frameworks of the opposition are reflected in the protest events, and how they create a space for activists to perform their identities (see more on research design in chapter 2).

## Structure of the Book

After this introductory chapter, chapter Two lays out the theoretical and methodological framework of the research. In chapter Three, I move on to examine the socio-historical context of youth politics and civic activism in Russia by examining the history of youth organizations in the Soviet Union and Russia, and the opportunities and restrictions of civic activism in contemporary Russia as well as introducing the case study of this research: the Russian Youth Movement Oborona.

In the first empirical chapter, chapter Four, I examine how activist identity is constructed in Oborona. In this chapter I suggest, firstly, that the activist self-understanding is constructed through identification with the Russian intelligentsia, cultural model of dissidents, and with cosmopolitanism. Furthermore, the activist identity is gendered and embodied in the right activist 'look', which is defined by masculinity. This self-understanding of an activist is further reflected in the collective dimensions of activist identity. I argue that instead of political ideologies, friendship, communication, and being together (*obshchenie*) become the most important base for constructing the sense of groupness in Oborona.

Chapter Five analyzes the Oborona activists' interpretation and understanding of democracy and civil society. The aim of the chapter is to show how Oborona tries to find its own way between the western 'imported' understanding of democracy and civil society and the dominant symbolic order of 'sovereign democracy'. I show how both the state's official view on democracy and Oborona's liberal-democratically oriented interpretation are tied to the political symbols of nationalism and the strong state and its unifying leader, which can be seen as a continuation of the centralized power relationships and the personification of power of the Soviet state. I argue that both of these understandings of democracy are entanglements (Fournier 2010) of Soviet continuities and liberal ideas.

The Sixth chapter presents an analysis of how Oborona's repertoire of action brings together the ideals and norms of the activist identity and discursive frameworks of the movement. In this chapter, I analyze Oborona's forms of action, mass-demonstrations, direct action, street performances and the movement's educational activities as social performances (Alexander 2006). I argue that the performance and its actors remain distant from the audiences and this reflects the wider problems of the political opposition and especially the liberals in Russia.

In the Seventh chapter, I conclude my theoretical and empirical findings and link them to the contemporary discussion on Russian political culture, civil society development, and the recent waves of protests and the restrictions on political activism in Russia. I suggest that Oborona as a case study reflects Russian political culture as an entanglement of western and eastern traditions of thought, which become reconstituted in post-Soviet

reality and difficult to distinguish (see Fournier 2010). I claim that the recent electoral protest movement suffers from the same problems that eventually led Oborona to dissolve in 2011, on the eve of the larger protest mobilization; the personification of power, silencing of disagreeing voices, engaging with the foreign and somewhat contradictory discursive regime of liberalist and statist views of civil society and democracy, as well as distancing themselves from and 'othering' the 'ordinary' Russians and their everyday problems.

## **2 RESEARCH DESIGN: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Research Questions and Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The aim of this study is to study Russian political culture from the perspective of young Russian oppositional activists. The research questions for this study originated from my interest in theoretical debates on political culture, social movements, politicization processes, and activist identities, as well as from the debates around democracy and civil society in Russia. During my fieldwork and first readings of the empirical data, the questions gained new dimensions, which I took into account while formulating the final research questions.

The main research question of my study is: How are oppositional activist identities and movement practices constructed in the restricted Russian political environment? To answer this primary question, I formulated more detailed sub-questions. The first sub-question is: who are the oppositional youth activists and how are activist identities constructed in the group setting and in relation to Russian politics and civic activism? The second question concerns the movement's discourses on democracy and civil society, and asks how activists interpret democracy and civil society and how these interpretations relate to the state's official view on state-society relations. The third question scrutinizes the public practices of activism and asks how the identities and ideals of the movement are performed in the protest event, and how effective these performances are.

This research draws on sociological theories on identities, performance, and politicization as well as class, gender and generation studies, which also structure the book; every chapter analyzes youth activism from a different theoretical perspective. This approach allows me to scrutinize youth political activism from different conceptual perspectives and thus create a many-sided representation of it. In the following section, I introduce the theoretical 'toolbox' of the study, which will be further elaborated and deepened in the subsequent chapters.

#### **Social Movements and Politicization**

Della Porta and Diani (2006, 20–21) define social movements as 'distinct social processes, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors are engaged in collective action.' They define these mechanisms as 1) conflictual collective action with clearly identified opponents, 2) dense social networks, and 3) shared distinct collective identity. Furthermore, participating in protests and in 'new disruptive forms of action' instead of conventional political participation distinguishes social movements from other types of networks and organizations (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 28–29). When studying Russian political participation, the definitions of a social movement gain new dimensions. Due to the restrictive NGO laws (see section 3.3 of this book) that have introduced complicated

registration and reporting obligations for registered NGOs, many opposition political groups are forced to operate as networks or movements, although in more lenient legislative framework they would probably register as non-governmental organizations. However, I choose to call Oborona and other youth groups, which this book addresses, ‘movements’ since they themselves identify and label their groups as such, and they fulfil the criteria of della Porta and Diani’s definition of a social movement. All the dimensions of della Porta and Diani’s definitions are present in these youth movements; they are engaged in conflictual activities and have clearly identified opponents, have created a dense network of like-minded people, and share a certain collective identity or sense of groupness, which I will demonstrate in upcoming chapters.

However, I argue that when defining a social movement we should not forget the aspect of politicization. Alvarez et al (1998, 8) claim that social movements are important forces in shaping the political culture, i.e. the social construction of what counts as ‘political’, of a society. According to them, social movements ‘seek to reconfigure the dominant political culture’. They aim at shaking the boundaries of representation and reframing what is understood as political in a specific context. The authors maintain that in many cases social movements not only struggle to be included in the political system, but also for the right to define the ‘political’ and the ‘system’ in which they wish to be included. (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 21.) Social movements are important in politicizing issues, i.e. bringing them into the public debate and naming questions as political as well as creating new spaces for performing politics (Palonen 2003, 171; 182; see also Luhtakallio 2012). In the restricted political environment of Russia, politicization becomes a delicate process, which often involves creative strategies to avoid repressive and sometimes even life-threatening backlashes from the opponents’ side. Opposition activists need to find a balance between finding tactics for challenging and criticizing the state and using tactics which might further endanger the activists, for instance by getting arrested, suspended from a school, or fired from a job (see also van der Vet and Lyytikäinen forthcoming). In this research I study what issues Oborona politicizes as a social movement and how as well as how these politicization processes reproduce and challenge Russian political culture.

## **Activist Identities**

In scholarly writing on social movements, the interest lies in the so-called ‘new’, ‘post-citizenship’, or ‘identity-based’ social movements. Researchers have turned to studying collective identity in order to fill the gaps between earlier theories, such as resource mobilization and political process models, which have dominated social movement studies (Polletta and Jasper 2001; see also Stryker, Owens, and White 2000; Jasper 1997). According to Polletta and Jasper (2001, 283–284), mobilization and process theorists studying social movements focused too much on structural shifts instead of individual interests, motivations, strategic choices and cultural effects of social movement activists, issues which Polletta and Jasper propose as important for a better understanding of social movements.

In my research, I am interested in the activist-level identification processes, motivation, and meaning-making. However, identity is a controversial concept in the social sciences. Snow and McAdam (2000, 62) state that work on collective identities and social movements ‘remains conceptually muddy at best’. Among others, Polletta and Jasper (2001, 285–286) argue that collective identity has often been overextended and used to explain too much. Polletta and Jasper argue that while analytically using the concept of collective identity, ‘[t]he analytical challenge is to identify the circumstances in which different relations between interest and identity, strategy and identity, and politics and identity operate, circumstances that include cultural processes as well as structural ones’ (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 286). Thus, they claim that both structural and cultural processes are important to take into the analysis with the concept of collective identity. On the other hand, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) refer to the ongoing identity debate in the social sciences as the ‘“Identity” crisis’. They argue that identity ‘tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)’. The concept of identity has been critiqued and deconstructed in a variety of ways, especially by cultural studies and feminist scholarship. Instead of identity, research has turned more towards studying subjectivities, the performative self, and to postmodern anti-essentialism instead of ethnic, national and racial concepts of identity.

So, who needs identity?, Stuart Hall (1996) asks. As Hall claims, even if the deconstruction and ‘erasure’ of identity has often been fruitful for thinking of identity-related questions, identity has still not been ‘superseded dialectically’ or replaced with better conceptual tools. I agree with Stuart Hall’s (1996, 1) argument that identity in its new deconstructed and de-totalized forms, is still ‘good to think with’. Hall argues that we do not need to ‘abandon the subject’ but re-conceptualize it ‘in its new displaced or decentered position within the paradigm’. In this approach, identity and identification are not understood from essentialist points of departure, but as strategic and positional; not as a stable core of the self, but as a discursive process and always ‘in process’. Identities are ‘produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific, discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies’ and as ‘the product of marking the difference and exclusion’ in relation to ‘others’. (Hall 1996, 4.) According to Redman’s reading of Hall’s theorization, there is no true or essential ‘self’, but identities are ‘constituted or performatively “enacted” in and through the subject positions made available in language and wider cultural codes’ (Redman 2000, 10). My research engages with this discussion by approaching activist identities as processes of identification, dis-identification and self-understanding in relation to the ‘others’, which are performed in everyday settings as well as in public displays of activism.

In my analysis of different dimensions of activists’ identities and their relations to group practices, I find Brubaker and Cooper’s theorization of identity as helpful. Because of the multiple uses of ‘identity’, Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 14) argue, it is more helpful to not try to describe all aspects of ‘identity’ with one term, but to speak of different dimensions in different conceptual frameworks. The authors suggest the use of ‘identification’ and ‘categorization’ to draw attention to the complex processes of ‘identity’. They further distinguish between self-identification and the identification and



categorization of oneself by others, which take place in ‘dialectical interplay’. One form of external identification is the powerful, authoritative institution’s, such as the modern state’s formalized, objectified and codified systems of categorization, which include the power to define what and who is who. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 14–15.) In my research, I am interested in exactly these processes of identification and categorization and in the struggle over the definition of what is what and who is who.

According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 7), the often too general use of the concept of identity blurs the line between ‘identity’ as a category of practice and as a category of analysis. Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 4) claim that identity as a category of practice is used by actors in some everyday settings ‘to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others’. However, they continue that ‘even if everyday “identity talk” and “identity politics” are real and important phenomena’, it does not mean that identity as a category of practice needs the use of identity as a category of analysis, which would posit ‘identity’ as something that exists in the essentialist sense. According to the authors, we should avoid reproducing and reinforcing such reifications of putative identities that result from uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4–5.) In the recent post-modern and post-structural studies influenced by Foucauldian theorizations, ‘identity’ is used to ‘highlight the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary ‘self’’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 8).

Different from identification and categorization, which Brubaker and Cooper define as active terms calling attention to particular acts performed by particular identifiers, they use the term ‘self-understanding’ to refer to ‘ways in which individual and collective action can be governed by particularistic understandings of self and social location’. Self-understanding can also be called ‘situated subjectivity’, as a dispositional term that refers to one’s sense of who one is, social location and of how one is prepared to act, as in Bourdieu’s (1990) ‘practical sense’ that persons have of their social world and themselves. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 17.)

In addition to activists’ self-understanding, I examine the construction of activist identities on the group level, and on how group practices shape activist identities and vice versa. Social movement studies often use the concept of collective identity to refer to the subjective or objective sameness of the members of the group (e.g. Gamson 1992; Melucci 1996). However, instead of using the very ambiguous concept of ‘collective identity’, Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 20) suggest terms *commonality*, *connectedness* and *groupness* instead of the ‘all-purpose ‘identity’’. They define commonality as ‘the sharing of some common attribute’ and connectedness as ‘the relational tie that link people’. Groupness on the other hand, is referred to as ‘the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group’.

Nevertheless, collective and individual dimensions of identity are intertwined and often difficult to distinguish, and they take different shapes in different social contexts. Lawler’s (2008) sociological perspective of identity further problematizes the often rigid categorization of identity. According to her (2008, 2–3), identities are ‘done’ through complex processes of identification and dis-identification. Identities are simultaneously about sameness and difference and no one has just one identity: ‘everyone must,

consciously or not, identify with more than one group, one identity'; identities have impact on each other. Different identities should be seen as dynamic, interactive, and mutually constitutive because identity draws not only from sameness but also from difference. Often differences that seem 'natural', for instance between ethnic groups, are in fact produced by suppressing what is similar between groups, i.e. differences need to be *made* (Ignatieff, 1994 in Lawler 2008, 4). Lawler (2008, 8) argues that identities are socially produced in interdependency with others and embedded in the social world, and therefore, 'without a nexus of others, none of us could be "who we are"'. I follow Lawler's central claim when she states that 'identity needs to be understood not as belonging "within" the individual person, but as produced between persons and within social relations' (Lawler 2008, 8).

In the subsequent chapters, I analyze how Oborona activist self-identification and self-understanding are shaped by their group practices and how they construct feelings of belonging in the movement. I study the activists' self-understanding: the ways in which the activists make sense of themselves and their identities, through identification with and dis-identification from, in relation to 'others'. (Lawler 2008; Skeggs 1997; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). In my analysis, I combine the analysis of the activists' self-understanding with the collective dimensions of identity, groupness, connectedness and commonality, and analyze how the activists create feelings of belonging and solidarity in the group setting. I argue that the self-understanding of an activist is often complexly intertwined with the collective dimensions of identity, and thus identities at the collective and individual levels are complex and enmeshed and often not even meaningful to distinguish.

## **Social Performance**

In addition to analyzing activist identities in Oborona, I scrutinize the ways in which activist identities and groupness is performed in various social situations, such as in demonstrations, meetings and street performances. Lawler (2008, chap. 6) follows Goffman in arguing that social identities, and social reality, are made through performance. According to Goffman, there are no 'false' or 'true' performances of the self, but the concern of a performance is, whether it will be credited or discredited by the 'audience'. Therefore, 'the self is a social product in the sense that it depends upon validation awarded and withheld in accordance with the norms of a stratified society' (Branaman 1997, xlvi). Furthermore, even though for Goffman performance includes playing roles, these roles are not masking the 'true self' but the roles, and their repetition, are what 'makes us persons' (Lawler 2008, 106). In my research, I scrutinize these performative acts in the group setting and as social performances, and I analyze how activist identities are performed in Oborona's public activities, such as demonstrations and street performances how these performances and their reception by the audiences influence the self-understanding of the activists.

Benford and Hunt (1992) argue that social movements can be described as dramas, in which movement and countermovement activists 'compete to affect the audiences' interpretations power relations'. They argue that movement activists collectively construct

their images of power and struggle to alter extant power relations through ‘dramatic techniques’ of scripting, staging, performing, and interpreting (Benford & Hunt 1992, 36). In my analysis, I follow Alexander (2006), who formulates these techniques further and suggests that a social performance has the same elements as a theatrical performance (see in more detail in chapter 6). Alexander creates a ‘macro-sociological model of social action as cultural performance’ and uses this theoretical framework to show how in less complex societies, social performances were more ritual-like but through the growing complexity of society, social performances become more de-fused and less ritual-like. In my analysis, I follow Alexander’s theory of social performance, but apply it not on the macro-level, but on the level of group action. I analyze protest events as social performances and trace the different elements of performance in this context to show how the activists perform their identities and ‘groupness’ in the protest event (see also Shukan 2010).

### **Class, Gender and Generation**

Class, generation and gender as classificatory categories and vectors of power are central to my analysis. I study how class, gender and generation are constructed in activism and how they shape the discourses, identities and performances of the movement. A class perspective was long absent from the debates of post-modern and post-structuralist theoretical discussion, but it has recently re-entered the scene. However, according to Skeggs (1997, 7), even if class was no longer central to academic debate, it continued to structure people’s lives: ‘it is a major feature of subjectivity, a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being’ (Skeggs 1997, 7). Class analysis has also often been missing in studies of social and political changes in post-Soviet Russia, or these have been dominated by structural class analysis that is not sensitive to its cultural dimensions (Salmenniemi 2012, 1–2). According to Salmenniemi (2012, 3), some of the features of class processes taking place in Russia, such as individualization of inequalities and naturalization of class privilege, and the pathologisation of the working class, are also familiar to western societies. However, as a special characteristic of Russia and other post-Soviet societies, she sees that they ‘have moved from the Soviet logic of social differentiation to the logic of global neoliberal consumer capitalism within a very short period of time.’

In ‘new class studies’, within which this study is located, class is understood as a process of classifying practices instead of merely as an economic category. Class is relational, cultural, emotional and symbolic, fluid and performative, and it has real material, economic and political consequences. In addition, moral evaluation is an integral part of class-making and class inequalities are also derived by denying or attributing value, through symbolic violence, and through symbolic power. (Bourdieu 1989; Skeggs 2004.) Furthermore, ‘new class studies’ pay attention to how class configures in people’s everyday lives and relations and becomes naturalized as personal or psychological attributes of the self (Lawler 2012, 259–260). In my research, I analyze how understanding of class is incorporated in the activists’ self-understanding, how the

activists define class, as well as how it shapes opportunities for participation, and how it is performed in activist practices.

Furthermore, I examine gendered understandings of activism, how gender shapes activist strategies and practices, and how it is performed in the group setting. Gender is produced in discursive practices, and it is a central component of identities and performances as well as the power relations in which the youth of this study live and act. Gender, as a social and symbolic category of sexual difference, is one of the organizing principles of societies (cf. Scott 1986). Feminist theory questions essentialist understandings of gender and the view that sex and sexuality are derived from physiological and biological causalities and attributes. This is not to deny the material dimensions of the body, but rather to pay attention to the processes through which bodies come to bear cultural and historical meanings (Butler 1988, 520). Gender thus refers to the socially and culturally produced ideas of inequality, power, and male-female difference. These ideas structure the reproduction of these differences within institutionalized practices of society. Gal and Kligman (2000, 4) see gender as an important cultural category shaping the ways how states are imagined, legitimated and constituted, and thus as an important analytical lens studying post-socialism and the reconstitution of post-socialist states. Ideas about gender difference interact with other cultural constructions, such as the family, the public good and the nation, and thus shape institutional changes. Furthermore, state ideologies and policies constrain gender relations, but simultaneously, gender relations shape the practices and ideals of different kinds of states as well as different types of political action. (Gal and Kligman 2000, 4–5.) Following Gal and Kligman, I suggest that ideas about gender continue to shape young activists' understanding of themselves, their group practices as well as the ways they construct and perform their identities, groupness and connectedness.

I see performance as a significant factor in my analysis of gender. Butler (1988, 521) claims that the acts that constitute gender in its embodied form are similar to performative acts in a theatrical context. She sees performativity as a process that is constituted in time and instituted through 'stylized repetition of acts' (Butler 1988, 519). According to Butler (2000, 108), performative acts are a form of authoritative speech and gender performances are regulated by social conventions. Performative acts are statements or utterances that exercise power. An example of this is the uttering of 'It's a Girl' that designates the baby as a girl and initiates the process of a certain 'girling' of the child that produces the normative understanding what it means to be a girl or a boy. According to Butler (1988, 520), gender performances are confined by social taboos and sanctions. A child embodies certain ideals of femininity and masculinity and then 'performs' what is normatively seen as 'proper' for her sex accordingly. In my research, I show how activism is performed and gendered in the movement's practices.

In addition to class and gender, the generational experiences and ties shape youth activism and thus are important to take into account in the analysis. Recently, the point of departure in youth studies has turned from the 'youth at risk' or problem-based approach, to seeing youth cultures and identities on their own terms. Youth is studied as a condition that is shaped by specific social, political, and economic settings, and youth are seen as actively contributing to social and political changes in society (Ginwright and Cammarota

2006). In Russia, as elsewhere in the world, youth have been a target of state policies and the ‘constructors’ of the future in many ways. Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998, 83) argue that the concept of youth is the ‘product of state systems through which age became bureaucratically calibrated’. According to them, through the development of modern state, patterns of age relations have been configured into age hierarchies that are characteristic of modern times. They argue that age provides an exact method of calibration of administrative practices that are used to define subordinate groups in order to control them, even if this controlling is done in the name of welfare, for example. Youth can be seen as a political construction that legitimates the pattern of subordinate relations between generations. Youth, or more precisely age, is politically important because of its administrative convenience, technical utility, and its potential in the reproduction of labor power (Mizen 2004, 14–15). According to Mizen (2004), the political importance of age determines and organizes the shape of young people’s lives.

Furthermore, youth are not a homogenous group, but the construction of youth affects different groups differently. This means that state, class and social relations of production remain important aspects of understanding youth and age. (Mizen 2004, 20–21.) According to Mizen (2004), the restructuring of youth occurs through the institutions of education, work, family, social security, and law and order. Thus, age is used as a way of allocating rights and responsibilities of formal citizenship. (Mizen 2004, 179.) Pilkington (1996, 1) maintains that even if age has not been accepted as a macro social category as significant as class, race and gender, identities are also renegotiated throughout the life cycle. In addition to the transition from childhood to adulthood, also other moments of the life cycle, such as entering college, the army, or a relationship as well as death or the disappearance of a family member or the birth of a child, are important in the process of renegotiating one’s identity. Furthermore, class, gender, and race shape the experiences of young people. Experiences of youth is always classed, gendered, racialized and contextually constructed in time and space. (Pilkington 1996.) In this study, generation, alongside gender and class, is analyzed as shaping the activists’ self-understanding, discursive strategies, and performances both as a category imposed on them and as a part of their own identification processes. I do not analyze youth as a rigid category, but aim to find ways how the activists construct their identities as young, and how they identify or dis-identify with the dominant views of young people in Russia. I am interested in meanings and self-understandings that are associated with the discursive practice of ‘being young’ in relation to the activists parents’ generation as well as to ‘other’ young people in Russia.

## **2.2 Data and Methods**

The methods of this research consist of thematic interviews, informal discussions, participant observations, and selected readings of central Internet and social media sites. The data derived from interviews and participant observation was collected in Moscow over the period 2009–2012 and in St Petersburg in 2011. It consists of 38 interviews with the activists of youth movements in Moscow and St Petersburg. I interviewed 29 activists,

12 women and 17 men. Of these activists, 15 were activists or former activists of the Moscow Oborona, 7 were from the St Petersburg Oborona and 6 were young people from the movements *DA! – Demokraticheskaia Alternativa* (Yes – Democratic Alternative), *Solidarnost'* (Solidarity), *MY* (We), *Svobodnye Radikaly* (Free Radicals) and *Natsiia Svobody* (The Nation of Freedom) (see Appendix 2A).

In addition to the thematic interviews, I conducted biographical interviews with six key activists in Oborona. In these interviews, they talked about their lives through themes such as family life, memories of their school and university years, joining the oppositional movement as well as through their expectations for the future (see Interview Questions, Appendix 2B). I used the interviews with activists from youth movements other than Oborona to map the youth activism scene in Russia in general and to take the outsiders' view on Oborona into account. All the activists were friends or acquaintances of each other and often took part in the same protest events and trainings, the boundaries between different groups were often fluid, and the activists moved between different groups. Furthermore, the field notes from my participant observations, which I wrote during my stays in the field, form an important part of my data. In addition to the interviews and participant observations, I have used activists' writing in social media (*Vkontakte* and Facebook) and in their weblogs as well as my personal email correspondence with some of the activists as well as writings in the email-lists of Oborona groups, to confirm and illustrate some of my observations.

I spent a total of six months in Russia conducting this fieldwork. This includes three 1-2 month long visits to Moscow, a weeklong trip to the *Partizan* 2010 camp in the Moscow suburbs, and one month-long trip to St Petersburg in 2011. During my fieldwork, I participated in various activities, such as seminars, meetings, games, and protest events organized by the Oborona movement and other opposition groups, as well as other public demonstrations and rallies. I also spent time with some of the activists outside the actual activist events (even though these are hard to separate); I visited their homes and we went to museums and cafes, and traveled to nearby cities just to 'hang out' and to see my friends' favorite places. In summer of 2011, two activists paid me a visit in Helsinki and we continued our discussions cycling around the sunny (and rainy) Helsinki, sitting in cafes, and in my favorite places. All the interviews and notes are transcribed in their original language (mainly in Russian, some in English and my notes in Finnish) and the analysis is conducted with the help of the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software, with which I coded the data for thematic reading and analysis.

According to Skeggs (1997, 17) methodology informs us of a range of issues from who to study to how to write, and which knowledge to use. The researcher's 'locatedness' informs methodological decisions and the final product of the research. Knowledge is always situated and produced by someone in a certain social, cultural, historical, economic location. Additionally, there are numerous power relations embedded in field research. Thus, also this study is written at the intersection of various power relations. I entered the field as a young female researcher studying a highly masculinized field: Russian politics. My thinking was affected by western theoretical concepts of the social sciences as well as my studies in feminist theory. In fact, I did not manage (or even want) to establish myself strongly as a researcher in the field; I was usually referred to as the Finnish '*devushka*'



(young woman), or jokingly as the Finnish '*Oboronets*' (participant of the Oborona movement) and persistently, even after several corrections, as a Finnish journalist. My informants who got to know me gave me these labels to help me to find contacts; they did not think that writing a PhD thesis was really interesting enough in order to get to speak to people. However, I did my best to inform my informants that I was doing research and not just writing popular pieces on activist life in Russia that they sometimes would have preferred me to write.

My entry to the field was strongly dependent on one key informant that I managed to contact and create a trusting relationship with. During my fieldwork in Russia, I found out that personal contacts and networks are often an important resource in reaching out to people and gaining trust. This first activist contact from Oborona had a lot of international experience, and was openly writing about his activism on the Internet both in Russian and in English. His openness to foreigners and to research (he was himself also a PhD student) contributed to establishing contact with him. I was in contact with other groups' activists as well, and conducted some preliminary interviews with them, but I did not manage to build trust in the same manner to become invited to their activities as in Oborona. Furthermore, my key informant was much respected in the movement and in opposition politics in general, and turned out to be very important in helping me get new interviews and invitations to different seminars and demonstrations. He also invited me personally to one of Oborona's meetings where I was accepted right away as an observer, participant, and eventually as a friend, which ensured my further access to information and movement activities.

During my fieldwork, I became friends with many of the activists and we have remained in contact after I returned from the field. Through these open and friendly relations, I gained wide access to activists' lives and worldviews. Furthermore, I have paid even more attention to the ethical research questions due to my wish to not harm my respondent-friends. For ethical reasons, I have done my best to preserve the anonymity of the informants by using pseudonyms and in some cases by blurring the context and descriptions that would expose the respondent's identity. All of the interview participants were informed of the research purpose of my interviews. However, in some situations, such as larger meetings, seminars and demonstrations, I was not able or willing to announce my researcher status even if I was observing the situation for research purposes. This was usually due to the inconvenience or impossibility of the announcement for a larger crowd or my own, or the informants', wish to stay out of the center of the attention in a situation where my existence as a foreigner would have posed questions, unwanted attention, or even a threat of violence to me or to my informants.

I have thematically coded the interviews and my field notes looking for interviewees' engagement with various discursive practices, meaning-making, and the issues that they deem important to their activism. My interviews were semi-structured around a certain set of questions, such as democracy and civil society in Russia, protesting and other forms of action as well as activists' personal lives. These questions were formulated on a general level, so that I could give the interviewees freedom to choose what they wanted to discuss in more detail, and I could ask further questions when something interesting came up. During my initial thematic coding of the data, the questions of identity, the diverse

definitions of civil society and democracy, and the actual practices of activism, among others, started to emerge repetitively and to draw my attention, which led me to structure this book around these themes. I started to analyze these questions with the help of theoretical tools such as identity theories and performance theory (Brubaker & Cooper 2000; Alexander 2006). I also paid attention to the actual practices of the movement with the help of my notes from various meetings and demonstrations, and to look for the ways in which the themes that were introduced by the activists in the interviews were actualized and performed in street activism. Therefore, my research questions have been reformed and theoretical tools rechecked during my research. My approach was inductive; I allowed the data to direct the forming of my final research questions, my choice of theoretical tools, as well as my analysis and conclusions.

# 3 YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE SOVIET UNION AND IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

## 3.1 Youth Political Participation

Recent scholarly work on Russian youth has described young people in the country as politically apathetic and not interested in taking part in political life (McFaul 2003; Roberts 2009; Wallace and Kovatcheva 1998). For example, Douglas W. Blum (2006) sketches a dark picture of Russian youth. According to him (2006, 97), ‘available evidence suggests the emergence of an asocial, apolitical, unhealthy, often delinquent, and generally disaffected younger generation’ in Russia. He claims that Russian youth resist any formal or routinized social attachments and political participation. These claims of youth apathy are often based on the evaluation of the low levels of memberships of youth in political parties or labor unions, and on youth’s low interest in elections (Pilkington and Omel’chenko 2006, 545), and the lack of civic involvement is often explained as emblematic for Russian society as a whole (e.g. Rimskii 2008; Petukhov 2008). I contest this interpretation of overall youth apathy and show through my empirical data how youth activists are actively engaged in politicization processes and, thus, they are active participants in Russian civil society.

Furthermore, youth activism cannot be grasped by merely looking at conventional political participation indicators, such as voting or party memberships. Even though youth’s interest in formal politics tends to be low worldwide, recent research beyond the indicators of formal political participation describes, for example, British youth as civic-minded and interested in politics. Rather than being apolitical, young people tend to be distanced from formal political institutions and decision-making and are looking for alternative ways to voice their grievances (Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest 2005; Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002; O’Toole et al. 2003). Youth’s interest in political issues does not easily stand out in quantitative research techniques that draw on indicators of ‘conventional political science’ and assume that there is a common understanding between the researcher and the research participant about the definition and meaning of politics (Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002, 169). Bhavnani’s (1994) research discloses that young people *do* take part in political activity, but this activity is not seen to be conventionally political by the researchers or the youth themselves. Many other studies also show that young people are interested in political matters, such as animal rights or environmentalism, but the themes that youth want to be involved in are often ignored by the mainstream political parties and representatives. According to Barber (2009, 27–28), when young people are encouraged to participate, the context is usually dominated by adults. In this case, the so-called youth empowerment is ‘stage-managed’ by adults and often highly tokenistic. This is often seen as the case in Russia as well, where youth activism is encouraged when it supports the government’s goals, as I will show in the upcoming chapters.

Furthermore, research in Europe shows how young people engage in political life and perform their citizenship in a variety of ways, including through subcultures. Youth find alternative spaces to perform their identities and sometimes resist the adult-managed forms of participation (e.g. Guidikova and Siurala 2001). Also research in post-Soviet space has shown that young people in the former Soviet states are interested in political questions, but often feel left out of decision-making and have no trust in formal politics that they see as distant and as an adult-dominated sphere of life (Omel'chenko 2005; Tereshchenko 2010). Furthermore, avoiding politics can also be a conscious act of resistance rather than a sign of political apathy. For example, Elena Omel'chenko (2005, 75) argues that young Russians are interested in civic participation, but the desire for civic activism does not usually mean that they are interested in taking part in formal political activity, such as voting or political parties. Furthermore, Tereshchenko's study (2010) on Ukrainian youth in fact shows how young people see themselves as active agents in their societies, and how they are able to express their views on citizenship issues and therefore be active participants in their communities.

In addition, the young British interviewed by Henn et al. (2005) had an overly negative attitude against political parties and politicians. These results encourage the authors (2005, 573) to conclude that young people in Britain feel alienated from the political process, but not because of their apathy but because of the lack of trust in the political system and politicians. The young respondents of the study stated that they would only participate in the democratic process if it would result in more concrete benefits. According to the authors, this indicates that 'levels of youth political engagement are largely conditional on their perceptions of the process and the resulting outcomes' (Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest 2005, 569). Young people support a type of politics that is more direct, participative, and responsive. In Russia, the general trust in public institutions is exceptionally low; according to Shlapentokh (2006), it is the lowest in the world. Most distrust is shown towards 'democratic' institutions such as election procedures, the parliament, and the political parties. Russians have preserved their trust only in the church and the President (Shlapentokh 2006).<sup>1</sup> Considering this, the low numbers of politically active youth are no surprise. However, rather than blaming the 'apathetic' Russian citizens, the explanation should be sought in the structural distrust and its reasons. According to Irina Miliukova's (2002) study on Russian students' attitudes towards the political system, Russian young people express distrust in political structures and institutions, and they desire a model that is defined by strong leadership but often combined with democratic values (civil state, individual rights and liberties). Milyukova's qualitative analysis shows a relatively high level of politicization and a contradictory political consciousness of youth: tendencies towards Europeanization and orientations to the western patterns of policy and culture coexist with the cautious stance towards the West. Liberal values coexist with a desire for authoritarianism and a strong personified leader. (Milyukova 2002, 20–23.) These tendencies are observable in the opposition youth movements, as I will show in the upcoming chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> 2011-12 protests, however, have lowered public trust in the President; Putin's support has lowered to 50 percent from almost 70 percent during his previous term in office (*Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie* 2013).

Furthermore, political culture and the understanding of concepts such as ‘politics’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘democracy’ are crucial when analyzing the statistics of political participation. According to Eeva Luhtakallio’s (2012) comparative research on French and Finnish political cultures, civic activists’ understanding of citizenship differs depending on the cultural context. For the French activists, active participation in the society was not attached to voting and other ‘duties’ of participatory democracy as it was for the Finnish activists, but for the French being active in society was more a way of being and, a necessity of resistance. (Luhtakallio 2012, 70–77.) Therefore, the lower percentage of young voters does not automatically equal political apathy, but tends to indicate a different understanding of the concepts of democracy and citizenship and different practices of politicization.

Youth activism in contemporary Russia is formed at the intersections of ideas and practices of activism continuing from Soviet times to the political environment of contemporary Russia. In this chapter, I first examine youth activism and dissidence in the Soviet Union and in contemporary Russia. Then I move on to discuss the development of civil society in Russia after the collapse of communism, and the current political environment that shapes youth participation today. Finally, I introduce the case study of this book, the youth movement *Oborona*.

## **3.2 Soviet Youth Activism**

### **The Komsomol and Youth as Constructors of Communism**

Youth have been important for the ideological as well as physical construction of communism, but also, after the collapse of communism, as constructors of post-Soviet Russia. Blum (2006) argues that official nation-building in Russia relies on the ‘right’ socialization of the populace and especially of its youth. Omel’chenko (2005) on the other hand, suggests that the idea of youth as a resource of state-building and an object of state policies continues in contemporary Russia. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the status of youth in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. These continuing ideas of youth’s status in society, but also its changes, ruptures and transformation, create the context in which today’s youth activists operate.

One of the most influential organizations for the Soviet youth’s life was the Communist Union of Youth, the Komsomol. The Komsomol was officially founded in 1918, and it was officially defined as an independent organization, but operating ‘in solidarity’ with the Communist Party. According to Pilkington (1994, 52–53), the Komsomol was to keep up with the paradigm of ‘youth-as-constructors-of-communism’ by engaging youth in different physical construction projects as well as ideological projects that were seen as beneficial to Soviet society. Gorsuch (2000, 42) calls the early Komsomol ‘a site of agreement, negotiation, and resistance between and within generations about what a Communist should be and how best to make one’.

Pilkington (1994, 49) argues that during the early communist period, youth became the symbol and the physical constructor of the emergent Soviet society and ‘constituted the body and mind of the new society’. For the Bolsheviks, young people’s successful transformation was essential in constructing communism and important for the transformation of the pre-revolutionary bourgeois society into a socialist state. Youth was seen as the future of socialism, but only as long as it was willing and able to reproduce the communist ideology. The party-state perceived youth as easily modified, self-sacrificing, and as symbolic material for the construction of communism. Some young people followed Bolshevik ideology enthusiastically, but simultaneously, there were many young people uninterested in politics and communist identity. According to Gorsuch (2000), during Stalin’s times, the Bolshevik government took a firm policy against these ‘unacceptable’ alternative youth identities. Youth activism in the early Soviet Union was ‘a highly routinized process’ coordinated by the Communist Party and its youth organization, the Komsomol, while at the same time, genuinely spontaneous activism was labeled as ‘extremism’ or ‘voluntarism’ (Pilkington and Omel’chenko 2006). Extra-state activities or even non-participation in the Komsomol were interpreted as ‘deviant’ or considered anti-social behavior. Furthermore, during the early Soviet times, youth was studied in many ways, mainly to find means to raise true soviet citizens and screen out the unwanted youth identities. (Gorsuch 2000, 1–3; 15–16.)

During the development of the Soviet state and the early years of Bolshevik rule, the size and meaning of the Komsomol grew, and at the end of the civil war, it was a great source of labor as well as reserves for the Red Army. During the civil war, the Komsomol’s membership rose from 22 000 in 1918 to 400 000 in 1920. In 1922, the Komsomol took the name All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, VLKSM. After the Komsomol ratified the instructions of the Communist Party in 1919, the Party required that all its members under 20 years of age should join the youth organization. The Komsomol, like the Communist Party, was mainly targeted for workers but unlike the CPSU, the Komsomol also accepted peasant members even though peasants and students were often suspected of bourgeois ideology. Therefore, they needed to show two recommenders from the party or from a Komsomol member before being accepted as members of the union. (Pilkington 1994, 53–54; Gorsuch 2000, 48.)

According to Pilkington (1994, 65), during the Second World War, more than a million Komsomol members fought in the Red Army. After the war, the main issue of the ‘youth question’ turned out to be the western influence on Soviet youth. Western music, dances, and clothing styles were seen as harmful to Soviet ideology and having foreign influence on Soviet youth’s upbringing. The Komsomol’s role was to inform and educate young people of the harmful and stupefying influence of western culture. However, Pia Koivunen (2013) argues that after Stalin’s death in 1953, during Khrushchev’s rule, the Party and the Komsomol started to refashion the ways of managing perceptions of communism and the communist movement. According to her (2013, 337), ‘Khrushchev adopted a new policy of peaceful co-existence and began to open up the country to the West’ and this had implications to the opening up of Soviet youth culture as well. Moscow’s World Youth Festival in 1957 was an example of this new policy, which illustrated and constructed a new relationship with the West by granting Soviet citizens

extensive contact with the outside world by allowing tens of thousands of foreign citizens to visit the country. According to Koivunen (2013, 338), during the festival, many young Soviet citizens recognized alternative ways of living and were exposed to foreign cultures. Furthermore, Tsipursky's (2012) research on youth cultural initiatives during Khrushchev's thaw-era in the 1950s and 1960s shows that the leisure clubs organized by the Soviet authorities began to emphasize a more autonomous position of the youth and its interests. These clubs also gave youth pleasure, as well as opportunities for popular agency and grass-roots organization (see also Edele 2002). Khrushchev's thaw opened up some new opportunities for performing alternative youth identities, but still under the control of the party-state.

The era during Brezhnev's rule from late 1960s to 1980s has been described as a period of stagnation, which ended Khrushchev's relatively liberal policies and was determined by economic slowdown and political and social stagnation. This was a time of strengthening state control over society and the harsh treatment of dissidents. (Bacon 2012.) During the Brezhnev era, the Komsomol grew in numbers, and it was an essential part of many concrete building projects, such as the Baikal-Amur Railway, which was started by Brezhnev (see e.g. Ward 2009). Officially, the Komosmol's role was to take care of the rights of its members under the Soviet Constitution, so that every member had the right to work, the right to education as well as labor protection. Young people were also quite well represented in the Supreme Soviet, the legislative body of the Soviet Union. In 1974, one-third of the elected were young people. The Komsomol had the right to draft laws, resolutions, and other acts. (Pilkington 1994, 79.)

However, Pilkington (1994, 57; 79) argues that even if young people were formally represented in official organs, their needs were usually subordinate to the interests of the state; the Komsomol was more of an agency of the state apparatus than an independent youth union. Komsomol members also gained educational and career benefits through their membership, and sometimes moved very quickly up the career ladder. In most cases, Komsomol membership was also a prerequisite for a young person to be accepted to a higher education institution or to get a job in a factory. (Pilkington 1994, 53–54; Evans 2006b, 39.) However, the Komsomol created a peer group for young people to gather, and this companionship and group togetherness created a fruitful base for ideology to spread (Edele 2002). According to Fürst (2013, 633), despite the 'stagnation', the 1970s era was not as dull, grey and isolated as often thought, but exiting and exhilarating for many, especially for the young people. Fürst (2013, 638–9) describes the 1970s as an era of disengagement defined by a disconnection between people and the system. Even though the Brezhnev era is defined by the revoking of Khrushchev's relatively liberal policies, the 1970s were also a time for underground artists and dissidents to gather strength and the western press continued to shape citizens' worldviews. This was also the starting point of the Soviet hippie culture, which then entered the Soviet youth culture scene.

However, after Brezhnev's death in 1982, the ideological purification of youth gained more power again. The paradigm of 'youth-as-constructors-of-communism' was mirrored by the paradigm of 'youth-as-victims-of-western-(bourgeois)-influence' (Pilkington 1994). Young people were to be controlled mentally through ideological training and physically by strengthening the control on their leisure time. Tightening laws on music



production, distribution, and performances especially targeted young people's musical preferences. Western music and influence were labeled as 'psychological warfare' aimed at weakening young people's trust in communism. CPSU also wanted to diminish young people's leisure time spent on the streets and in courtyards. Hanging around doing nothing was seen as most harmful for Soviet youth and as leading them into misbehavior and law-breaking. Parents were seen as liable for their children's behavior and for this reason, the parents were punished if they were seen as failing in the upbringing of good Soviet citizens. (Pilkington 1994, 79–83.)

Mikhail Gorbachev started as the General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 and started to restructure the Soviet society. Even during the *perestroika* and *glasnost'*, the era of economic restructuring and increased openness in society, youth politics and the Komsomol's role continued along the lines defined in the early 1980s. The Komsomol's membership had grown from half a million in 1920 to nearly 41 million in 1987 (Pilkington 1994, 126). Youth was now seen as a reconstructor of communism, and the western influence still worried the CPSU. Young people were not approached as individuals with individual needs, but as a generation whose duty it was to contribute to the state and its future. Young people continued to work at construction sites in Siberia and the Far East, and in big projects pursued by Gorbachev such as the Baikal-Amur railway. However, the youth voice was still largely absent in the media, regardless of the principle of *glasnost'*. (Pilkington 1994, 95–100.)

Eventually, the weakening of the Soviet Union also had its impact on the Komsomol and the youth debate. At the end of 1980s, youth's significance as constructors of communism, the future of communism, and the nation's strength were emphasized in dominant youth discourses. However, the Komsomol could not keep its members and tout for new members anymore. Its membership started to fall, so that in 1990 it was around 31 million – 10 million less than three years before. The decrease in membership in the non-Russian states, especially in the Baltic countries, was even more dramatic. The rush for independence in many republics left the Komsomol supporters in Russia fear for the organization's future, and so the Russian Komsomol (RSFSR LKSM) was established. (Pilkington 1994, 163–165.) The Komsomol's 21st congress in 1990 adopted a Komsomol program that established a new political role for the organization. The organization was to become 'the defender of youth interest' and a representative of youth in parliamentary and state organs. Besides this, it was to become the sole organization responsible for organizing, coordinating, and owning youth leisure and labor facilities. Nevertheless, already in September 1991, in the 22nd congress of the Komsomol, the organization was declared exhausted. One year later, around 100 Komsomol delegates from Russia and former Soviet states gathered in Moscow to restore the Komsomol. From that point on, the Komsomol operated in Russia as the 'Russian Union of Youth' that continued to function in local politics and lobby the authorities on youth issues. Besides that, it acted as an umbrella organization for several social initiative groups. (Pilkington 1994, 177.)

Eventually, during the restructuring of society, the concentration on youth and their obligation for self-sacrifice for the nation's well-being changed into a paradigm in which the state was seen as responsible for young people's well-being and future. However, the state was no longer capable of providing youth a bright future and the public discourses

started to portray youth as the lost generation, who were marginalized into the peripheries of society (Pilkington 1994, 193). Pilkington (1996, 3) argues that this change in discourse is connected to the institutional crisis of the late *perestroika* and redefined images of youth. When earlier youth were seen as patriotic, work-loving, morally upright, and ideologically committed and as the bright future of the nation, they were now seen as economically deprived, morally disoriented, socially marginalized, and symbolizing the moral downturn of the state. However, the reformers of the 1990s started to perceive a new role for youth in transforming society as the ‘active and critical members of a growing civil society whose development would gradually push back the state and, eventually, provide a counterbalance to it’ (Pilkington 1992, 106). Youth were once again seen as the builders, but this time of the new post-socialist Russia.

### **The Soviet Dissident Movement and Youth Subcultures Resisting the State**

As I show in the upcoming chapters, the oppositional youth activists of the Oborona movement that this book addresses, often draw parallels between their own activism in contemporary Russia and the underground dissidents of the Soviet Union. Even though youth activism during the Soviet Union was concentrated officially in the Komsomol, there were young people who resisted these state-sanctioned forms of participation. Because of the Communist Party’s strong control over the public sphere, all dissenting and alternative cultures were part of the informal sphere of society.

During the early Soviet period, the Komsomol was seen as the only ‘proper’ channel for youth activism. However, after the Second World War, dissident organizations also started to appear. According to Fürst (2002, 368), young people dominated the dissident organizations of the later Stalinist period and ‘the young generation of the post-war period demonstrated a wide range of oppositional behavior that skirted the political debate and found expression in social and cultural nonconformism’. She argues that political youth opposition was linked to the ‘mental and intellectual Soviet habitat’ (Fürst 2002, 368); the younger generation was both overtly exposed to Soviet ideology and propaganda through schooling and Komsomol organizing, but was also most vocal in expressing discontent. Young people were active in dissident groups such as the Communist Party of Youth, the Union for the Struggle for the Revolutionary Cause, Army of the Revolution, the Fighting for Freedom Union, and the Death to Beria group. Nevertheless, Fürst (2002) proposes that there were only a few hundred members in politically motivated oppositional youth groups, and they were often closed and isolated, and thus did not have a significant influence on their peers’ political views. As many other dissidents, youth did not criticize communism per se, but rather the Stalinist implementation or the lack of implementation of communist ideals. Many young dissidents read texts by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and saw Stalin’s regime as contradicting or reversing revolutionary ideas. (Fürst 2002, 361.)

The Khrushchev era that started after Stalin’s death in 1953 has been interpreted as a period of ‘thaw’ when the repression of Stalin’s time somewhat appeased and the government accepted some forms of political plurality and disagreement. The era has often been interpreted as a time when the foundations were laid for the larger dissident

movement of the 1960s. However, according to Hornsby (2013, 2), the Khrushchev era was more than that, and during the era, Soviet society witnessed ‘unprecedented spells of dissension within the Communist Party and Komsomol’. According to Hornsby (2013, 3), the mass disturbances and underground political groups and even would-be terrorist cells demonstrate the diversity in social origins and in protest behavior during the era. Events such as Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 prompted protests and political criticism that was not witnessed in the USSR for many years. Furthermore, even if some political disagreement was accepted in the sphere of formal politics, all signs of ideological heterodoxy were repressed in society. According to Hornsby (2013, 5–6), even if the Stalin-era physical repression had eased, the Khrushchev era government established new means of repressing dissent, namely tightening social control in the form of manipulating the public opinion and strengthening the practices of peer-policing. Additionally, many were jailed, reprimanded by the Party or the Komsomol, or fired from their jobs because of ‘anti-Soviet activity’. When the era wore on, the beginning’s enthusiasm for liberalization turned into cynicism and disenchantment. (Hornsby 2013, 23–24.)

The Brezhnev era, from late 1960s to early 1980s, is sometimes referred to as a period of strengthening repression of dissidence (see e.g. Bacon 2012). However, Zdravomyslova and Voronkov (2002) argue that the Brezhnev era stagnation opened up new opportunities for public communication previously repressed. They use the concept of informal public to describe the sphere of independent activism in the late socialist era. While the official public was still controlled by the Communist Party, the informal public had its own rules that Zdravomyslova and Voronkov refer to as ‘unwritten’ or ‘common’ law. The informal public included social practices such as the shadow or second economy, clientele groupings and networks, retail marketing, a limited labor market, family gardens, certain legal organizations were used for illegal purposes, ecological and intellectual movements, the bard movement, ethnic societies, *samizdat*’ (reproducing and distributing censored literature) and *magnitizdat*’ (copying and distributing unsanctioned audio-tapes), and the countercultures, as well as the dissident movement.

The actual dissident and human rights movements began to rise during the 1960s, and it consisted mostly of people from the liberal intelligentsia and remained separate from the workers’ protests, which were often based on material discontent instead of dissatisfaction with the political environment (Hornsby 2013, 24–25). According to Evans (2006b, 43), the dissident movement grew stronger and became better organized as well as internationally more connected after 1969, in response to the state’s efforts to repress dissent. In the mid-70s, the authorities had taken a stronger role in repressing dissent and many of the first generation dissidents had emigrated or were imprisoned, and the movement was fragmented. Alekseeva and Fitzpatrick (1990, 4) show that the number of independent associations in the Soviet Union further increased during the Brezhnev era in the 1970s and 1980s. Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom (2006, 4) maintains that the groups of dissidents working underground were the main opponents to the regime. Just as the Russian opposition groups of today, the Soviet dissident community also included individuals from various political backgrounds such as social and liberal democrats or Marxist nationalists (McIntosh Sundstrom 2006, 4). However, in the late 1980s,

Gorbachev began to reshape the relations between the state and civil society, allowing for more plurality in Soviet society. For example, religious organizations had more freedom to practice their activities with the new legislation of 1990 on the freedom of conscience and worship. (Evans 2006b, 46.)

Today, as well as during the Soviet Union, the most critical youth is the urban intelligentsia youth, who has better access to books and other mass media than their peers elsewhere in the country (see Gromov 2009a). Interestingly, during the Soviet period, these young people were often highly integrated into the state system and sometimes even active Komsomol members before they started to think critically about the Soviet state and ideology, often as a result of personal disappointment or disillusion, for example, during the purges and famine of late Stalinism. Gorsuch (2000, 78–79) argues that even though many young *Komsomoltsy*, the Komsomol members, could speak like a Communist, in many cases they did not have a deeper understanding of the ideology. They just repeated the common phrases they had been taught (see also Yurchak 2006). Also, depression and a sense of alienation from the Komsomol were common, and this even led to rising suicide rates (Gorsuch 2000, 81).

The non-politically motivated subcultures outside Party control began appearing during the 1950s and 1960s. They were known as the *neformaly*, the non-formals, and were organized in the informal public sphere. These subcultures were not actively suppressed by the Soviet authorities, but were not openly accepted either (Evans 2006b, 42). The *neformaly* groups followed different styles, usually associated with western popular culture. They were for example the *rokery*, the bikers, and *stiliagi*, a group that followed western clothing style and dances such as boogie-woogie and jitterburg (Edele 2002), and other groups that found their identity in music, movies, or other interests such as the hippies or the skinheads. The official youth discourse saw them as imitating harmful western images, even though some less ideologically driven groups were seen as quite harmless fashions, and some acceptable groups were even supported by the Komsomol. The official debate usually associated the *neformaly* with crime, alcohol and other dishonorable behavior. (Pilkington 1994, 113–115.) The members of these subcultural groups were often from wealthier families: they had money and free time to devote to their looks and entertainment than regular youth whose lives concentrated around studies, dormitories, and youth clubs (Edele 2002, 46). According to Anne White (1995, 1354), in the early *perestroika* period, the Communist Party newspaper Pravda reported that there were an estimated thirty thousand *neformaly* groups in the USSR in 1988, and in 1989, the number had doubled to sixty thousand. However, White (1995) continues that these numbers were probably exaggerated and estimates that the number was more likely in the thousands than in the tens of thousands.

Many of the groups that were not tolerated by the Soviet regime were established by young people (Evans 2006b, 42). In 1987, even 60 percent of youth aged 17–30 said they were members of informal groups. The main reasons for joining a group was leisure interests and the dissatisfaction with the clubs and other facilities the Komsomol offered. Informal groups were usually small and they did not have official rules, but were more like gatherings of people with similar interests. Groups also had wide networks with other informal groups (Pilkington 1994, 124.) Besides the uninterested youth, there were

militant Komsomol youth who also felt alienated from the Komsomol. These Komsomol members sought more radical communism and economic policies. (Gorsuch 2000, 82.) Thus, youth found ways for creativity and influence even within the Komsomol, and often formally acted as needed in order to get along with the authorities and the party, but informally living freer lives drawing on music, clothing, and lifestyles as an alternative to the Komsomol (see also Yurchak 2006, 77–125).

For many young people, participating in political and social activities was difficult simply due to their poor living conditions, especially during the early Soviet period. Many students and workers faced difficulties in obtaining daily meals, and this alone made political activism and resistance beyond their interests. The daily struggle to obtain food, health care, clothing, or housing made political activism seem distant from their reach. (Gorsuch 2000, 34–36.) In the forthcoming chapters, I will show that in some ways, the conditions restricting youth activism continue to define oppositional youth activism today. Furthermore, I will show how today's youth activists identify with the Soviet dissidents and underground activism.

### **Gender Dimensions of Youth Activism during the Soviet Period**

The Russian revolution was supposed to bring about gender equality by guaranteeing women full participation in economic life and shifting care work in the household to collective organizations. In addition to equal marital, economic, and civil rights, the 'sexual revolution' encouraged equality in love and sexual relationships. Also, the Komsomol was supposed to follow these ideals and to help 'liberate' women from their traditional roles (Gorsuch 1996). Even if the Constitution of the USSR guaranteed women equal rights with men in all areas of life, the construction of the ideal soviet man was a highly gendered practice; despite of the official equality discourse, the political and cultural identity production was a masculine process and communism was sometimes idealized as a society of men (Ilič 2004, 17; Gorsuch 2000). According to Gorsuch (2000,17), this discourse originated from the prerevolutionary gender contract and gender relations.

Many young women joined the Komsomol in the 1920s in search of equality. However, despite the enthusiastic start, many women did not manage to participate in political life, and they comprised only 20 per cent of the Komsomol members in 1929. (Gorsuch 1996, 637.) Besides their responsibilities at home, girls had other obstacles to participation. Many parents did not see girls' participation in political life and social work as necessary or even acceptable. The main task for young women was to learn to take care of the household and to raise children. Young women's participation was especially complicated in rural areas, where their input in household duties was greater and where the traditional values were stronger. Young women, both in rural and urban areas, were also likely to see themselves as unprepared to join political action or bound by the traditional gender roles where political activism was seen as 'men's work'. (Gorsuch 2000, 99–100.)

Also, Komsomol clubs were highly masculinized spheres, where women did not find their place and were underestimated or laughed at (Gorsuch 2000, 101). The Komsomol did not take any position to lessen the triple burden of family, work, and Komsomol, which made participation nearly impossible for many young women. This way, the Komsomol failed to address women's specific concerns. Gorsuch (2000, 108–110) argues that sexual harassment was common both at work and in the Komsomol meetings. Women were not elected to the leadership positions, but they took care of the more feminine tasks like working with young children or cleaning. When pointed to leading positions, women were filling the quotas ordered by the higher authorities of the Komsomol. The gender inequalities in leadership positions were common throughout the organization.

During the Khrushchev era, even if in the other organizations of the CPSU less than 20 percent of the members with the right to vote were women, young women and girls made up 44.5 per cent of the Komsomol recruits, and almost half of the Trade Union members were women (Ilić 2004, 8). In the CPSU politics, women's representation was relatively high due to the quota system. For example, in the 1979 elections, 32 per cent of the representatives elected to the Supreme Soviet were women, and in the 1980 local elections, 50 percent of the elected were women (Pilkington 1992, 109). However, Ilić (2004) notes that women were recognized for their active political participation by awards or honorific titles far less often than men. Only one third of such awards were given to women before 1963. After *perestroika* and the end of the quota system, women represented only 5.4 percent of the parliamentary members before the 1993 elections, and gained 13.6 percent of the seats in the 1993 elections (Racioppi and See 1995).<sup>2</sup>

The dissident communities were also structured by gendered practices. According to Chuikina (1996, 192), women were important in creating the 'dissident milieu'; atmosphere of solidarity and the support and information networks of the movement. Women dissidents became the 'mothers and sisters' taking care of their 'heroic brothers' in dissident circles. Relationships between dissidents were so close that they were similar to family relations, and the dissidents themselves presented the dissident circle as a 'quasi-family'. (Chuikina 1996, 194–201.) Dissident families did not make a strong separation between public and private lives, partly because many of the dissident activities happened in people's private homes, in the kitchens. Many dissident women hosted meetings in their flats, gave shelter to homeless dissidents, and offered mutual help in everyday lives of the dissidents. Often dissident women's husbands were imprisoned and they ended up bringing up children alone and socially excluded from society. However, in these cases the mutual support networks of the dissident circles helped them to carry on their daily lives and to support their imprisoned husband. (Chuikina 1996.) The Soviet and pre-revolutionary gender relations and gendered understandings of women's roles in political activism remain influential in contemporary Russia (Rotkirch 2000; Salmenniemi 2005;

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<sup>2</sup> *In the 2011 elections, women represented 13.6 percent of the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia (parliament) members, but only 8 percent of the upper house, the Federation Council, representatives, which puts the country as the number 98 in a worldwide comparison of women's representation in parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2013).*



Temkina and Rotkirch 1997) and, as I show in upcoming chapters, they shape contemporary youth activism as well.

### **3.3 Civic and Political Activism in Post-Socialist Russia**

After the collapse of communism, the government has not officially regulated youth activism as in the Soviet Union, but youth activism is strongly shaped by general political opportunities and restrictions of political and civic activism in the country. In this section, I discuss the development of civil society in Russia and its international influences, which is important in understanding the roots of my case study, the Youth Movement Oborona and its western orientation. Furthermore, I set the context of political activism in contemporary Russia by examining Russian politics and political culture and its connectedness to the development of civil society in the country. I locate the Russian ‘non-systemic’ political opposition between the spheres of civil society and formal politics, which both strongly influence its activities. Therefore, understanding the connections between Russian politics and civil society is significant for creating the context in which Oborona and other non-systemic political activists operate.

#### **‘Bringing’ Democracy to Russia?**

During the last decades, Russia has been looking for its path in between the continuing Soviet traditions and the western understandings of democracy and civil society. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international community supported the democratization process and the development of civil society in the country; Russia was expected to transition to a western-type of liberal democracy. Western aid to democratization and various development projects were booming in the 1990s and in early 2000s in Russia, and the United States was the largest donor to civil society in the country. According to Mendelson and Glenn (2002), in the early 2000s, the US had already invested 133 million dollars in the development of the Russian NGO sector and the European Union had funded the Russian organizations with 272 million dollars. (See also McIntosh Sundstrom 2006; Hemment 2007). My case study, the Oborona Movement, is an example of the western support to Russian civil society; its founding and ideological base can be traced back to a German liberal organization, the Friedrich Neumann Foundation, which played a central role in the creation of the movement (see section 3.5). However, Russian civil society development has not followed the predicted or hoped path and the continuous authoritarian rule, weakness of civil society, and alleged citizen passivity have formed the dominant narrative in the research literature (Howard 2003; Evans 2002; 2006a; McFaul, Petrov, and Riabov 2004).

In the 1990s, western governments and international organizations saw supporting Russian NGOs as a way to promote the country’s democratization. Even if foreign support provided resources for the development of NGOs, some scholars argue that organizations enjoying foreign support have not created a domestic support base and the foreign funding



base has led to more competitive rather than cooperative relations among civil society actors (Salmenniemi 2008). Furthermore, scholars have suggested that foreign support often came paired with western concepts and understandings of civil society and it disconnected the NGOs from domestic constituencies, and the funders' agendas failed to take the needs and interests of Russian society into account. Also, the government has used the organizations' foreign funding to delegitimize their activities and status in Russia. (Cook and Vinogradova 2006, 30; Henderson 2002; Kulmala 2011.) In this book, I argue that these questions are relevant when assessing the success of the liberal opposition in Russia, which tends to remain distant from the Russian public and employs liberal discourses that are foreign to many Russians.

The western supported 'grassroots' mobilization or democratization programs have been critiqued for being based on a neoliberal rationality, and they have been identified as normative and narrowly circumscribed, not taking into consideration the post-socialist context and the lived realities of people living in these new societies (Hann 1996; Sampson 1996; Verdery 1996; Hemment 2004). Russian civil society is often discussed in relation to a liberal model, which sees civil society as an opposing counterweight to the state and as a distinct entity separate from the state (Kulmala 2011). Furthermore, Gal and Kligman (2000) see the problem of foreign support for civil society in Eastern Europe stemming from the idea of civil society as an 'end itself', which has guided western projects to fund Eastern European organizations regardless of their goals in the name of 'missioning for liberal democracy'. These 'exported' liberal understandings of civil society and democracy are usually received with enthusiasm by the small liberal-minded intelligentsia in Russia, such as the activists of the Oborona movement, but often failed to translate to the wider community. The Russian state has refused to take in the western ideas of political liberalism and democracy and Putin's government has announced its 'own way' of democracy instead, as I show in chapter 5. The liberals of the 'non-systemic opposition' (Roberts 2012; see also this book p. 34 onwards) supporting the 'western' path of democratization are a small minority that suffer from the lack of public recognition and support and is associated with the 1990s democrats' 'shock therapy' measures to liberalize and privatize the Russian economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the liberals see 1990s reforms as freeing the country from its communist past, for many people it still represents a shared trauma and personal loss (Oushakine 2009). Western influence on Russian civil society has formed the context in which the liberal political opposition operates: on the one hand, they struggle to bring in the western liberal notions of democracy, which are often received with suspicion by the authorities and the Russian public, on the other hand, western support creates a strong feeling of international connection for the small liberal circles in Russia, and thus strengthens their self-understanding as western intellectuals. However, their persistent idealization of the western liberal principles and their strong rejection of Soviet and post-soviet Russian democratic ideas bring them into conflict with the state's official view of a more state-lead practice of democracy, which is still the dominant view in Russian society. Because of the marginalization of the western-minded liberal intellectuals, the contentious political opposition has no access to institutional politics and thus is situated between civil society

and political sectors, which further complicates its position as a credible political force in society. (See more in chapters 4 and 5.)

### **Political Domination over Civic Activism**

The Putin era political ‘design’ has been described as ‘managed democracy’, ‘virtual democracy’ (Wilson 2005) or ‘stealth authoritarianism’ (Hahn 2004). Evans (2006b, 48) argues that a particular liberal concept of civil society dominant in the West, which assumes a sharp division between the state and society, did not exist during the Soviet Union, and has not formed in the post-Soviet Russia either. According to him, civil society and the separation between the state and society were already growing in the late tsarist times, but after the revolution, the Communist Party controlled and suppressed social groups. During the *perestroika* era, social and informal groups started to develop but stayed under control of the authorities. Evans joins the discourse of the Russian weak civil society and claims that state-society relations in present-day Russia are similar to the Communist Party’s policies in regard to the government’s tight control over civil society. However, according to him, economic modernization, urbanization, and higher levels of education have increased pluralism of groups and interests in today’s Russia compared to the Soviet Union and tsarist times. Evans (2006a, 156) refers to Russian civil society as ‘Putin’s quasi-civil society’ and claims that the meaning of personal connections increases in Russia when the state distributes resources only to loyal non-governmental organizations, and when public debates and political competition are restricted. He describes the Russian government’s vision of civil society ‘as a network of organizations that, while remaining technically outside the state, will be co-opted to assist the leadership of the political regime pursuing objectives it has chosen for society’ (Evans 2006a, 152).

According to the International Center for Non-Profit Law, ICNL, (2013) there are more than 220 000 non-commercial organizations in Russia. However, because of the burdensome and restrictive registration requirements, the actual number of civil society groups is hard to calculate, since many civic groups, especially groups criticizing the Kremlin, are unregistered and loose groupings. Furthermore, the state recognizes a large number of organizational forms, such as public organizations, foundations, institutions, non-commercial partnerships, and autonomous non-commercial organizations, which further complicates the legal and political framework under which civic actors operate and under which NGO laws are interpreted (ICNL 2013). The opportunities and restrictions for activism in the realm of Russian civil society are determined by the actor’s relationship to the state; the service-providing, the so-called ‘third sector’ organizations that do not question the state authority have relatively wide opportunities for action, but the organizations that are criticizing the state and are often linked to international aid agencies are under state scrutiny and their opportunities for mobilization and action are restricted. While the state ‘allies’ often work with important social problems and disadvantaged social groups, their activities do not fall into the western dominant understanding of civil society as independent from the state and as a counterforce to the state and, thus, the international attention and criticism of the weakness of Russian civil society is often based

on the assessment of the restrictive environment of political opposition and does not see the often local level and small-scale civic activism because of its apparent dependence on state endorsement (see Cook and Vinogradova 2006; Hemment 2004; 2009; Kulmala 2011; Salmenniemi 2008).

Many of the critical assessments of the development of Russian civil society draw on the strong political control over civic actors during the Putin-Medvedev era. In contemporary Russia, political power and its concentration in the hands of the small political elite play an important role in defining civic and political activism. The United Russia Party (*Edinaia Rossiia*) controls formal politics as the party of power, and it holds the majority of seats in the lower chamber of the Federal assembly of the Russian Federation, the State Duma. Even though in the State Duma there are official opposition parties, namely the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), the Fair Russia and the Communist Party, only the Communists can be somehow counted into actual opposition while the LDPR and the Fair Russia party has been called the 'pseudo-opposition' (and sometimes the Communists as well) (Mäkinen 2009). Russian politics are characterized by a strong emphasis on personal networks and the lack of institutionalized channels of recruitment, which makes it nearly impossible for 'new players' to enter the field. Renz (2006, 904–5) associates this 'under-institutionalized mechanism of elite-recruitment' characterized by personal networks and loyalty, to the wider logic of the post-Soviet political system. According to her (2006, 911), the Russian political system lacks institutionalized mechanisms of elite-recruitment and therefore, Putin had no choice but to form his government in reliance of his trusted people, the former colleagues from the Federal Security Services, the FSB. However, she emphasizes that this was not a conscious strategy to construct a 'police-state' as some scholars have claimed (e.g. Kryshnanovskaya and White 2003), but a consequence of the nature of the political system. However, she acknowledges, that the appointment of *siloviki* (members of the security and military forces) in political posts might be partly an explanation for the more authoritative policies of the Putin era regime.

The Russian political system is often referred to as 'super-presidentialism' where presidency as the executive power is above all other institutions. Strong presidency was established in the Russian Constitution of 1993 and thus inherited from the Yeltsin regime (Fish 1997; Sakwa 2011a). This system has also lead to the creation of top-down parties of power, such as United Russia, which are essential in mobilizing support around the president and enforcing the presidential model of executive dominance instead of the party system as the dominant power system (Sakwa 2011b, 526). The system of a strong presidential regime is supported by the manipulation of the elections, which follow the democratic principles in theory, but in practice are manipulated by the power-holders through, for example, restricting the appointment of opposition candidates in ballot lists by referring to failed bureaucratic procedures. Often these failures are shown by arbitrary interpretations of the abstruse electoral laws. (Ledeneva 2006, 40.)

In addition, economic elites play a strong role in Russian politics. Gulnaz Sharafutdinova (2010) describes the Russian tradition of close connections between economic elites and state officials that dominates policy-making in the country as crony capitalism. In this system, economic elites acquire more wealth by preferential treatment

and privileges from the state officials than by market forces. In crony capitalism, political and economic spheres are tightly intertwined, and the system is based more on privileges rather than rights. Cronyism coexists with political competition and elections, and these democratic institutions become crucial for the economic elites to maintain their close connections with the power-holders. Since both economic and political elites have high stakes in this system, they are more prone to use tricky manipulative methods to obtain victory and maintain their position. A change of government in crony capitalism would mean a change of rules and political and economic arrangements, which are not secured by the rule of law and property rights like in established democracies. In Russia, this combination of crony capitalism and democracy has led to a situation where democratic processes are seen more as a means for economic elites to access power and wealth than as a means of executing the public will. In turn, the people's trust in democratic processes is ruined by negative campaigning and corruption scandals. (Sharafutdinova 2010, 3–4.)

Because of the strong political elite and the concentration of power, opposition groups criticizing or protesting against the political authorities have to find forums outside the formal political structures to voice their grievances. However, strong state control, in the spirit of the so-called 'sovereign democracy', is wielded in relation to the civic field as well. The term 'sovereign democracy' was first used by Vladislav Surkov in his speech for the United Russia Party in 2006, and it gives the authorities power to 'manage' the democratic processes in order to secure state sovereignty (see chapter 5). In 2004, Putin's administration founded the Public Chamber (*Obshchestvennaia Palata Rossiiskoi Federatsii*) to create a platform for wider dialogue between the state and society. However, the Kremlin chooses the Public Chamber's 126 representatives from civil society. Therefore, this initiative is seen as non-transparent and as a new tool for the presidential administration to have control over the civic actors and to legitimize its power. (Richter 2009, 40.) Furthermore, the state manages civic participation by creating different restrictions and opportunities for participation by the state's 'allies' and 'adversaries' (Salmenniemi 2010). This is done, for example, through the arbitrary interpretation of law, which is possible owing to the abstruse legal platform. Because of the incoherence of formal procedures, legal disputes are often solved outside the legal domain and often by unlawful means. In addition, in many cases, political, commercial or personal interests motivate law enforcement or the absence of it (Ledeneva 2006, 25).

The key legal platform for regulating civil society in Russia includes the laws on NGOs (2006/2009/2012) and on extremism (2002/2006). According to Robertson (2011, 540–1), the law on NGOs is written so as to provide a somewhat ambiguous legislative platform that can be used selectively to monitor possible threats from the NGOs and their foreign sponsorship, which the Russian political elite sees as the crucial element in the 'Color Revolutions'. Shortly after the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, the law 'on combating extremist activity' was amended; since then, individuals who have shown support for people or organizations charged with extremism can be criminally charged with extremism themselves. (USCIRF 2011.) Many opposition activists I interviewed see this law and the Russian Internal Ministry's Centre for Extremism Prevention (Centre E) as tools used especially for targeting and persecuting activists in the opposition. In addition, the Russian government has strengthened the monitoring of the Internet by

signing a law on ‘information, information technologies, and information protection’, which gives authorities the power to shut down ‘harmful’ Internet sites. According to the law, all Internet sites containing references to pornography or drugs, promoting suicide or other ‘extremist ideas’ can be blacklisted and shut down. This law too has been criticized as a potential way for the authorities to harass opposition groups by the international monitors. (ICNL 2012.) After the parliamentary elections in 2011, and Putin’s inauguration as president in 2012, the Kremlin adopted a harsher stance towards the renewed collaboration of opposition movements (Roberts 2012, 6). The new laws created in 2012 increased the fines for participation in unauthorized public demonstrations, introduced laws on treason, and listed the defamation of public officials as a criminal offence. NGOs engaged in political activities and receiving financial funding from abroad are required to register as a ‘foreign agent’ (*inostrannyi agent*) with the Ministry of Justice (ICNL 2013). NGOs, which register as foreign agents, are subject to further registration restrictions. According to lawmakers, these new laws protect Russia from foreign influences, but human rights organizations in Russia and abroad have been especially critical of the law as targeting dissident organizations (Lokshina 2012). Organizations providing information independently from the Kremlin, such as the Levada Research Center, ‘Memorial’ Human Rights Center, and Golos that monitors Russian elections, have been targeted for inspection by the Ministry of Justice and fined for not complying with the registration requirements under this law (RFE/RL 2013; RIA Novosti 2013).

In addition to legal, political, and economic measures, the government and groups closely associated with it have used their culturally hegemonic positions to portray oppositional activists and organizations as being spies for foreign countries, harmful, and even as a mentally unstable minority. For example, the pro-government group ‘Nashi’ has been harassing those engaged in opposition demonstrations by putting up banners mocking the demonstrators and calling them ‘nutters’ (*psikhi*). This practice was also documented in the Soviet Union, where the state used its hegemonic power to represent reality by labeling dissident groups as psychotic and sick. Some prominent dissidents were even committed to mental institutions for political reasons (Yurchak 2006, 107). Similarly, after drafting the new law on foreign agents, workers of Memorial human rights center found ‘Foreign Agent’ sprayed in graffiti on the wall of their building (von Twickel 2012). On the other hand, the opposition activists aim at differentiating themselves from the government and its auxiliaries, which they see as illegal, undemocratic ‘marionettes’ passively following leaders, and in contrast try to portray themselves as independent and active intellectuals. This ongoing struggle for symbolic power for social recognition, legitimacy and authority, marks political activism and its discourses with constant ideological pushing and pulling from both sides, which I will address in more detail in chapter 5.

## **The Non-Systemic Opposition**

Russian party politics are based on the ruling power of the United Russia Party. Political parties in the Duma co-operate on many levels and often the relations between the political

powers are personified into personal connections between the party leaders. From this viewpoint, the only true opposing forces are excluded from the official legislative and executive systems and they work at the grassroots level. Activists criticizing the government, which this book addresses, are excluded from formal politics and thus identify as the 'non-systemic' opposition in contrast to the 'pseudo-opposition' within 'the system'.

The non-systemic political opposition has mainly consisted of communist and nationalist actors and it has undergone various internal conflicts and disagreements (Shev'tsova 2005). According to Vladimir N. Lysenko (1997, 477), the birth of the democratic movement in Russia can be traced back to 1987 when the then unknown organization Memorial gathered on the streets of Moscow to collect names to begin research on victims of the Stalinist repression. In his view, the crisis of the present democratic movement rises from the split of the movement into several parts, of which many transformed into National-democrats with nationalistic agendas. After this split, the democratic movement in Russia has been fragmented and unable to consolidate democratic forces and thus it is not capable of working as an efficient opposition. My analysis in the upcoming chapters demonstrates how nationalism is still a strong political symbol in contemporary Russia, and how inner disagreements, such as questions of nationalism, continue to be seen as threatening to the unity of the political opposition.

Lysenko (1997) maintains that the main actors in the democratic opposition have been the Yabloko Party and some actors of the Union of Right Forces party, the SPS. Both Yabloko and the SPS did not have enough votes to pass the five percent threshold in the 2003 Duma elections. These parties were unable to join forces in order to overcome the new seven percent threshold in the 2007 elections and were individually well short of the barrier. However, according to Laverty (2008b), the joining of forces of these two liberal parties was not even to be expected because of the ideological differences and personal disputes between the parties. The combined support of these two liberal parties has come down from its 27.3 percent in 1993 to 8.5 percent in 2003 and to 2.6 in 2007. (Laverty 2008b, 369; see also Horvath 2011, 20.) The Yabloko Party still has an active membership and campaigning but the SPS was dissolved in 2008 when some of its members joined the ranks of the Right Cause (*Pravoe Delo*) Party, that is seen to stand close to the Kremlin, while the rest of the members have joined forces under the democratic movement *Solidarnost'* (Solidarity) (see table below).



<b>Main opposition actors in Moscow and St Petersburg in 2009–2012</b>			
<b>Group</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Participating groups</b>	<b>Leadership</b>
<b>Solidarity Movement</b> ( <i>Solidarnost'</i> )	Liberal Democratic political movement founded in December 2008. Unites various liberal political and human rights activists.	Yabloko, SPS, United Civil Front (OGF), Human Rights groups	Federal Bureau (7 members), including Boris Nemtsov (SPS), Garry Kasparov (OGF), Ilya Yashin (Yabloko)
Russian United Democratic Party ' <b>Yabloko</b> ' (Apple)	Social liberal party founded in 1993. Expelled some of its members in 2008, because of their membership in <i>Solidarnost'</i> .	Active youth section. Some youth activist participated in Oborona.	Founded by Grigory Yavlinsky. Currently led by Sergey Mitrokhin. Youth section lead by Ilya Yashin until 2008.
<b>The Union of Right Forces</b> ( <i>Soiuz Pravykh Sil, SPS</i> )	Founded in 1999. Supported economic liberalism. Dissolved in 2008, merged with the Civilian Power and the Democratic Party of Russia to form a new party 'Right Cause' ( <i>Pravoe Delo</i> ), which was seen as being close to Kremlin.	Active youth section. Some youth activist participated in Oborona.	Nikita Belykh (appointed as the Governor of Kirov Oblast in 2008), Boris Nemtsov until 2008.
<b>The Other Russia</b> ( <i>Drugaiia Rossiia</i> )	Umbrella movement for several opposition groups in 2006–2008. Organized Dissenters' Marches. Today operates as an independent news website.	United Civil Front (OGF), the National Bolshevik Party, Left Front	Garry Kasparov, Eduard Limonov, Liudmila Alekseeva, Sergei Udal'tsov (Left Front) and others.
<b>United Civil Front</b> (OGF, Ob'iedinennyi Grazhdanskii Front)	Founded in 2005 to protect electoral democracy in Russia. Active participant in the Other Russia Coalition and in <i>Solidarnost'</i> .	Activists from various opposition groups.	Garry Kasparov
<b>National Bolshevik Party</b> (NBP, NatsBoly)	Founded by Eduard Limonov in 1992. Promotes imperialist ideology. NBP is profiled against capitalism and the		Eduard Limonov



	USA but also against Russian government. Banned by the Supreme Court in 2007 as an extremist group.		
<b>Left Front</b>	Coordinating left-wing oppositional groups supporting socialism, democracy and internationalism.		The Executive Committee (19 members in Moscow), including Sergei Udal'tsov.
<b>Democratic Movement WE (MY)</b>	Democratic youth movement founded in 2005 active in Moscow until 2011.	Youth members from <i>Solidarnost'</i> and other coalitions.	Roman Dobrokhotov
<b>Movement 'Democratic Alternative' (DA!)</b>	Founded in 2005 in Moscow and St Petersburg. A platform for its participants' individual projects. Dissolved in 2008.	Youth from the SPS and other liberal groups.	Federal Council lead by Mariia Gaidar (SPS, Moscow)
<b>Free Radicals (Svobodnye Radikaly)</b>	Libertarian group founded in 2005. Supports legalizing Marijuana, prostitution and carrying weapons. A Russian subdivision to Transnational Radical Party (Italy).		Alex Moma, Sergei Konstantinov and others (Moscow)
<b>Nation of Freedom (Natsiia Svobody)</b>	Small group of activists who resigned from the NBP in 2009.		Roman Popkov and Daria Isaeva (Moscow)

**Table 1.** *Main opposition actors in Moscow and St Petersburg during the research (2009–12). (Sources: NBP-Info 2007; Solidarnost' 2009a; The Other Russia 2007; Left Front 2013; Iabloko 2013; Iabloko Moscow 2008; Loskutova 2008; SPS 2007; OGF 2013; Free Radicals 2012; Freedom of Nation 2012)*

In 2006, groups opposing the Putin regime got together to form the Other Russia coalition. This was an effort to bring the opposition forces together, but the attempt failed already in the first meeting when the main opposition parties Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces, SPS, refused to attend the assembly because of the presence of nationalistic and 'extremist' groups. The most visible effort of the Other Russia coalition has been the Dissenters' Marches (*Marsh Nesoglasnykh*) that, at their height in 2007–2008, gathered thousands of protesters on the streets in different Russian cities. According to the interviewed activists who participated in the marches, the protests were eventually suppressed by the authorities, who claimed that the opposition marches disturbed the

public peace, traffic and other Muscovites. After the Dissenters' Marches in 2009, the opposition under the leadership of the National Bolsheviks, started a new wave of demonstrations, Strategy-31, to demonstrate how the Russian state was not respecting its own Constitution, which guarantees citizens the freedom of assembly (Russian Federation's Constitution, article 31. I will analyze the Strategy-31 protests in more detail in chapter 6).

After the 2007 Duma elections, democratic parties and organizations started consultations on founding a new political structure that would include all democratic forces and, in this way, unite the fragmented democratic opposition in Russia and distance the 'extremist' and nationalistic groups such as the National Bolsheviks and radical communist groups. In December 2008, the United Democratic Movement *Solidarnost'* was founded. Well-known democrats, 1990s reformers and today's oppositionists such as Boris Nemtsov, Garri Kasparov, and Vladimir Bukovskii participate in the coordinating groups of *Solidarnost'*. Also members of political parties such as SPS, the Yabloko Party, and the Russian People's Democratic Union have been active in *Solidarnost'*, as well as different opposition organizations, human rights defenders and youth movements like Movements *MY* and *Oborona*. (*Solidarnost'* 2009b.) Even though the democratic movement started enthusiastically and found many supporters, it has gone through various inner conflicts, for example, surrounding strategies of co-operation, which rise from the heterogeneity of the movement. However, the Solidarity movement managed to unite behind a list of candidates for the Moscow Duma local elections in October 2009. Nevertheless, all the candidates were denied the right to register in the elections due to alleged errors in the registration and signature forms.

After the electoral protests in late 2011, President Medvedev eased the restrictions on movement registration and this started a mushrooming effect of new political parties. Some of the new political parties are so-called spoiler parties organized by Kremlin supporters to take votes from viable opposition parties, but genuine political parties were also founded among the non-systemic opposition. The People's Freedom Party (*Parnas*) was founded on 13 December 2010 by well-known opposition politicians Vladimir Ryzhkov, Boris Nemtsov, Mikhail Kasyanov and Vladimir Milov. Another party 'Fifth of December' (*5 Dekabria*) is inspired by the December fifth demonstrations in Moscow. Fifth of December is organized horizontally and employs Internet elections as its democratic instrument. (*Partiia 5 Dekabria* 2012.) However, some *Solidarnost'* leaders, such as Garri Kasparov have declined to join the party because they do not wish to be part of 'unfree' elections. Activists from various youth movements have been actively engaged in these new political parties but in general, they seem to have fragmented the already disjointed non-systemic opposition even further.

Even if the non-systemic opposition and politics are the most 'obvious' fields of struggle for opposition activism, these often overlap with other scenes, such as the arts or the media. Especially youth movements often use performance and art in their demonstrations and communicate through various Internet newspapers, social media sites and blogs. Recent examples of political performances reaching outside of the formal political spaces are the *Gruppa Voina* (Group War), which organizes artistic performances criticizing the Kremlin, and the feminist punk collective Pussy Riot, which rose to

international prominence after its anti-Putin punk performance in the Orthodox Church of Christ the Savior in Moscow. The members of Pussy Riot were detained, and after a prolonged court hearing, were sentenced to two years each in prison in August 2012. Their act was seen as especially disrespectful because it took place in a church and was called a 'punk prayer'; it thus channeled political ideas in to the religious field. This arrest can be understood as a sign of the government's tightening control over the arts as a field of protest and as a 'warning example' for protest groups looking for alternative fields in which to express their opposition to the Kremlin.

Recent research has shown that Russia has unevenly or partially, even reluctantly, followed the western models of democracy, and thus, Russia has developed hybrid models, taking and mixing elements from several models (Alapuro, Lonkila, and Liikanen 2004; Sakwa 2011a; Robertson 2011). Therefore Russia's 'peculiarity' has prompted a discussion on whether western concepts of civil society are applicable to the Russian (and other non-western) cases (Hann 1996; Hale 2002; Salmenniemi 2008; Verdery 1996; Alapuro, Lonkila, and Liikanen 2004). To answer this growing trend of criticism, recent research has emphasized the importance of combining micro and macro level research in making sense of the everyday realities of citizens in the post-socialist space and critical deconstruction of theoretical models and their normative underpinnings (Hann 1996; Jäppinen, Kulmala, and Saarinen 2011; Salmenniemi 2008). In my analysis, I aim at scrutinizing youth activism on the micro-level and to move away from the normative understanding of what civil society should be or how civic activism is defined in the West. Instead, I analyze how youth understand and construct their activism and civil society as well as the opportunities and restrictions that define it, and thus aim to bring the liberal youths' own voice forward in the debate about Russian civil society.

### 3.4 Youth Activism in Contemporary Russia

During my fieldwork in Moscow and St Petersburg, I met active youth who are organized in formal and informal youth groups that cover a variety of different political and ideological standpoints. The popular uprisings in Central and Eastern Europe known as the Color Revolutions, especially Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004, were important triggers for Russian youth activism. Right after the Orange Revolution, a new wave of youth organizations, both 'pro-' and 'anti-orange', took place in Russia. Stanovaya (2005) has categorized Russian youth movements into two groups: 'loyal to the Kremlin' and the 'opposition'. In the 'Loyal to the Kremlin' group, she locates the *Nashi* (Ours), *Molodaia Gvardiia* (Young Guard of the United Russia Party) and *Rossiia Molodaia* (Young Russia)<sup>3</sup>, which she describes as 'liberals' differentiating them from the other loyal to the Kremlin groups that are more patriotic or nationalistic in character, such as the Eurasian Union of Youth and the youth organization of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal-Democratic Party (LDPR). Stanovaya categorized the political opposition's youth movements as 'liberal' and 'patriotic' and according to their 'left' or 'right' wing character. The liberal

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<sup>3</sup> Jussi Lassila adds the Moscow based youth movement Mestnye in this category (Lassila 2011b).

left-wing opposition consists of the youth movement *MY* (WE), *Oborona* (Defense) as well as the already dissolved movements *DA!* (*Demokraticheskaiia Alternativa*, the Democratic Alternative), *Pora* (It's Time) and *Ia Dumaiu* (I think). She categorizes left-wing patriots as movements such as *Za Rodinu* (For the Motherland), Union of Communist Youth (*Soiuz kommunisticheskoi molodezhi*), AKM (*Avangard Krasnoi Molodezhi*, Vanguard of Red Youth) and the National Bolshevik Party (*Natsional-Bolshevistskaia Partiia*). (For a similar categorization, see Gromov 2009a.)

Stanovaya's categorization is helpful in mapping out the various and often interconnected youth groups and their political orientations. However, the left-right division as it is understood in the western context is problematic in the Russian case (G. Evans and Whitefield 1998) and especially concerning liberal youth movements that often want to include as many young people as possible in their groups and are therefore defining their position quite loosely regarding socio-economic questions, such as educational reforms, social benefits or taxation, that could bring out the 'left' or 'right' wing character of the movement. Rather, they wish to keep their grievances on the abstract level in order to accommodate youth of 'all colors' (see forthcoming chapters). Movements also move on this left-right scale according to their participant base, because of their small size that often gives individual participants power to define the whole movement's activities.

In 2005, right after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Kremlin began mobilizing youth to join the movement '*Nashi*' in support of the government and thereby channel discontent to prevent the further spread of 'orange sentiments' in the country and public displays of protest among Russian youths (Danilin 2006; Robertson 2009; Lebedev 2008). Pro-Kremlin movements, such as *Nashi*, *Molodaia Gvardiia* of the United Russia Party and the Young Russia movement (*Rossiia Molodaia*) as well as the Locals (*Mestnye*) represent state ideology and the state's 'official anti-fascism', and are officially supported by the state (Atwal 2009; Blum 2006; Hemment 2009; Lassila 2011a). Within a few months of the *Nashi* movement's founding, its membership increased up to 120 000 people. This is quite remarkable in a country where youth is seen as politically disinterested and apathetic. *Nashi* got the media's attention by organizing mass-rallies targeted against the opposition and sometimes against western countries as well. An internationally noted event was the mass protests against the relocation of the Soviet war memorial, the 'Bronze Soldier' in Estonia in the spring of 2007 (see Lassila 2011b). According to Heller (2008), after the presidential elections in 2008, the Kremlin started to reduce its support to *Nashi* and the other government-friendly movements. Some assessed that President Medvedev's project of 'civilized Russia promoting itself as a friend and partner of the West' did not need the *Nashi* anymore (Heller 2008). However, *Nashi* and other pro-Kremlin movements were actively organizing 'anti-orange' rallies as a counterweight to the opposition's rallies in 2012, until in April 2012 the movement's leaders announced that *Nashi* would disband its activities, and the movement will be dissolved (Gazeta.ru 2012).

Youth participation in Russia is often described as 'state-managed' because the government has provided considerable administrative and financial resources to enhance the mobilization of the pro-government youth (Blum 2006; McFaul 2003; Heller 2008).

According to Heller (2008), *Nashi* cannot be considered an independent mobilization project by youth themselves but rather ‘a Putin-era political technology project’. Putin’s former adviser and the founding father of the so-called ‘sovereign democracy’ project, Vladislav Surkov is said to be the movement’s mentor in the Kremlin (Heller 2008, 2; Horvath 2011, 20). Horvath (2011) claims that *Nashi* was part of ‘Putin’s preventive counter-revolution’ against the orange revolutionary feelings and a ‘response to a tangible domestic threat posed by opposition leaders prepared to flirt with revolutionary politics’ before the election cycle of 2007-08. However, recent research on pro-Kremlin youth movements has questioned this thoroughly state-managed nature of youth participation and has also shown how pro-Kremlin activism is more complex than that. It has described the activists as agents in the civic field and elucidated how some activists use the movement as a tool to create better chances in life for themselves and to distance themselves from the adult politics, which they view negatively or as inefficient (Lassila 2011b, 362; Andreev 2009; Atwal 2009; Hemment 2012).

The political opposition’s youth movements are smaller than the pro-Kremlin groups. They question the current political regime and its policies and resist the state-managed forms of participation. These movements are therefore under the strict control of the authorities. They have no access to formal politics, nor do they want to be engaged with it. Oppositional youth movements are organized under umbrella movements such as the United Civil Front (*Ob’iedinennyi Grazhdanskii Front*, OGF), the Other Russia (*Drugaiia Rossiia*) and most recently, the Solidarity Movement (*Solidarnost’*) (see table 1). The most numerous and active of the opposition groups are the communist forces, such as the ‘AKM – the Vanguard of Red Youth’, and the now banned National Bolshevik (Party) and some other leftist groupings that have organized under the Left Front coalition (Gromov 2009b). The National Bolsheviks have a program that is a mix of bolshevism and nationalist agendas, and the group relies on their well-known leader Eduard Limonov, who is the organizing force behind many demonstrations and events, and has actively participated in the Other Russia coalition.

In addition to the leftist and communist youth, there are youth movements that describe themselves as democratic and/or liberal movements. The most active of these in Moscow are the Youth Movement *Oborona*, Movement *MY*, and smaller movements, such as *Smena* (Change) *Svobodnye Radikaly* (Free Radicals), *Natsiia Svobody* (Nation of Freedom). Typically for Russian politics and especially for opposition politics, also the democratic youth movements revolve around a few active members. Liberal youth movements gather those with a variety of political views together, but define their overall goals as free and democratic elections and party politics, free media, and guaranteed constitutional and human rights. The young activists are also especially concerned with army recruiting policies and students’ rights. One common and unifying idea for these various opposition youth movements is the personified resistance to President Vladimir Putin.

Even though Russians have started to recognize political youth movements somewhat better than in earlier years, especially opposition youth movements are still very rarely known by the wider audiences. According to FOM’s (Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie 2011; 2010) surveys of political youth organizations in 2010 and 2011, 52 percent of the

respondents did not recognize any of the 13 listed youth organizations. However, the number has diminished from the 2007 survey when as many as 60 percent of the respondents did not recognize any of the organizations. The most widely known of the youth organizations was the Youth wing of the United Russia Party, the Young Guard (*Molodaia Gvardiia*), which has overtaken the position of the movement *Nashi* that was leading on the 2007 survey. The Young Guard was known to 25 percent of the respondents in 2010 and *Nashi*'s was recognized by 18 percent of the respondents. From the anti-Kremlin movements only the National Bolsheviks or '*Limonovtsy*' (referring to its leader Eduard Limonov) reached 10 percent of recognition while other movements had been heard of by only 1–2 percent of the respondents. Young people and Muscovites knew the youth movements somewhat better than the older generation and people from the regions (Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie 2012).

Public recognition of the youth movements is surprisingly low even though the pro-Kremlin youth movements, such as *Nashi*, are often featured in the Russian media. According to Lassila (2011b), *Nashi* received its most media visibility in 2007, but still people claimed not to recognize the movement's existence in the surveys. Lassila (2011b, 260) argues that '*Nashi*'s relatively low familiarity among the population (including youth) is based on public unresponsiveness rather than simply a lack of information'. Lassila connects this unresponsiveness to the population's disinterest in politics in general.

However, *Nashi*'s wide mobilization is also interesting when looking at the political opportunities and restrictions in Russia. In general, Russian civil society is politically steered according to the principle of 'managed democracy', which leads to the categorization of civic organizations as 'allies' or 'adversaries' of the state. The allies are seen as the 'state's helpers', supporting state systems and carrying out social services that the state cannot provide. This kind of civic activism is encouraged by the state while the adversaries are discouraged, and even harassed. (Salmenniemi 2008.) The openly oppositional youth movements are part of the 'adversaries' group, while the pro-Kremlin movements are deemed allies of the state. The opposition movements often complain of harassment, that they do not get any media-coverage, and that their demonstrations are controlled and often forbidden. At the same time, the state invests in the 'right kind' of youth activism by allocating economic and emotional support for the pro-government movements. Allowing the pro-Kremlin movements access to the state-controlled media while the opposition has been dislodged from the public eye strengthens the mobilization potential of the pro-Kremlin movements such as the *Nashi*. However, during the 2011–12 demonstrations, the opposition's access to the state controlled television and other media has somewhat eased. According to the Levada Center (2012, 196), in 2012, 78 percent of respondents had heard of the protests against the rigged elections and 85 per cent of those had heard of the protests on the television.



### 3.5 Case Study: Youth Movement Oborona



**Image 1** *Oborona has adopted the picture of the clenched fist from the youth movements participating in the so-called Colored Revolutions.*

The case study of this research, the Youth Movement Oborona was founded in March 2005, after the German Friedrich Neumann Foundation for liberal politics organized a seminar for youth activists in Moscow. The seminar brought together the youth sections of the liberal political party Yabloko and the liberal right-wing Union of Right Forces, SPS, for the first time. After the seminar, young activists from Youth Yabloko, youth SPS, student group 'I think' (*Ia Dumaiu*), Libertarian Breakout (*Libertarnyi proryv*) and from the Institute of Collective Action (*Institut kollektivnoe deistvie*), under the leadership of the Yabloko party activist Ilya Yashin, started to brainstorm a coalition movement in the spirit of the recent Orange Revolution in Ukraine (Loskutova 2008, 292; Horvath 2011). They came up with the name 'Russian youth movement *Oborona*' (Defense) and chose the movement logo to be a black clenched fist, which was used by the democratic youth movement *Otpor* in the Serbian 'Bulldozer revolution' in 2000, as well as *Kmara* in the Georgian 'Rose Revolution' in 2003 and *Pora* in the Ukrainian 'Orange revolution' in 2004<sup>4</sup>. Soon after the founding of Oborona, branches were also established in St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg and gradually in other Russian regions as well.

In the beginning, Oborona activists were enthusiastic and many thought that the Russian 'color' revolution was right around the corner. According to Mikhail<sup>5</sup>, one of the activists in Oborona from its inception, Oborona was the first opposition groups that openly criticized Putin and broke 'the conspiracy of silence', which had kept President Putin outside of all critique. He explained that Oborona's slogans were in fact not very radical, such as 'We are bored of Putin', but they seemed extreme at that time. The Russian government was worried and surprised by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and aimed at uprooting all 'orange' sentiments and foreign influence in Russian society and organizations, and therefore, Oborona was labeled a potential threat to the country's 'stability'.

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<sup>4</sup> *The clenched fist was first used by the Industrial Workers of the World and since then by many revolutionary social causes and the radical feminist movement. In the 2000s it has been used by movements opposing repression such as Otpor in Serbia and lately the Arab Spring movement during the uprisings in the Northern African countries.*

<sup>5</sup> *The quotations used throughout the thesis are drawn from my interview data. All the names of the respondents are changed to pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the respondent.*



According to one ex-activist of Oborona who had been also part of the movement from the beginning, the coalition between the right-wing SPS and the more social-liberal oriented Yabloko was possible because of Putin's 'anti-democratic' politics:

And after Putin stepped into power, the discussions became simpler and harsher, the question became simpler and stronger: Is there going to be democracy in Russia or not? And there was no choice between good or better democracy. There was a question: Is there going to be democracy in general? In this sense, the rigid sociological discussion moved to the background and this helped to unite a wide coalition of opposition. (Artem)

Regardless of the enthusiastic beginning, Oborona did not manage to mobilize youth in large numbers and its activists' enthusiasm diminished gradually. During the years 2005 and 2006, Oborona searched for an organizational style. Its main idea was to be a leaderless movement organized horizontally as the youth groups of the Color Revolutions. Less than a year after its foundation, in early 2006, the Moscow branch of the movement drifted into inner disputes and most of the more social-democratically oriented Yabloko activists left the movement. This conflict started when Ilya Yashin, who had already been profiled as the movement's unofficial leader, was not re-elected to the coordinating council and the movement was divided into his supporters and those of SPS's Oleg Kozlovsky's supporters. After a long strand of discussions and disagreements, Yashin left the movement and Kozlovsky became its leading figure and the other coordinators were former SPS youth or outside of political parties. (Loskutova 2008, 292–299.) Since then, Oborona in Moscow has been coordinated by the right-wing liberals and libertarians associated with the late SPS, while the St Petersburg Oborona continued to cooperate with the Yabloko youth.

During its existence from 2006 to 2011, Oborona identified with the non-systemic opposition and the democratic movement in Russia. Oborona's main goal was to contribute to a democratic change in the current government and under this general theme, the movement aimed to unite young people from a wide spectrum of political ideologies who shared the basic values of liberal democracy. The movement embraced western ideas of liberal democracy, which are based on individual freedoms and rights, and thus the movement positioned itself against the state's sovereign democracy model (see more on activists' interpretation of democracy in chapter 5). Oborona engaged in using non-violent methods of protest and its forms of action included participation in mass-demonstrations, smaller scale street performances and flash mobs, as well as organizing various educational seminars for its activists and other interested young people (see chapter 6). Oborona activists emphasize that they were not paid for activism, were not affiliated with any political party, and did not intend to come to power themselves. Oborona was organized horizontally around four coordinators who were responsible for their own fields of action, such as public relations or coordinating protest events. The movement participated actively in the Solidarity movement as well as in various coordinating committees of mass demonstrations, and it organized small-scale independent actions.

During my fieldwork in 2009–2012, Oborona had about 1000 activists on its roster in ten to fifteen cities in Russia, but it was most active in Moscow and St Petersburg. In both of the cities, the membership was estimated to be around 200, of which only about 20

activists actively took part in Oborona's activities and others were active online or they were 'supportive' of the cause, participating through Internet discussions. Oborona's various branches had all created distinct political claims and forms of action, but they shared the general goals and principles of the movement's common Declaration (*Deklaratsiia*<sup>6</sup>, see Appendix 1). However, in many cases these 'branches' in smaller cities consisted of a few people keeping up oppositional activism under the name of various movements.

Even if the movement cooperated widely, it was associated most closely with the Solidarity movement. Many Oborona participants were and still are active in the Solidarity movement and some of them are members of their city and on federal councils. This has both strengthened and weakened the group. Solidarity movement gave a meaningful platform for Oborona participants to voice their grievances in 'adult politics' and these two movements shared their goals, but simultaneously Solidarity's inner conflicts also affected the cohesion inside Oborona, as I will describe in greater detail in forthcoming chapters.

The St Petersburg and Moscow branches of Oborona have been the most successful in gaining public recognition and attracting participants. They did not cooperate considerably but formed their own activities independently. In Moscow Oborona was oriented more towards cooperation with political coalitions, such as the late SPS, Solidarity Movement, United Civil Front (OGF), and the Other Russia, while in St Petersburg, Oborona cooperated with civic organizations such as the Soldiers' Mothers demanding rights for army-recruits and various anti-military groups, which they defined more as human rights-oriented rather than political *per se* (see section 4.4). However, both of the branches determined that their goals were democratic reform and anti-authoritarianism, and to be ready to mobilize people when 'Day X' came:

I saw it (the movement) as a relatively small but a very effective and efficient group with very dedicated, devoted activists, who would help to mobilize people. And then on day X they would be the first to put the first tent on the Red Square. (Mikhail)

However, when public disappointment finally peaked in late 2011 and led to wider demonstrations, Oborona was incapable of pulling its act together and reforming the movement to respond to the latest political upheavals. According to one of the long time activists of the group<sup>7</sup>, Oborona came to be in a situation where it had to redefine and sharpen its goals according to the new situation in the country and form a common opinion of how to participate in the new protest movement. However, the activists could not find a common strategy on how to move forward, and instead of reforming the group, they decided to freeze its activities. Therefore, Oborona ceased to exist in a situation that

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<sup>6</sup> Oborona's declaration was published online on its website ([www.oborona.org](http://www.oborona.org)). However, in May 2012, Oborona did not manage to renew its webdomain and now it was bought by a group called 'Defense (oborona) - the great deeds of the Russian people' and dedicated to the Russian war victories.

<sup>7</sup> Here I refrain from using names or even pseudonyms when talking about the dissolution of the group since it is a difficult, emotional question for many of the activists. In the following chapters, I will use pseudonyms for the activists in order to ensure their anonymity.

its activists had anticipated for the whole six years of its existence: Putin's support was plummeting and people were taking to the streets. According to one of the Moscow participants, who was first to leave the movement,

the events after the [parliamentary] elections divided Oborona – between the supporters of unsanctioned actions and the supporters of some sort of sluggish inactivity (*vialotekushchei bezdeiatel'nosti*). (Email correspondence, March 2012.)

Soon after the dissolution of the Moscow Oborona, also St Petersburg Oborona froze its activities. According to one of the activists of St Petersburg, Oborona had ceased to exist as 'an independent project' (*samostoiatel'nyi proiekt*):

Perhaps we 'evolved' it as many of us began to have differences in our visions on how to proceed. The main participants of Oborona continue their activism, but in other projects. (Email correspondence, February 2013.)

The Oborona flag with its clenched fist was not seen in the Free Elections demonstrations, but Oborona activists participated (or boycotted) the demonstrations as individuals. In this book, I scrutinize the reasons for the dissolution of Oborona precisely at the time when Russian civil society started to activate and mobilize people. I suggest that this analysis contributes to our understanding of the Russian political opposition and its struggle for mobilization.

# 4 SILENCING DISAGREEMENTS –ACTIVIST IDENTITIES AND GROUP PRACTICES<sup>8</sup>

## 4.1 Introduction

For some time after starting my fieldwork, the youth movement Oborona remained a mystery to me. I got to know the activists and the movement's repertoire of action, but I had difficulties grasping what the group was really about. Coming from Finland, I was used to associating social movements with questions of social justice and the anti- or alternative globalization movement of organizations opposing neoliberal globalization (see Della Porta and Diani 2006, 2). With this mindset, I had difficulties understanding Oborona and its struggle against the government. On the one hand, Oborona's repertoire of action was very similar to the social movements in Western Europe: They organized flash mobs and performances, participated in rallies and demonstrations, and were very active in online discussions. However, these activities were always organized around abstract themes of constitutional rights and seemed to avoid taking any stand on questions of poverty, economic reforms, gender, sexual minorities, or ethnic discrimination, for instance, which would have seemed as obvious points of critique. Activists often struggled with questions about their political views and wanted to emphasize how the movement accommodates everyone regardless of their political position. On the other hand, when I talked with the activists, they often emphasized their group as their most important network of support and like-minded friends. They were talking about their fellow activist-friends as intelligent and active and they were clearly proud of being part of such a group despite their political disagreements.

In this chapter, I analyze these observations from the perspective of contradictions and negotiations between activist identities and group practices. First, I examine the construction of activist identities in Oborona. I am interested in activists' self-understanding as well as in the meanings they give to their activism, the ways activists construct their identities through identification and dis-identification in dialogue with 'others'. (See section 2.1; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Lawler 2008; Skeggs 1997). In my analysis, I pay particular attention to how class and gender articulate understandings and practices of activism. I argue that the activist identity is constructed on three axes: in relation to the middle-class and intelligentsia, to dissidents, and to an international orientation.

Second, I analyze the construction of a movement identity: how activists create a sense of groupness or a sense of 'we/us' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) in the movement, and how they define the connective ties that keep their group together.<sup>9</sup> I argue that activists see

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<sup>8</sup> Parts of this chapter have appeared in my article *Gendered and classed activist identity in the Russian oppositional youth movement in the Sociological Review*, vol 61(3) (Lyytikäinen 2013).

<sup>9</sup> As I discussed in chapter 2.2, Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 20) suggest using the concepts of groupness, connectedness, and commonality instead of an 'all-purpose' collective identity. They define

generation and friendship as an important tie forming the sense of groupness in the movement and that they employ a discourse of ‘action’ that distinguishes them from their parent’s generation and from the stereotypical view of the Russian youth as apolitical. The sense of groupness, feelings of belonging and solidarity, in Oborona was based on friendship and communication (*obshchenie*) instead of common political points of view and, thus, I suggest that Oborona’s group formation resembles the *tusovka* and *kruzhok* types of organization common already among the Soviet youth and intelligentsia groups.

Third, I analyze the depoliticization of certain questions in the group, which, I argue, is an important part of constructing the movement identity, and reflects the weakness of the activists’ political connectedness. I analyze the movement’s practices that aim at creating a coalition that is as wide as possible, but also their wish to represent the group as a united entity, by silencing the political opinions, solidarities, and affiliations that might harm the group’s ideals of consensus and harmony.

## **4.2 Identification with the Intelligentsia, Dissidence and Cosmopolitanism**

In my analysis of activist identities, I follow Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) conceptualization of self-understanding that governs individual and collective action. I argue that the activist’s sense of who one is and their sense of their social location vis-à-vis ‘others’ governs how they are prepared to act in the group setting. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 17.) I suggest that Oborona activists identify with the ideals of intellectualism, dissidence, and cosmopolitanism, which form the base of their self-understanding as activists. This self-understanding is strengthened in movement practices and collective identification processes. The different dimensions of individual and collective identities are enmeshed and sometimes hard to distinguish.

### **‘Always against and No Compromises’ – Self-Identification with the Dissidents**

Unfortunately, most of our generation is either apolitical or dress up in a T-shirt with the portrait of Putin and marches under the banner of the movement ‘*Nashi*’. (Artem)

Just like Artem, one of the founding members of Oborona who had since left the movement, many Oborona activists refer to the ‘other’ Russian youth as cynical and apolitical, while they describe the typical Oborona participant as independent and able to think critically. According to another long-time activist, Vova, a typical Oborona activist ‘likes to decide for himself, doesn’t like leaders telling him what to do, carries on rational

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*commonality as ‘the sharing of some common attribute’ and connectedness as ‘the relational tie that link people’ and use the concept of groupness to refer to the ‘the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group’.*

arguments, likes to participate in discussions, [and] listens to arguments not orders.’ Vova declared that a ‘real’ opposition activist does not take orders from others, but makes his own decisions based on rational thought. This mirrors Oborona activists’ identification as modern-day dissidents and dis-identification with the ‘typical Russian youth’ that is often portrayed as stereotypically apolitical.

The dissident identification manifests itself in the Oborona activists’ positive identification with dissidents in the late Soviet Union, and they draw a parallel between Soviet dissidence and their own activism. For example, many of them express admiration for National Bolshevik leader Eduard Limonov, who was a dissident in the Soviet Union, not because of his politics but because of his courage and persistence. Inna describes her respect for Limonov by saying that ‘this man has never sold his life but is true to himself’. She continues by explaining that there is no other opposition figure that she could respect. Even though she identifies as a liberal, she does not talk approvingly of the people in the liberal opposition:

I have a very bad attitude towards all the current liberals, Belkov, Yashin, Melov, they are very rotten people (*prognivshie liudi*). They are bad (*gnilye*). They are evil (*lukavye*). They are insincere (*neiskrennye*). (Inna)

Inna’s exceptionally strong dislike of the leading liberals reflects the personified understanding of power, which associates certain political groups or ideologies with their leaders instead of political doctrines. The Russian public shares a similar view: the terms ‘democrat’ and ‘liberal’ are discredited in Russia because they are associated with the people responsible for the reforms and the ‘shock therapy’ of the 1990s (Martyanov 2005). Nor is Limonov admired by the public, but often associated with the ‘extremists’, as the National Bolsheviks are portrayed in public. However, Limonov’s persistence has given him an image of being the ‘true oppositionist’ among the Oborona youth. Ruslan explained his admiration:

I don’t believe that Limonov will come to power. I honestly do not want him to come to power. Once in an interview, he was asked: ‘What will happen if you come to power?’ He said: ‘I will go to the opposition’.

Other Soviet dissidents, such as Liudmila Alekseeva and Andrei Sakharov, were also raised as paragons for today’s young opposition. Furthermore, activists admire the national poet Pushkin as a revolutionary dissident and a revolutionary Decembrist<sup>10</sup>. The opposition’s demonstrations are often held at Pushkin Square, which Bushnell (1990) has documented as being popular already for dissident demonstrations during Soviet times.

Pushkin’s poetry is read as a criticism of the state, and he is sometimes cited in the performances organized by the democratic youth movements. Bergman (1992, 16) draws a correlation between Soviet dissidents and the revolutionary intelligentsia of tsarist Russia, which ‘criticized the existing political order in moral terms’ and relied on personal grievances and individual liberation. According to Bergman (1992, 20) for some

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<sup>10</sup> *The Decembrist Revolt took place in December 1825 against Tsar Nicholas I.*

dissidents ‘the intelligentsia provided a model of morally virtuous behavior and its heroism and altruism were qualities the dissidents should try to cultivate themselves’. Dissidents referred to Decembrists and the revolutionary intelligentsia as their sources of inspiration and admiration. Oborona activists also identify with the opponents of the state of the previous generations. However, many of them do not identify with the revolutionary intelligentsia on the ideological level, but on the more abstract level of intellectualism and persistent critique of the power holders. Thus, they can be seen as continuing the revolutionary intelligentsia and dissident traditions of criticism. Articulating their identification in relation to dissident traditions also reflects Oborona’s desire for exceptionalism. In the Soviet Union, dissidents were marginalized; even if they were portrayed positively in the West, people living in the Soviet Union tended to see that, through their resistance, dissidents belonged to the authoritative discursive regime of the Soviet state that ‘ordinary’ people wanted to stay out of (Yurchak 2006, 130). This is similar to Russia’s human rights defenders and political activists of today; they are rarely known or admired in their home country, but often supported in the West.

When I asked Oborona activist Ruslan about his political paragons, he mentioned Eduard Limonov and Barack Obama, but also the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Admitting that this statement was a bit strange (*stranno*), he explained that even though he does not approve of Merkel’s politics, he respects her as a ‘solid’ (*tverdyi*) personality who stands behind her words. Many of the activists’ did not choose their paragons because of their political points of view, but because of their character and personality. This kind of personification of heroes and enemies of the opposition can be seen as continuing the Soviet dissident traditions. Hornsby (2009) argues that Soviet dissidence during the Khrushchev era was not against communism itself, but oriented more towards specific events, policies and individuals. One of the most common themes among imprisoned dissidents was the idea that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ (Kozlov 2006, cited in Hornsby 2009, 166). A diverse group of political figures from Hitler to Eisenhower became ‘quasi-hero figures’ for dissidents solely because they were seen as Khrushchev’s opponents (Hornsby 2009, 166).

Oborona activists are united against one main enemy, Vladimir Putin, and they feel solidarity with Putin’s ‘enemies’, the Russian opposition and the western leaders. The ‘cult of personality’ was often used to refer to Soviet leaders, but it has also been associated with the Putin era as well. However, Cassidy and Johnson (2010, 686) associate ‘Putin mania’ with the cultural practices of nostalgia and consumption instead of the Soviet style of monolithic propaganda campaigns. They see ‘Putiniana’ as reflecting the ‘contemporary social, political and communicative reality’ of Russia. Nevertheless, Oborona activists see the *Nashi* movement and other supporters of Putin as being deluded by a Soviet-style of personality cult. Activists referred to the ‘Emperor syndrome’ of the Russians, according to which people should love their tsar no matter what. In an interview, Viktor argued that most Russians think that ‘the tsar might be bad or good, but it is our tsar and we should love him.’ This alleged cult of personality is parallel to the personified hatred deployed by the political opposition. For example, Vova saw that the creation of civil society was possible only by removing the current government and especially Putin, whom he viewed as destructive to civil society because of his strong control over citizens.





**Image 2** *Pushkin Square is a common place to hold opposition's demonstrations. In sanctioned pickets people need to enter the square through security check and metal detectors.*



**Image 3** *Strategy-31 demonstration in May 2010.*

Furthermore, not giving up and not making compromises are seen as important ideals of a 'true' oppositionist. Many Oborona members talk about their admiration of Limonov, especially in the context of the Strategy-31 project. In 2009, National Bolshevik leader Limonov started the Strategy-31 demonstrations at Triumfalnaia square to highlight the 31st article of the Russian Constitution, which guarantees the right to peaceful assembly (see more on Strategy-31 in chapter 6). In 2010, the democratic opposition also joined the demonstrations, and a leader of the liberal Solidarity (*Solidarnost'*) movement Boris Nemtsov and Liudmila Alekseeva from the Moscow-Helsinki human rights group became leading figures of the Strategy-31 movement, along with Limonov. In 2010, city officials gave Alekseeva permission to organize a demonstration but only for 800 people, which she agreed to. Limonov and many other opposition activists saw this as a compromise and giving in to the authorities and the Strategy-31 organizers split into two camps. Many Oborona members did not accept any compromise, and therefore were on Limonov's side. As Viktor explains, the main idea of the radical opposition is its non-systemic character (*vnesistemnost'*):

Even though the organization is democratic, it does not cooperate with the Kremlin, which is part of the system. Because the main thing that distinguishes radical opposition is its non-systemic character (*vnesistemnost'*). You shouldn't have any contact with the regime; you shouldn't cooperate in any form... And we speak out a lot against it (*protiv*). It is a very strong characteristic of Oborona. (Viktor)

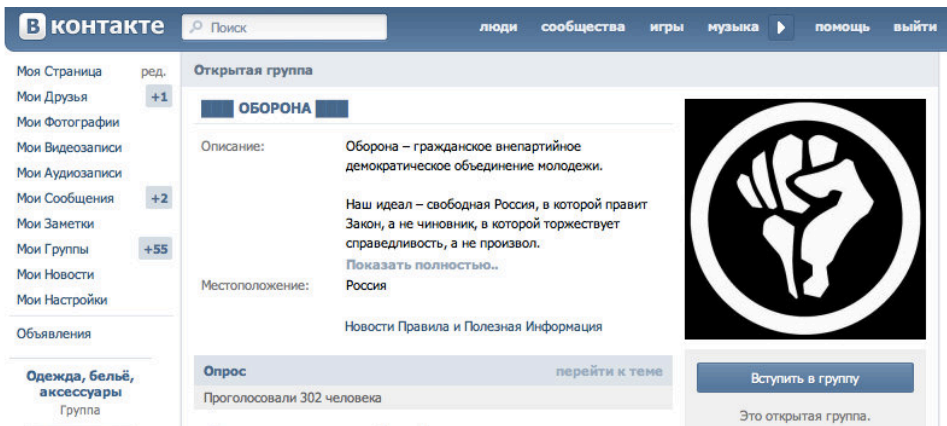
However, Viktor also identified Oborona's 'always against' attitude as a *problem* of the 'non-systemic' opposition. For Anna, who participated in Oborona for only for a few months, this negative approach was the main reason for leaving the group. She said that she would rather participate in demonstrations for (*za*) good things, such as for democratic freedoms and free media. However, most of the activists shared and practiced this 'always against' ideal. Dissenting and being against all of the government's actions characterize what is perceived to be a 'true oppositionist' in the group. This is also manifested in the movement's repertoire of action, which is centered on organizing protests against Vladimir Putin. This shared 'enemy' blurs the ideological boundaries of various groups, and thus liberally dispositioned Oborona activists can also represent the National Bolshevik Limonov as their paragon and participate in demonstrations organized by nationalist groups.

Furthermore, Oborona engages with the dissident written tradition. Reproduction and dissemination of forbidden texts, *samizdat*, started to circulate in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and dissenting through written texts has been an important tradition of Soviet dissidents. Volkov has described *samizdat* literature as 'one of the main reservoirs of intellectual opposition' in the Soviet Union (Volkov 2008, cited in Hornsby 2009, 176). In contemporary Russia, the Internet has become an important forum for oppositional activism and an important tool for mobilization (Lonkila 2012). However, activists also associate this contemporary platform with Soviet dissident traditions:

So, for example, it is such a curious situation that basically all of the opposition leaders are present in the LiveJournal: Kasparov, Limonov, Nikita Belykh, [who is] the governor. In

general, all the well-known experts and public figures are there because it is that kind of intelligentsia's underground subculture (*andergroundnaia subkul'tura intelligentskaia*). If before they gathered in kitchens, now there is a more interesting way of engaging in dialogue (*sposob obshcheniia*). It simultaneously combines kitchen and *samizdat*'... Now under the censorship conditions, blogs play the role of the *samizdat*', which we use actively. (Maksim)

Activists often refer to censorship and repression in contemporary Russia as being as bad as in the Soviet Union, and they identify with the written dissident activism under a repressive government. They see a continuation from the kitchen talk of the Soviet Union and the *samizdat*' to the Internet forums and blogs of today because the political opposition has no access to the mainstream media and its public. Also Sergei Kovalev, who was known as a Soviet era dissident, has made the same association by arguing that the *samizdat*' was the 'Internet-for-the-poor' (Oushakine 2001).



**Image 4** *Oborona has been actively participating in various social media sites, such as VKontakte and Facebook.*

Activists' use of the Internet can be seen as a way of creating a subaltern counter-public, which Nancy Fraser (1990, 67) defines as 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs'. As previously in the Soviet Union's kitchens, today's Internet forums create a space where marginalized groups aim to re-create themselves as an alternative public and to challenge the dominant views and norms of the ruling social groups (see also Warner 2002, 80). Internet creates an arena that the activists use to challenge the categorization of the opposition as the 'western spies' and instead portray themselves as dissidents fighting the repressive state. Furthermore, the Internet is the only available forum for the opposition to challenge the government's hegemony over public discussion on civil society and democracy (see more on this struggle in chapter 5). However, the Internet also created a space for critique inside the movement. Some topics that were not raised as

issues in the official movement meetings created heated discussions on the email-lists. As I show in section 4.4, in the group meetings, older activists and movement leaders silenced many discussions on topics that were seen as threatening to the group unity. However, this control did not always reach the Internet and oftentimes email-lists created a space for inner critique of the group too.

## Intelligentsia Identification and Cosmopolitanism

Besides the identification as dissidents, Oborona participants identify with the Russian intelligentsia or are identified as part of the rising middle class and are categorized as such by others.

Anna: Probably they [participants in the movement]<sup>11</sup> are somewhere in the middle class (*srednii klass*) because the absolutely poor – they simply don't have that kind of interest, and the rich have different interests.

The participants do not usually talk about class this frankly, but rather more implicitly in a way that is embedded in their self-understanding. They describe their fellow *Oborontsy* as students or recent graduates with higher education. According to Ruslan, one thing differentiating Oborona activists from other youth groups, such as *Nashi* or the nationalists, is that they are better 'supplied':

And probably also the composition of the participants is a bit different. That is, if you compare it to, let's say, the Nazis [natsisti, refers to the nationalistic groups] or *Nashi*<sup>12</sup>... I think there are more students from respected (*kotiruemykh*) universities. And I think most of them are better-off (*luche obespecheny*) than, let's say, the Nazis, or the *Nashi*. So, higher education and somehow better income of the parents [differentiates them from other youth activists], probably.

One common attribute of the Oborona activists (and other civil society actors in Russia, cf. Alapuro 1993; Salmenniemi 2008) is that they have resources, i.e. different forms of capital at their disposal. Almost all of the Oborona activists had stable social positions as university students supported by their parents or jobs that allowed them to have an active lifestyle and acquire cultural capital, such as language studies and travel, which they say has shaped their liberal worldviews. Civic activism represents a space for self-realization for many, but also an opportunity to transform cultural capital, such as education and intelligentsia status, into economic resources, for example, through foreign grants that started to flow into Russia in the 1990s (Hemment 2007; Henderson 2003; McIntosh Sundstrom 2006, see also section 3.3). Furthermore, progress and civic mindedness tend

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<sup>11</sup> Anna had just joined Oborona and did not yet identify herself as a 'member'.

<sup>12</sup> Ruslan's wordplay creates correlation between the terms *Nashi* and *Nazi*. Oppositional activists refer to the participants of the *Nashi* movement as 'nashishti' or the 'Putind jugend' creating associations with the term *Natsisti* (*Nazis*) and the *Nazi* youth in Germany in the 1930s.



to be associated symbolically with the middle class in Russian public discourse (Melin and Salmenniemi 2012).

Intellectualism is a central dimension of the activist identity of Oborona participants, and forms of cultural capital are highly valued in the movement. Many activists described themselves as coming from ‘democratic’ and ‘intelligent’ families. Their parents had enjoyed higher education and had worked in white-collar professions, such as engineering, teaching or the arts. Omel’chenko (2010) has shown that the Russian skinheads she researched often learnt their racist ideology at home. Similarly, the liberal views and political activism of Oborona activists tend to be influenced by parents and growing up in families of the intelligentsia<sup>13</sup>. Activists described their families with words such as ‘scientists’ (*uchenye*) and ‘intellectuals’ (*intelligenty*) and relations in their families with words such as ‘respect’ (*uvazhenie*):

LL: What three words could you use to describe your family?

Aleksandr: Uh, scientists, intellectuals, well, it's a little more than three words, politically passive.

LL: Why these words?

Aleksandr: Well, scientists – because of their education, intelligent – it is like their character, and the third – is the topic of our conversation [now], their political views: positive neutralism (*polozhitel'nyi neutralizm*).

Katia: Literature [referring to her parents’ education]... Democracy, respect.

Also Ruslan refers to his family as belonging to the intelligentsia, but explained the term concerning his family more as a ‘moral position’ that he associates with the soviet times, than stemming from his parents’ professions:

The semantic field of the word intelligentsia is split into two components. First, it's the people who are engaged in intellectual work, including doctors, teachers and so on. In the Soviet Union there was still a second sense, it is the people who hold certain moral positions. (Ruslan)

Ruslan emphasized that even some people can be identified as the intelligentsia because of their profession, but they do not necessarily carry the moral position that being a part of intelligentsia entails. Kochetkova (2010, 33) describes the Russian intelligentsia as a mythical category characterized by the ideals of being intellectual, critical and reflexive with morality and creative talent. According to Michele Rivkin-Fish (2009), the intelligentsia is historically and currently an important local category. During the tsarist times, intelligentsia was used to refer to the educated groups that opposed tsarist rule and, during the Bolshevik time, to the anti-communist cultural elite. According to Rivkin-Fish

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<sup>13</sup> According to research on intergenerational transmission, parents tend to transmit their political views to their children, especially if the parents themselves are politically engaged and hold consistent political attitudes (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009).

(2009, footnote 6), the intelligentsia today is ‘assumed to have inherited the moral capital of their parents and grandparents’. The intelligentsia is an imagined community that shares the ideals of culturedness (*kul'turnost*) and moral righteousness (Rivkin-Fish 2009, 81). Oborona activists identify with both the moral and professional dimensions of the intelligentsia.

The intelligentsia discourse is also incorporated into Oborona activists’ descriptions of their fellow *Oborontsy*. One of the informants described the typical Oborona participant as ‘an intellectual in glasses’ (*intelligent v ochkakh*). Intellectualism, conversational skills, as well as an active political position are used to differentiate the movement’s participants from the ‘apolitical masses’ of Russians. Especially new activists in the movement often speak highly of their fellow *Oborontsy*:

I like the fact that all are rather intelligent guys and girls. That they are smart, educated people. Simply, they are smart enough and not... how shall I say ... they are not passive, not lazy, they are not afraid to think and they are not afraid to realize that not everything is as good as you can see on TV. (Zhanna)

Strong engagement with intellectualism and emphasizing the activists’ higher education also reflects their resistance towards the state-initiated categorization of the political opposition as ‘hooligans’ or ‘mentally unstable’, which is enacted by the government and groups closely affiliated with it. By identifying as ‘intelligent and independent young men and women’, as Oborona referred to its activists in the Frequently Asked Question on their website (see Appendix 1), activists distance themselves from being categorized as either foreign-paid spies or extremists, definitions which circulate in the public discourses about the opposition (see Horvath 2011).

Some of the activists also talked about their worries concerning the intelligentsia’s ‘degradation’ (*degradatsiia*) when people lose their own opinions and start to be ‘trimmed with the same brush’ (*vsekh podravnivaiut pod odnu grebenku*) and converge with the powerholders’ opinions, as Vova put it. With this statement, he joins the post-Soviet intellectual and political discourse on the ‘death of the intelligentsia’, which claims that the intelligentsia has lost its moral authority and real meaning amongst the Russian people (Kotchetkova 2004). Kotchetkova associates this discourse with the construction of new identities in the changing socio-economic conditions. However, she (2004, 6.7) maintains that by joining the discourse of the death of the Russian intelligentsia, intellectuals in fact ‘leave for themselves an opportunity to reclaim traditional intelligentsia role and the superior social position associated with it’. This idea of the activists as intelligentsia with a certain role in society is a common discourse among the activists, and it is also reflected in Mikhail’s point about how activism is not suitable for everybody:

I don’t think that everybody should become an activist. Only in really extreme situations should everyone be involved in politics... But some people think that this is for them, and then it is very interesting.

However, one of the activists who had been part of Oborona in the beginning but has since left the movement saw Oborona not as a political movement but as ‘counterculture’ that emphasizes its own ‘otherness’ instead of even aiming at wider mobilization:

Most participants in the movement do not see a clear way to participate in public life under the authoritarian regime. [They] don’t go to a political [organization], but to a counter-cultural organization that aims not to win the support of the majority of the population, but aims at a vivid public demonstration of its ‘otherness.’ (*demonstratsiui svoei inakovosti*). (Email correspondence, May 2010.)

This critical assessment of the participants constructs an image of activists distancing themselves from the ‘ordinary people’ to legitimize their own identity as special or even a superior social group.

Many Oborona activists emphasize their movement and civil society in general as a place for self-realization and moral agency. However, at the same time, the idea of civil society as a public space where everyone could have their say equally is suppressed by the normative understanding of the intelligentsia as the representative of the ‘common people’. Differentiation from the ‘common people’ also highlights the activist identity as the moral educator of the masses, an idea that continues from the Soviet-period discourse about the intelligentsia’s role (Fitzpatrick 1992; Kochetkova 2010). Oborona takes up the intelligentsia’s traditional role as the ‘educator’, or transmitter of culture, and as the moral example for the masses by organizing various seminars and trainings for its participants and other interested young people. One forum for these educational activities is the annual summer camp that Oborona organizes and where the older activists act as ‘pedagogical agents’ (Crossley 2003) by giving lectures and workshops on the philosophy and methods of activism (see more in chapter 6).

One thing that is common to all of the activists and a central part of their identity is that they live in Moscow or St Petersburg, where the intelligentsia and dissidents have historically been more active than in other regions of Russia (Hornsby 2009). Even though there are small branches of Oborona in other cities, they are usually composed of one or a couple of activists carrying on oppositional activism under the name of several movements. Most of the Oborona activists have grown up in Moscow and St Petersburg, and the rest have moved there to study or to work. Moscow and St Petersburg as metropolises are the most highly developed regions in Russia and thus offer more work and leisure time opportunities for young people, as well as more autonomy and more freedom of self-expression than the provincial regions (Gromov 2009a, 5–8). In addition, since power is strongly centralized in Russia, oppositional activism is most evident in Moscow and St Petersburg; thus, these cities have the most organized civic or ‘non-systemic’ opposition.

The activists’ position in the middle class has also provided them with an opportunity for international interaction, which is reflected in the movement’s identification with western type of democracy (see more on chapter 5). Many Oborona activists are internationally oriented; they are studying or are interested in languages and traveling. Some have chosen to work in tourism or international relations because that would give them the opportunity to travel, and some have studied in international study programs or



participated in exchange programs abroad. For the activists, a certain cosmopolitanism in the form of traveling and being able to browse the Internet in English or other languages has opened their eyes to the problems of Russian society. Aleksandr mentioned that seeing how well things are handled abroad makes you see your society's problems more clearly. Mikhail too talks about his travels as moments of politicization:

I think another reason for these [liberal] views was when I began visiting western countries in 1996. Almost every year we were able to go to some European country at least for a few weeks. I looked at how they lived [abroad] and wondered why they managed to live better than we did. ... After some time, I realized that the internal structure of the society was different. It was based more on the self-consciousness of the people than on repression or coercion. So this is how I began to look at things from liberal points of view, and to think of the concept of human rights.

Also Igor, one of the older activists, adopted the same kind of logic in explaining his awareness and stronger concern for Russian reality:

So I happened to spend in my childhood in the Soviet Union and in Europe. And I had the opportunity to compare how people live here and there. It was probably one of the main factors why it is more difficult for me than my friends and my other fellow citizens... Why I am more troubled by the way we live now. I just know better than others, how much better you can live.

Oborona activists' self-understanding as the continuers of dissident traditions and as a part of the intelligentsia community is combined with the admiration of democratic ideals of the West and a wish to be part of the European or western intellectual community.

### **4.3 Gendered Activist Identity**

Even if the activist identity is constructed through an apparently non-gendered ideal of dissidence, cosmopolitanism, and intelligentsia affiliation, the activist identity is also gendered. As Skeggs (1997, 83) argues, bodies are physical sites in which the relations of class, gender, race, sexuality and age come together and are embodied and practiced. In Oborona, the oppositional activist identity is embodied in the activist's 'right look'. From Igor's description of his first contact with Oborona, we can trace the ideal of a 'real oppositionist':

Well, after that [the initial contact with the movement], one of the activists, Anton, contacted me. [He was] a kind of curly-haired young man. At that time he arrived, I think, a bit late. That kind of original (*svoeobraznyi*) young man. From my point of view, that is exactly how a real oppositionist in Russia should look. Kind of detached from worldly affairs; concerned only with politics.

Igor describes ‘a real oppositionist’ as ‘original’, different from the ‘masses’, and thus, he further articulates the idea of oppositional activists as being exceptional. From his quotation, we can also note how the Oborona activist is typically identified as masculine. This reflects the fact that Oborona is male-dominated but also further reproduces the association of the space of political activism as masculine. During my fieldwork, among the couple of dozen most active Oborona participants in Moscow, only four to five women participated at a time. However, in the St Petersburg Oborona, there were more women activists than in Moscow; about half of the participants in St Petersburg were women. This might have also shaped the understanding of activism in these two groups; in the St Petersburg Oborona, activists framed their movement more around ‘civic’ claims and human rights than on ‘purely’ political claims, which reflects the symbolic association of the political sphere as masculine and the idea of civic activism as feminine (Salmenniemi 2005). The St Petersburg Oborona group co-operated more with human rights groups, such as the Soldiers’ Mothers, and they also had participated in protests in support of gay rights. This indicates that in the St Petersburg Oborona women had more numbers and power to widen the group’s sphere of activities to issues that were outside the traditional understanding of ‘political’ – in the ‘feminine’ civic sphere. The Moscow group, on the other hand, concentrated on co-operation with groups that were understood as political in the traditional sense and wanted to ‘stay out’ of discussions on gay rights, for example (see more on Oborona’s identification as civic and political in section 4.4).

Gromov (2009b, 193) claims that the radicalism of the Russian youth movements keeps young women out of the activities. In his view, in the radical groups that participate in illegal protests women are only involved as girlfriends of male activists or have ‘copied masculine stereotypes of behavior and appearance’ (Gromov 2009b, 193). Although my observations have shown that young Oborona women are firstly activists, not ‘only’ girlfriends of activists, in the group, the more physical and aggressive forms of activism were often named as reasons for why there are so few women in the movement. In addition, even though activist women identify first as activists, more often than not, they are married to or in a personal relationship with a male activist.

This gendered understanding of activism that the Oborona participants enact can be traced back to the practices of political activism during the Soviet period and beyond. According to Gorsuch (1996, 643), even if young Soviet women carried the triple burden of family, work and participation in the Komsomol, they were seen as politically and culturally ‘backward’. Even if in the official rhetoric of glorified women’s emancipation, the Komsomol or Communist Party’s politics did not address the problems of young women in everyday life, but treated them as ‘private’ questions. Instead of easing women’s double burden, the Komsomol claimed that the reason for the lack of women in its ranks was their political and cultural backwardness. Gorsuch (1996, 644) sees this pattern reflecting the pre-revolutionary and Civil War image of young men as revolutionary; active, engaged and important, and the construction of the ‘public-male versus private-female’ ideal. Gorsuch (1996, 645) claims that especially young men kept holding onto the image of the aggressive and militant revolutionary man, even though the Bolsheviks tried to create a more disciplined and ‘cultured’ image of a Communist. In the Komsomol, young women were not seen as the victims but as the perpetrators of

inequality. However, young women themselves saw the problem often in the organizations' failure to address specific women's concerns (Gorsuch 1996, 646). Furthermore, in the Komsomol, the organization did not allow women to create an identity that could accommodate their family responsibilities and the Komsomol activities (Gorsuch 1996, 655). The same type of thinking of identifying women with their family responsibilities continues in today's activist norms and practices.

In Oborona, women are seen as occupied with family and household duties and that this is a reason for why they do not have time for political activism. Anna, for example, explained the lack of women activists in Oborona by saying, 'you know, it's like *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, and church)' referring to women's traditional role as caretakers as a reason for their absence in political activism. Furthermore, 'natural' differences between sexes were seen as a reason for young women's absence in political activities. Women were seen as more emotional and for this reason they could not relate to oppositional politics as well as men do.

Inna: But let's say, if we look at our movement, yes, girls are less often arrested in the Dissenters' Marches. Yes. We cry and scream there more easily, yes, boys protect us, maybe. But it is only in the public activities. In politics, we are equal. To say, in the inner life, in decision-making we are equal. That's why there is not that kind of comparison, who is better, who is worse. (Inna)

Many shared the view that women are too emotional for hard politics. One young woman activist<sup>14</sup> explained that she, unlike her husband, could never be President of the country, because she is so emotional and cries easily. Crying as a sign of emotionality and as a sign of feminine weakness was often mentioned by the young activists, both men and women, as explanations of why women are not suitable for formal politics or leadership. Igor proposed an explanation of the lack of women participants drawing on essentialist assumptions that represent women as 'traditionally' lacking interest in political participation:

LL: What do you think? Why do so few young women participate [in Oborona]?

Igor: Because, well, this is in many respects connected with Russian tradition. Here, women have never been politically active, that is, women always yield on men in public issues.

On the other hand, Alla explained to me that the St Petersburg Oborona had gone through a period of feminization:

LL: And why such feminization, what do you think?

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<sup>14</sup> This activist identified with the Freedom of Nation movement, which was a spin-off movement from the National Bolsheviks, and thus was not an Oborona activist. However, this quote illustrates the general mindset of the youth movements that can be associated with Oborona's identification processes as well.

Alla: I don't know. Girls, they are, in principle, in fact, more active. That is, on the one hand, politics and such are practiced by men. Well, traditionally it goes like that. But when the girls get to it, they are intensively engaged. But you know, it is the same thing as with cooks. Probably the best cooks are men, but still women do everyday cooking more often.

Another activist from the male-dominated Moscow group had a different view on women and men's participation:

I think most of them [women], are not fond of politics. And among the active population, I do not know how it is in Europe, but in Russia, at least among adults, men are the most active part of the population. That is, they die earlier, and they come to [vote at] the polls more. Despite the fact that we are fewer, we are more active. (Ruslan)

However, Ruslan is talking about formal politics such as voting while Alla is looking beyond formal politics, into the general activities of women in everyday routines of the group. She sees women as the 'workers' in the movement and refers to 'traditional' everyday responsibilities of women, such as cooking, to explain the gendered participation pattern. These explanations of gender differences can be traced back to the Soviet times, and they continue to dominate in gender discourse in Russia today (Rotkirch 2000; Temkina and Rotkirch 1997; Lyytikäinen 2009). However, Igor's and other Oborona activists' idea of Russian women as being 'historically' inactive is in fact contradictory to the history of women's activism in Russia as well as to contemporary women's activism. Several scholars have shown that women tend to be very active in the civic sector (Henderson 2003; Hemment 2007; Salmenniemi 2005; 2008; Sperling 1999). Women were also actively involved in both the socialist revolution and the feminist movement from the 1860s onwards (Stites 1978; Engel 1992).

Furthermore, Salmenniemi (2008) suggests that in post-socialist Russia, the close link between economic and political capital and their mutual convertibility functions as 'a major mechanism of the production and perpetuation of male dominance in the formal political system'. According to her, perceptions of femininity and masculinity affect the types of capital that women and men are able to collect and legitimately use. Civic activity does not require large financial resources or powerful contacts, which tend to dominate formal politics, but rather social and cultural capital can offer symbolic recognition and can be used as currency in the civic field. (Salmenniemi 2008, 86.). This gendered cultural articulation is likely to discourage women's participation in groups such as Oborona, which are associated with politics and political goals.

These culturally-produced meanings and ideas of male-female difference are embodied by the activists and performed and institutionalized in activist practices (see Butler 1988, 520). When I asked the respondents about the gender imbalance in political life they seemed puzzled and answered as if they had not even thought about the question before. They did not question traditional understandings of gender relations, which associated masculinity with cold politics and femininity with nurture and emotionality; this appeared to them to be self-evident. Bourdieu (2010, 164) refers to such taken-for-granted understandings in a given society as *doxa*, an experience in which 'the natural and social world appears as self-evident'. However, all the activists insisted that in principle the

activities of Oborona would be suitable for both men and women alike. Some wondered if the activities, which are mainly street demonstrations, were too aggressive and scary and kept young women out. Viktor explained that street demonstrations were not very 'female' (*zhenskii*).

In addition to the essentialist understandings of proper gender relations, women's different motivations for activism were seen as a reason for their absence from Oborona. Some activists explained that Oborona was lacking a 'charismatic' (handsome) leader, and therefore young women were not keen to join. Inna explained that 'in general girls like 'bad boys' more than intellectuals in glasses'. Aleksandr claimed that young women are more interested in joining the youth movement *MY* (We) because of its charismatic male leader. They did not pay attention to other differences between the movements, such as their different forms of action<sup>15</sup>. What the activists are basically saying is that young women's motivation to join a group is to find an attractive or interesting male companion. Interestingly, young women themselves employed this sexualized discourse as well and were not offended nor did they protest the idea of women not being 'real' activists, but using the movement as a means to look for a husband. This can also be linked to the essentialist discourse portraying women as 'naturally' more occupied with their (future) family and children than with politics. Activists explain women's participation in activism through a heterosexual relationship or marriage, both of which are strong social norms in Russia, where unmarried women tend to be seen as an 'anomaly' (Rotkirch 2000). This discourse was incorporated in the activists' self-understanding and affected the relations inside the activist group as well by creating different tasks and roles for men and women.

Even if many of the participants acknowledged that women were not represented in politics in general, they maintained that women and men are equal in decision-making within the Oborona movement. Katia referred to the group as 'something like a family' in which everyone had his/her say and was respected. Activists tend to see women in more legitimate positions within a family, in the private sphere, and this discourse was employed in reference to the 'activist family' as well. Women activists' self-understanding is based on women's social roles as mothers and the traditional gender roles are used to justify the gendered division of tasks inside the group. Referring to a civic group in family terms and gendered relations finds its parallels in Soviet dissident gendered practices. Chuikina (1996) describes women in Soviet dissident circles as the 'mothers and sisters' taking care of their 'heroic brothers'. According to her, relationships and mutual help between dissident friends often replaced relationships with their relatives. Articulation of gender relations through family resonates with pre-revolutionary forms of oppositional activism as well, as in Inna's reference to 'Pushkin's nurse':

When I joined Oborona in January, I was generally the only one [woman]. I was called Oborona's own Arina Rodionovna, who was Pushkin's nurse (*niania*). [Laughs]. So, I carried out my function: dress [them] warmly, pour coffee, there, feed [laughs], that way. Now we are two [women] so it is easier for me.

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<sup>15</sup> The movement 'My' is strongly identified by its humorous and artistic street performances, while Oborona defines itself as more political and participates more aggressively in mass demonstrations.

Inna's account shows that the movement practices reflect the caregiving tasks culturally ascribed to women. I noted Inna's role as the one 'pouring coffee' at the first Oborona meeting I attended. When others started to talk about future activities, Inna was busy making coffee and organizing the biscuits on the coffee table, and only after finishing these responsibilities did she take part in the discussions. Her role as a 'nurse' was also observable when activist men got arrested and ended up in jail without food and water. Inna organized a group to shop for food for the arrested men and also negotiated with representatives of the militia to take the groceries to the detained. Inna stayed outside the police station, waiting until her husband was released so that they could go home together. Inna saw women as the more responsible participants of the group and also as taking care of the men. She referred to her motherly instinct (*materinskii instinkt*) to explain her role as the '*mamochka*' (mommy) of the movement. Even if Inna herself saw her role as the nurse or mommy of the moment, other women activists showed admiration for her political skills as well:

Inna is great, she is such a very active participant. I like that even though she is a woman, men listen to her opinion, which means that her opinion is not the last. I like it a lot. I think she is a very strong person (*ona ochen' sil'nyi chelovek*). (Maria)

Even if the movement's practices were seemingly gendered, Maria interprets participation through the personal qualities of an activist and further articulates the normative understanding of an activist as masculine; she saw Inna as an activist as a strong person, 'even though she is a woman', but did not criticize the gendered practices of the movement. Activists view gender as a 'natural' category, and the traditional gendered division of labor is not recognized or politicized as an equality question.

This essentialist understanding of gender relations is explicit in Igor's explanation of women's and men's strengths in politics:

I think that women can... They have a trump card (*kozyr'*) that they can use: raising children properly. That is, they have the ability to add or to increase the number of normal people in society. Men, on the other hand, can participate in any activities that require strength and courage or a certain desire to take risks.

In Igor's quote, the gendered division of women in the private sphere and men in the public sphere is naturalized. Especially young women maintain that when they grow up and establish a family, they can no longer participate in Oborona as actively because of their family responsibilities. Women activists see becoming a mother as the end of their activist careers, which they tend to associate with their youthfulness, when they are not yet 'fully' women, but can dedicate their lives to activism. After having a baby, they need to move on to adult ways of protesting – legal pickets and other 'milder' ways of supporting the cause, to the 'kitchen activism' that they see suitable for adults. Inna explained that having a baby would mean ending her activist career:

I honestly said to the Oborona guys (*rebiatam-oborontsam*), okay, yes, now, this year I'll be coordinator, but I'll leave activism as soon as I start to think about a child. I will still

support Oborona, but [not participate] in all the rest. As soon as I know that I will have a child, I'll leave. Probably parenting is not easy (*ne prokhodit darom*) and I already think that it will be hard to find time. But until then, I will spend all my forces (*sily*) here.

This gendered understanding of activism mirrors the fact that Oborona is male-dominated, but also further reproduces the political space as masculine, distancing it from women and femininity and thus making it more difficult for women to claim their political position in the group. However, many young women participate in demonstrations and get arrested and are sometimes even beaten alongside the men. However, one activist mentioned that women are not arrested that often and that it would be a big scandal if a girl was hurt during the arrest, and therefore the police stay away from the girls. Pictures of young women are also used as symbolic representations of police brutality. Even if most of the protesters are men, women and other groups, such as elderly and children represented as 'weak', play an important symbolic role in demonstrating police brutality. Pictures of police dragging a young woman to a police car have shock-value, they are circulated on the Internet, and the police brutality is emphasized by referring to the arrested person's gender and age ('Only an 18-year-old woman'). An interesting reference can be also made to the demonstration tactics of the Serbian youth movement *Otpor* in which, according to Kuzio (2006, 366), young women played an important role in breaking down the distrust between law enforcement and the revolutionaries. Women protesters usually marched in front because the police was less likely to attack women. If women were beaten, the pictures of blood-stained young women worked effectively in the opposition's favor (see also van der Vet and Lytikäinen forthcoming).

Although Oborona participants do not as a rule question the gender *doxa* and the division of labor it entails, one new woman activist in the movement problematized the group's 'gentleman rules' by starting to shake hands with the men. A custom among Russian men is to shake hands with all their male friends when they meet and again when they leave. Women are greeted with a nod, and close female friends by a kiss on the cheek. I myself struggled with this group habit, since I often felt that my presence was ignored or only briefly noted with a nod. However, when Katia started shaking hands with the men, she started a new practice. None of the young men seemed bothered by this, but another active woman participant made it clear that she found this habit stupid. She laughed and repeatedly complained how uncomfortable it is to take your gloves off when you have to shake hands in the cold and explained to me that she prefers to give a hug or kiss on the cheek, which is more personal. She made a situation that would otherwise have been comfortable and normal, difficult and uncomfortable. She giggled and exaggerated her motions as extremely awkward in removing her glove or having to stand up to greet someone. Interestingly, it was this woman activist who wanted to hold onto the previous gendered greeting practice. I suggest that this new gender neutrality called her status as a care-taker for the group into question, which according to her own interpretation, was appreciated and gave her symbolic recognition in the group setting.



## 4.4 Creating a sense of Groupness: Generation, Friendship and *Obshchenie*

As was explained in the previous section, Oborona activists' self-understanding is based on shared gendered and classed ideals of intelligentsia, dissidence and positive identification with the West. However, even if Oborona's goals – change of government and a western-type liberal democracy – are political, the group has not created a shared political and ideological base. Instead, the political solidarities and affiliations in the group are more complex and range from libertarians to social-democrats. I suggest that because of these fluid and sometimes contradictory political affiliations, the sense of groupness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), feelings of belonging and solidarity, in Oborona are not based on shared political goals but on generational ties, friendship, and communication (*obshchenie*). Activists construct connective ties that keep the group together through the idea of shared generational experiences and action. Furthermore, activists' sense of belonging is enforced through friendship ties and family terms, which reflect the Soviet forms of group formation, youth hang-outs, the so-called *tusovki*, and intelligentsia's circles, known as *kruzhki*, which are defined by *obshchenie*: being together and communication (see Yurchak 2006, 148).

### Depoliticizing Activism: Oborona as 'Civic' or 'Political'

When talking about political ideologies, Oborona activists found it difficult to identify a common political reference point:

Vladimir: It's hard to position him [the typical participant]... We cannot say he is a social-democrat, liberal, or so forth. Everyone has very different views on political credos (*na politicheskiiy kredo*). He is difficult to position.

Also Katia explained to me about the irrelevance of different political ideologies in the group:

See, if we stand for democratic values, democratic values mean precisely that there can be social-democrats and there can be libertarians. We have Vova, who is a libertarian. Okay. Let them be. Surely, we are not United Russia where everybody has to be the same (*odinakovymi*)<sup>16</sup>. No. In fact, in the coordinating council we have very intelligent people who can accept each other's point of view. That is normal.

The number of active participants in Oborona tended to be small, and the turnover rate relatively high. Because of the lack of shared political ideology, the movement's ideological base relied on individual political solidarities of the participants. For example,

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<sup>16</sup> According to Olga Kryshchanovskaya (2011), United Russia also has a wide platform of different political ideas and thus it is in fact structured quite similarly to Oborona as accommodating a wide variety of political affiliations.

in the spring of 2010 Viktor explained to me that even if the movement supported more right-wing ideas, it could become more 'socialist' if people with socialist ideas would join the movement. During my fieldwork, this type of shift in political orientation occurred when two rather influential activists with more social-democratic ideals entered the core group and started to promote a more leftist agenda, such as the educational reform and opposing the state-proposed fees in education. In October 2010, Oborona was in the middle of this change. Its long time leading figure had left his position as a coordinator, and new activists entered the group. Inna's hesitation to define the ideological position of the movement at that time demonstrates the fluidity of the movement's inner politics:

LL: What kind of ideology does Oborona have?

Inna: Uh, at this point it's a complicated question. Because Oborona is undergoing changes in the composition of its activists, as well as some ideological [changes]... We have changed our objectives, goals, and strategies a little. This is a sore point (*bol'nyi vopros*).

When I visited Moscow after the dissolution of Oborona in October 2012, one of the core activists explained to me that 'the new people' had steered the movement too much to the left and therefore she decided to leave the group. However, instead of evolving into a leftist group, Oborona dissolved altogether, mainly due to the pressure of its more right-wing activists who did not support this path of development. In 2012, the more left-oriented activists started to plan a new branch of Oborona outside of Moscow in order to continue cooperation.

The weak political connectedness, i.e. the relational ties that link the activists together (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), was further reflected in the activists' definitions of the group as political or civic. My questions of Russian politics and the movement's political ideology created many different answers and activists were somewhat confused about the movement's ideological position. Despite Oborona's political goals, many participants presented the movement as 'civic' or 'societal' (*grazhdanskaia* or *obshchestvennaia*) instead of political (*politicheskaiia*). Some of the activists emphasized that Oborona does not have any political ideology whatsoever and is therefore purely 'civic'. Others saw that Oborona's ideological base was non-violent resistance and constitutional rights, while some described Oborona as a 'pure political project' or a 'political platform'. Activists' confused relation to political ideologies and goals reflects the diversity of political positions in the movement. Furthermore, this confusion reflects the shared idea in the group that politics in Russia are 'dirty' and that politicians are 'bad'. By insisting on Oborona's 'civic' nature, activists could distance themselves from these 'dirty' politics and portray Oborona as taking a moral higher ground:

Katia: It is like the Russian philosopher Berdiaev said, that the Russian intelligentsia thinks that power itself is a sin (*vlast' sama po sebe grekhovna*). Therefore, it is a sin to hold power and a sin to rule (*rasporiazhat'sia*) people. I am not a religious person, but I share the attitude of the Russian people that everyone who has power is bad (*plokhie*).

Activists' understanding of what is 'political' was often tied to formal political parties and politicians. One of the activists explained that before joining Oborona, he was involved in an environmental group to protect Lake Baikal and to stop the building of an oil pipeline in the region. He emphasized that this group was 'not political but civic'. Also, Daria makes a distinction between different themes, such as antifascism or human rights, as not being 'political':

And we don't only do political events but we also have people who are interested in rights-defending themes, antifascism, there are all sorts. Well, being anti-draft (*antiprizyv*, referring to army drafts), is certainly more about defending rights than about politics. (Daria)

For Boris on the other hand, 'political' means to fight for power and to try to be in power. He refers to Oborona as 'anarchist' in a sense that it is not taking part in institutional politics:

Well, for me, the internal structure of the organization is important, [it is] sufficiently anarchist, and for me it is not a political project. That is, Oborona does not exactly participate in politics, that is, it doesn't fight for power, yes. (Boris)

Because Oborona participants associate party politics with corruption and personal gain, they did not want to identify as a political project *per se* but frame the movement's activities as 'civic'. This resonates with the activist self-understanding, which is based on intellectualism and dissident traditions, and the idea of the intelligentsia as a social group that is distinguished not only from the masses, but also from powerholders (Kochetkova 2010). Traditionally, intelligentsia's 'true' place has not been in formal politics but in society, in moral critique. This suspicion towards politics and politicians is not unique for Oborona, but distrust in most public institutions is characteristic for Russians in general, shown by Shlapentokh (2006; see also Petukhov 2008). Furthermore, depoliticizing the movement is a way of overcoming political fragmentation within the group and to create commonality and feelings of belonging despite political discrepancies. Because political ideologies could not create a sense of groupness in Oborona, it had to be constructed through other attributes, namely through generational ties and friendship.

### **Generational Ties: 'The New Free Generation'**

Instead of political attributes, Oborona activists emphasized their shared generational experiences as an important source of connectedness and solidarity inside the group. For Oborona activists, mainly born in the late 1980s and the 1990s, the 1990s form an important shared generational experience as the 'new free generation', as Oborona calls itself in its Declaration (*Deklaratsiia*, see Appendix 1). Oborona makes a strong distinction from Soviet times and the previous generations by stating that its participants are 'free of the burdens of the Soviet past and care about the future instead' (*Deklaratsiia*). Even if Oborona activists have different opinions of the success of the reforms in the

1990s, they share a nostalgic relationship to the 1990s and the era of democratic reforms. They see the 1990s as a time of freedom and ‘real’ democracy with free media and elections. Some of the activists, like Aleksandr, believe that growing up in the 1990s and during the *glasnost*’ and *perestroika* periods was a good time for the ‘personality formation’:

I’m very happy that my period of secondary school happened during these years when the old Soviet ideology was already gone, but before Putin came to power, before this semblance of today’s ideology was formed. Or this fake-ideology (*lzhe-ideologiya*) ... This time was a lucky interval between one ideology and the attempt to make another ideology. Therefore, this was a very good time for personality formation.

For Mikhail, the general politicization occurring during the 1990s meant that he has been interested in politics ‘since childhood’. Alla too, talked about her generation and their ‘vaccination of freedom’:

And my teens, when everything is formed in the head, happened in the 1990s. And that’s why this is a booster vaccination (*moshchnaya privivka*). I always say that especially our section of this generation has the vaccination of freedom (*privivka svobody*) and those who are younger, they no longer remember, how it was at that time. (Alla)<sup>17</sup>

Activists recount their memories of the 1990s, such as watching the news or listening to radio with their families and friends of their parents who had gathered to discuss what was going on in the country, or they retell their parents’ stories of the 1990s. Alexey Yurchak (2006, 2) claims that the *perestroika* and *glasnost*’ policies were first thought to be yet another state-orchestrated campaign, but after a few years, Russians started to realize that something ‘unimaginable’ was happening. According to Yurchak, people living through these changes talked about their experiences of a sudden ‘break of consciousness’ and ‘stunning shock’ quickly followed by excitement and readiness to take part in the transformation. These experiences of the possibility of ‘unimaginable’ change have shaped the identities of the young Oborona activists and their individual aspirations and expectations (see also Swartz 1997, 103). Activists see that through their personal memories, or their parents’ stories, and positive identification with the democratic changes of the 1990s, it has been easier for them to adopt democratic ideas and to believe in the chance of future change as well. These stories create a sense of belonging to this ‘new free generation’ and also to the wider democratic movement in Russia.

Katia told me how her mother took to the streets during the skirmishes at the beginning of 1990s:

When there was all that situation of the year ’91, and ’93, my mom took to the streets. She struggled for democratic goals when the tanks drove. At that time, I was in a village far away from Moscow, but mom was here. I was really small. She wasn’t afraid that there were people driving tanks, and she took to the streets, like that, with her friends. My father

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<sup>17</sup> Alla did not want to reveal her age but mentioned that she is some years older than other participants in the movement.

did not go at that time, simply because he was not in Moscow, [and where he was] there was no place to go. But in general, they are more like, of course, not activists, not as active as I am.

Katia's story reflects the general nostalgia and positive identification among the Oborona activists whenever they talk about the 1990s as a period of liberation and struggle for democracy. This idealization of the 1990s as a time of freedom and active participation is a marginalized discourse in contemporary Russia. The statements of Vladimir Putin as well as of the pro-Kremlin youth movement *Nashi* associate the 1990s with a period of chaos, moral degeneration, and citizen passivity. President Putin has referred to the collapse of the Soviet Union as 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' (BBC News 2005). While Oborona activists refer to their parents and the 1990's reformers as freeing the country from its totalitarian past, *Nashi*'s manifesto refers to them as 'defeatists' who sold out the country. Instead of their parents' generation, *Nashi* represents their grandparents' generation and especially the World War II veterans as their 'heroes' (Hemment 2012). However, both anti- and pro-Kremlin youth movements articulate their position in relation to the past, and as the active 'new' generation with a promise for an active and dignified position that differentiates them as activists from what are seen as the apolitical contemporary young Russians.

Just as Katia does, also other young activists talk about their parents being liberal-minded and not supporting the current regime. However, the young do not count their parents as being currently politically active, and this way the activists differentiate themselves from their parents' generation. Aleksandr described his family as 'politically neutral' and Mikhail described his parents 'more like a kitchen-type of intelligentsia', referring to the Soviet dissidents that gathered in the kitchen to discuss and to write, read, and distribute illegal literature. For Oborona activists, talking is not enough to be counted as 'political' let alone as being 'activist', but activism requires some concrete 'action' through which the activist identity is performed. According to Zhanna, 'activism is not only talking but doing'. Oborona activists mentioned the street activities and humorous flash mobs and games, which involved running from the police or getting arrested, as a youthful way of engaging in politics in comparison to adults' unexciting pickets. (I will analyze Oborona's street performances in more detail in chapter 6.)

Zhanna suggested that being young means taking a more active and optimistic position, because young people have not yet become cynical as the adults are. In the movement's Declaration, Oborona activists describe themselves as 'thinking, daring, interested in the fate of their country, ready to take responsibility for its future'. Young activists in other Russian youth movements share this discourse as well. The pro-Kremlin movement *Nashi* uses this same discourse of dis-identifying youth activism from 'adult' political practices, and *Nashi* leaders talk about their movement as a space in which to do something 'real' (Lassila 2011b, 262). Interestingly, this same discourse of 'action' (*aktsiia*) as the embodiment and enactment of political beliefs is found in research by Pilkington and others (2010) on Russia's skinheads, who also refer to their group as a 'movement of action' and to other, non-active people as 'kitchen racists' who have failed in action (Pilkington 2010, 121). 'Action' and 'doing' seem to be shared discursive

frameworks of Russian youth activism across ideological boundaries; it is a way for young participants to distinguish themselves from the ‘apolitical masses’ and their parents’ generation, which is currently in power.

Also McFaul (2003) writes about the ‘new generation’ of Russians and argues that ‘this is the first generation since 1917 in Russia to come of age in (a) an independent Russia, (b) a capitalist economy, and (c) a ‘free’ (albeit not altogether democratic) political system’ (McFaul 2003, 65). He claims that this generation became politically aware during the period of 1990s democratization and their views differ from the views of their parents, and are very distinct from those of their grandparents. McFaul describes the younger generation in Russia as more pro-market, pro-democratic, and pro-western than other age cohorts. (McFaul 2003, 64–70.) However, even if Russian youth seem to distinguish themselves from their parents’ generation, they hold various and individual political and moral viewpoints from anti-western to pro-western and from conservative to liberal, for instance, and thus, labeling the generation too generally tends to give too narrow an idea of the diversity of Russian youth and their views.

### **Soviet Continuities of Groupness: *Tusovka* and *Kruzhok***

Oborona participants often talk about their group with strong affection and refer to other activists as their good friends or people with whom ‘they feel comfortable’ (Vova). According to Lebedev’s (2008, 226) comparative study on Russian youth movements, especially oppositional movement activists, emphasize the importance of friendships in their groups. Usually the first thing my interviewees mentioned when talking about benefits of participation were the friends they met through activism:

Probably, it is that, now for me, Oborona, the Moscow [group], in the first place, it is simply my friends. [---] But for me, it is not only like-minded people (*edinomyshlenniki*), with whom my views coincide, it is people, with whom I can spend part of my free time, also when not practicing politics, [we] can just go to the *dacha* (country-cabin). (Anton)

Some of the activists refer to Oborona and the opposition in general as a ‘political *tusovka*’. *Tusovka* refers to youth’s hanging out especially in the Moscow rock scene during late socialism, from the 1960–70s onwards (Pilkington 1994, 234) and more generally, interaction patterns of the countercultures of the Soviet Union located it in the informal public sphere (Zdravomyslova and Voronkov 2002, 63–64). Zdravomyslova (2003, 144) argues that *tusovka* is ‘founded on face-to-face communication between those who enact it’ and that these actors are ‘united by shared practices, attitudes, and styles of individual conduct and interaction.’ Since Soviet times the term *tusovka* has evolved to designate ‘all particularistic informal communication realms’, not only dissident and ethnic communities but also salons and different forms of gentleman clubs (Zdravomyslova and Voronkov 2002). According to Pilkington (1994, 234–237), *tusovka* includes sociability and communicative interaction (*obshchenie*) with like-minded people.

Many Oborona activists talked about the meaning of activism in terms of *obshchenie*, and they brought up sociability and discussions as one of the most important rewarding elements of their participation:

LL: What does participation mean to you?

Vera: Well, it means that I can communicate (*obshchat'sia*) with people who share my opinions of the Russian reality (*deistvitel'nost'*), who understand me, and with whom it is possible to express my discontent more openly somehow.

Katia: Well, everywhere, there is this element of personal communication (*element lichnostnogo obshcheniia*), with young people in general. So in a youth movement, Oborona, for example, is a remarkable case, where everybody marries. [Lists three couples who 'met in the opposition'.] So this is also an indicator of Oborona, that we have this kind of deep communication (*obshchenie*) that unites (*splochaet*) people.

*Obshchenie* can be translated as communication and being together. Alexei Yurchak (2006, 148) argues that *obshchenie* does not only mean talking and spending time together, but also involves nonverbal interaction and intimate commonality as well as intersubjective sociality. It is a performative act that, among other functions, includes judging and controlling of who belongs to us (*svoi*), to 'our' people (Yurchak 2006, 149; 103). *Obshchenie* is not only typical for Oborona, but other studies have noted the importance of sociability and mutual support in Russian civic activism (Salmenniemi 2008; Kulmala 2010). According to Salmenniemi (2010, 321), organizations have partly replaced the terrain of Soviet collectives and provided for the activists 'feelings of belonging in a time of socioeconomic dislocation'. Also Lebedev (2008, 210) found in his study on several youth movement activists, both anti- and pro-Kremlin, that friends, *tusovka* culture and *obshchenie* were considered as more important values than ideological factors of the movements.

Furthermore, Oborona is also engaged in the traditional *kruzhok* (inner circle, insiders) culture as a form of collective action in Russian history when the activists gather in kitchens, cafes and camps to discuss and debate. These kinds of activist meetings last many hours and many activists define discussion and hanging out as a very important part of activism. Walker (2002, 111) describes Soviet *kruzhki*, a pattern of collective action of tsarist Russia, as unofficial circles that were based on intellectual horizontal networks and mutual support. According to her (2002, 112), gossip and theatrical performances were important parts of these *kruzhki* (see more on performances and Oborona's forms of action in chapter 6). They created a social network, which was strongly defined by insiders and outsiders. Walker associates *kruzhok* culture with the private sphere during Soviet times when public gatherings were restricted. This closed culture of *kruzhki* continues in Oborona even if nowadays Oborona and other oppositional groups can also gather in Moscow and St Petersburg's public cafes. However, activists pay particular attention to the location of the meeting and possible pro-Kremlin 'spies' and change the meeting locations when they feel that their gatherings are disclosed.





**Image 5** *Obshchenie is an important part of activism. Camp Partizan 2010.*

For many activists *Oborona* became the most important network of their lives and for them activism became a lifestyle that is hard to get out of even if they wanted to. Vova told me that he tried to resign from activities, but somehow did not manage to do it. He started to think about all the personal contacts and the like-minded people he had in *Oborona* and in the opposition in general. On the other hand, he felt ‘who is going to do it, if not I’, a responsibility to continue alongside his *tovarishchi* (comrades)<sup>18</sup>. The strong networks and feeling of responsibility keeps the older activists in the activities, even though they might have lost some of their faith in the cause already.

The construction of *Oborona*’s groupness based on personal relationships is reflected in activists’ interviews in which they refer to their group in friendship or family terms:

Katia: [*Oborona* has] very strong relations and a very strong family that is built on the fact that people share each other’s ideals, and that they spend a lot of time together and so on.

Activists’ close relationships and their understanding of their group as a family are realized in young activist families. During my fieldwork in 2009–2012, three *Oborona* couples got married and some others established a relationship with activists from other

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<sup>18</sup> ‘*Tovarishch*’ is often used by the activists while talking or addressing other activists. This is also common in different pickets and demonstrations while holding speeches.

youth movements. Activist couples' lives are almost completely dedicated to activism.<sup>19</sup> One newlywed Oborona couple had their symbolic wedding in the demonstration where they showed up in their wedding costumes holding a poster saying 'Bitter to see the arbitrariness' (*Gor'ko, videt' proizvol*)<sup>20</sup> and, thus, they consciously associated activism and political struggle with their personal lives.

## Creating Wide Coalitions and Silencing Disagreements

As shown in the previous sections, Oborona activists' self-understanding is based on their strong resistance to the government, differentiating themselves from the 'apolitical' masses and on shared generational experiences and on friendly and family relations instead of shared political ideology. These dimensions of group identity are reflected in the movement's practices and politicization processes: firstly, as creating a space for wide coalition-building despite ideological disagreements, and secondly, in a form of emphasizing the unity of the group even if at the expense of restricting the space for free political debate inside the group.

Oborona activists' self-understanding as modern-day dissidents and 'exceptional' is reflected in the political boundary-making of the group. Even if Oborona identity is not based on political connectedness, all Oborona participants construct Oborona's movement identity through a strong dis-identification of the Kremlin and its supporters. The pro-Kremlin groups, such as *Molodaia Gvardiia*, *Nashi* and *Mestnye*, are portrayed as the 'enemies' of the opposition. However, many Oborona activists do not want to give the pro-Kremlin movements any official status as political actors, but represent them mainly as 'marionettes' of the Kremlin without any real political agency. They repeat the idea that there is only a small inner group of 'real' pro-Kremlin activists and others that are paid to participate in the rallies supporting the government or paid to harass the oppositional rallies. In this sense, pro-Kremlin youth are identified with the apolitical 'masses' of Russian youth from which Oborona activists differ with their active position in society. Furthermore, this categorization of the 'other' youth reflects Oborona activists' understanding of civil society as a counter-force to the state and civic activism as a form of resistance and protest (see chapter 5). A couple of years after its founding, Oborona made a decision that people working or being active in pro-Kremlin movements or parties were not able to be part of Oborona. Before this decision, some activists had worked in parties cooperating with the Kremlin to gain political experience or money while also participating in Oborona. This was no longer seen as acceptable, because activists claim

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<sup>19</sup> *Close relationships and weddings are not only happening in oppositional movements but as Gromov (2009a, 150) has observed, also in the pro-Kremlin movements. For example, the movement Nashi encourages its participants to get married and have children to help the demographic situation in the country. Nashi even organized a collective wedding event in its summer camp in Seliger in 2007, where up to 30 couples were married. In Oborona, marriages do not have such ideological goals.*

<sup>20</sup> *In Russian weddings, the guests shout 'gor'ko' after toasting for the newlywed couple referring to the bitterness of the drink. At this point the couple needs to kiss to take out the 'bitter taste' of the drink.*

that Oborona's and the 'real' political opposition's main idea was to be '*vnesistemnaia*', non-systemic, outside the 'system'.

Furthermore, the flexible political identity and weak ideological connectedness of the group allows Oborona to maintain a wide coalition and network of cooperation. Oborona has organized activities and protests together with groups such as the Free Radicals; a libertarian group that strives for the legalization of Marijuana, prostitution and freer personal use of weapons, as well as with the Nation of Freedom; a group that separated from the National Bolsheviks and carries on its imperialist ideology. According to a Russian activist, Oleg Kozlovsky (2007), 'in the conditions of today's Russia, such alliances are perfectly natural: after all, before you can choose among various doctrines, you first need to win the right to choose in the first place'. Since all groups have the same goal, to overthrow Putin's government, they can put aside the more substantive questions and concentrate on criticizing Putin's anti-democratic principles. St Petersburg activist Alla did not see any problem in cooperating with the nationalists as long as they 'talk about the same things as we do'. Oborona's fluid political-ideological identity permits these kinds of alliances between liberals and nationalists as well as between left and right. Even Oborona's Declaration states that '[w]e may have different opinions of the political and economic reforms of the 90s, but we won't waste strength (*tratit sily*) in needless disputes about the past, we are interested in the future'.

However, during its existence the movement has redefined its relationship with nationalistic and Communist groups, and especially to the National Bolshevik Party (NBP, '*Natsboly*') according to its changing participants' positions. In 2010, after one of these discussions, Oborona decided to participate in the National Bolsheviks' protests because they 'are in the same *avtozak* (police minibus that is used to transport arrested protesters to the detention centers)' and share the common goals of constitutional rights and fair elections with them (Gmail-list, October 2010, see more on nationalism in section 5.7). However, especially the new participants as well as the more liberal activists started this conversation regularly on the movement's email-list because they felt that Oborona should not cooperate with the '*levaks*', the leftist movements but to stay in 'purely liberal' circles.



**Image 6** *Oborona organized a demonstration with the former National-Bolsheviks from the Freedom of Nation group, in which they demanded French company Vinci to resign from Russian state's building project in Khimky Forest in Moscow.*

Even if Oborona co-operates with many different forces, there were certain issues that were off-limits in cooperation. Oborona's practices were marked by an unquestioned heteronormativity that limited their co-operation. Questions related to homosexuality appeared difficult to discuss in the group. Oborona did not take a clear position on the LGBTI question and tried to 'stay out' of it. Discomfort and uncertainty are also seen in the following quotation in which Inna struggles to find the words to define the movement's position on gay pride parades:

Recently there has been an acute question of gay parades. So our society is divided, also the opposition: who is for and who is against. We try not to take part in this dialogue, like, say, probably, we are more like for (*kak by, skazhem tak, naverno, my bol'she vse-taki za*). Let people live. Who are they harassing with their parades? So, we are also likely to be against homophobia.

The LGBTI community organizes demonstrations against the government and city authorities that have prohibited the 'Pride' parades in Moscow. One of the Oborona activists explained that they do not cooperate with 'gays' (*s geiami*) because Russia should

first guarantee general rights for all citizens before any subgroup can demand special rights. Instead of an opportunity to unite forces against the common ‘enemy’ of the repressive government, the LGBTI community was represented as claiming specific rights for a specific group before the ‘collective good’ of all citizens and their rights had been achieved. Oborona did not take any clear stance on any political questions related to gender, sexuality, or ethnicity and legitimized this by referring to the lack of citizens’ rights in general. Often questions of Oborona’s representation in demonstrations other than ‘purely democratic’ ones were debated within the group when the participants had difficulties in collectively identifying with various social claims, owing to their differing personal socio-political positions. Usually the advice was that Oborona participants could take part in any demonstration they wished, but to take an Oborona flag to a demonstration was not allowed without the agreement of everyone.

In Moscow, the atmosphere is very hostile towards sexual minorities and Oborona did not want to be profiled siding with this struggle as especially ‘gay-friendly’. However, some Oborona activists in St Petersburg had participated in demonstrations supporting gay rights creating confusion and even embarrassment among the participants. Oborona as a ‘gay movement’ was a topic of many whispered jokes and giggles, which revealed the discomfort that the topic created.

### **Avoiding Politicization for Unity**

When talking about differences between the activists’ political ideals, Katia explained that Oborona’s openness to all political views is a democratic principle. However, various political ideas were not openly expressed and debated in the movement but silenced to guarantee a certain ‘harmony’ in the movement. In other words, Oborona avoided politicization, bringing up new issues to political debates, and opening new spaces for political debate (Palonen 2003), which Alvarez and others (1998) see as one of the main features of a social movement. As Vova told, these ideas are to be shared only with good friends, but not in ‘public’. In addition, Katia told me that participants do sometimes talk about their political views, not during the meetings, but afterwards in a more informal setting. Therefore, group bonding in Oborona is based on like-mindedness in only one principal issue: opposition to the current regime and especially to Vladimir Putin:

Katia: See, our differences are mainly in economic [questions], but in the political program [our views] are essentially the same. And given that now our main question is political, and only after we have to decide economic [questions], because they just are not relevant (*ne aktual’no*) at the moment.

Katia’s explanation illustrates the general position of the group, according to which in Russia’s current political system it does not matter what people’s opinions are in questions of social justice, because there are no real ways to affect decision-making. She referred to state-controlled media and rigged elections as the main reasons for this and saw that the change of the political system should happen before trying to solve any actual questions. Politicizing questions of redistributive justice would not help the ‘bigger cause’.



Avoiding public political talk resonates with Nina Eliasoph's (1996, 263) research on civic practices in the US. She defines these practices as ways 'how citizens create context for political conversation in the potential public sphere'. People she studied tended to evaporate political talk in the public context. This paradoxical pattern of taking political engagement 'backstage' instead of openly discussing politics in the 'frontstage' (see Goffman 1990) is common for the Oborona activists as well. Even if they officially engage with opposition politics, the real political 'talk' and personal engagement with politics is done not 'in public' but in the sphere of close friends, backstage. Oborona's group practices are based on compromising in various political beliefs, and expressing one's political goals and motivations in the group is not supported. Viktor blamed the inner conflicts of the movement on individual leaders who have tried to draw attention to them and risked the consensual atmosphere of the movement. According to him:

Some leaders stood out who tried to pull the blanket over themselves [tried to take advantage of others] all the time, and they were not willing to compromise with others. So they started to make sharp statements and sharp moves that others refused to accept. And as a result, these groups have left the movement. (Viktor)

Viktor explained that these kinds of splits were unfortunate and especially since in such a small group as Oborona, people should look for compromise instead of divisions. Voicing one's discontent or political opinions was seen as threatening to the group's unity.

However, at times individual activists compromised this norm of silencing disagreements by addressing questions that were not supposed to be discussed, or proposed themes of protest that included questions that went beyond the political and constitutional rights and included claims of social justice issues, for instance. Since Oborona's idea is to be leaderless and to give all its participants a chance to organize actions, these ideas could not be formally 'forbidden', but the coordinators tried to convince others not to support a certain plan of action. One case that illustrates this steering of activities away from political questions took place after the general elections of the new coordinators of the movement. Two of the coordinators were continuing in their positions, but Oborona's general assembly also voted for two new coordinators who were new in the movement and also known to be more 'leftist'. In fact, earlier one of the older activists had told me about her concern that one these new coordinators was 'too radical' and might create conflicts inside the group.

Already during the first coordinator meetings after the elections, these coordinators paired up 'against' each other and started to plan activities in pairs. When the new coordinators were more in favor of direct action, the other, organizationally older coordinators supported various educational seminars as the strategy for action. Before the meeting, the more 'leftist' pair had already planned to propose a new 'cool' (*kruta*) action, details of which they did not want to reveal even to the other coordinators. However, they needed money for the action and therefore it had to be brought up in the coordinators' meeting. The theme of the action was to protest against the new educational reform, which would introduce patriotic education in schools and make some courses in secondary schools paid. Protest was also targeted against religious education and 'life security' courses (*OBZH, Osnovy bezopasnosti zhiznedeiatel'nosti*) in schools. This was a

‘threatening’ topic within Oborona since it included questions of free or paid education and of religion and patriotism, which could possibly divide people into different camps. However, this was never clearly stated in the discussion, which circulated around the practical questions of money and the benefits of the action. The against argument was more about scarce resources and on what kind of publicity this kind of flash mob was going to get; it was about cost-benefit efficiency. Eventually other coordinators agreed to give the money to organize this flash mob, but it was solely organized by the two new coordinators.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the flash mob was organized outside the Ministry of Education. One of the activists descended from the roof of the building with mountain climbing gear dressed with angel wings and a gas mask. The coordinator of the event explained that the angel represented a person graduated from the ‘Putin-Medvedev-school’, who had received religious education on the side of ‘life security’ education and patriotic education. According to her, ‘this angel knew how to load a gun and use a gas mask’. Already before the angel touched the ground, the police was on the scene. The angel-activist was quickly arrested and earned himself a black eye and a night in jail.

In addition to avoiding political disputes within the group, Oborona did not actively question the speech norms of the Russian political culture, although its political identity was based on resistance against Putin and the vertical power. One of the activists, Anna, pointed this out to me. She had just left Oborona and she mentioned that one of her reasons to leave the movement was her feeling that on its website, Oborona was in fact engaged in same kind of ‘brainwashing’ just like the government. She referred to this style of writing as the ‘sarcastic soviet style’ and continued:

If you write in the same manner as the United Russia writes, why should I respect that? Basically they are at the same level as the Putin’s party. That’s not very good actually. Just be fair, be impartial. [---] If you fight for justice or fair elections, for a fair political regime, you should not use this brainwashing stuff, you know.

Oushakine (2001, 196), writing about the Soviet dissidents and *samizdat*, claims that they were largely framed by existing public discourses on Soviet law and civic and human rights. Dissidents were able to undertake certain symbolic and discursive positions in society and to represent themselves as political subjects by exploiting rhetorical devices already present, which were created within the dominant symbolic structures of state socialism. According to Oushakine (2001, 199), ‘[i]nstead of juxtaposing their discourse against official discourse, instead of distancing themselves from the sources of this discourse, the dissidents chose a strategy of identification with the dominant symbolic regime – a strategy of mimetic reproduction of already existing rhetorical tools.’ However, the dissidents’ dependence on the regime and the official discourse prevented them from becoming reformers of the system. Using a rival discourse would have meant distancing

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<sup>21</sup> *This division in the coordinating committee (shtab) continued to be troublesome and quite soon after the action, the coordinators were talking about resignations and planning a new election for coordinators. Finally, these divisions led to this ‘radical block’s’ resignation from the Moscow Oborona and soon the whole group started to meet less regularly and finally dissolved all together.*



themselves from the dominant symbolic order and locating themselves outside the system that they wanted to influence (Oushakine 2001, 207). Anna saw this same kind of identification with the speech norms of the political speech in Russia and did not see it as original or open but perhaps reproducing the power relations and the dominant symbolic order. As I will show in chapter 5, both Oborona and the state enact similar rhetoric in their democracy and civil society discourses that makes understanding the debate and differentiating the sides of this political struggle difficult.

## 4.5 In Conclusion

After spending more time with the activists and becoming familiar with their political ideas and group practices, my confusion with the group's idea that I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, started to open up and I started to figure out the common attributes and grounds for solidarities within the group. In this chapter, I have suggested that the activist identity in Oborona is constructed along three main axes. Firstly, the activist identity is classed through a symbolic association with the intelligentsia and middle class. Activists have grown up in intelligentsia families and they identify with this class, and they articulate their activities through the intelligentsia's 'markers' such as intellectual dispositions, high morality, discussion skills, and educating the masses. Secondly, the activist identity is formed in relation to the cultural model of dissidence, which emphasizes the importance of resilience and non-conformism. Oborona activists often draw a parallel between the political field in contemporary Russia and the closed political field in the Soviet Union, where dissidence was violently repressed, and represent themselves as modern-day dissidents. The intellectual and dissident dimension of the activist identity is associated with the third dimension, international orientation or western-mindedness, which manifests itself in holding up western democracy as the ideal and re-establishing international connections. International experience and connections are incorporated into activists' self-understanding, and they are strongly connected to the ideas of how democracy is understood in Europe, as we can see in the next chapter. Furthermore, the activist identity is also gendered, through subscribing to essentialist explanations of gender difference associating the political sphere with men and the private sphere with women.

These dimensions of activist identity were strengthened in the group setting and created feelings of commonality among the group participants. However, instead of a shared political ideology, activists formed feelings of belonging through friendship and being together, practices that resemble Soviet traditions: the cultural practices of *tusovki*, *kruzhki*, and *obshchenie*. Paradoxically, the group that struggled with political goals was internally depoliticized; as Vova told me, he did not want to bring up his political views in public because they would divide the group, which, according to him, should be unified against the common 'enemy': Vladimir Putin and his government. Sometimes, in more 'private' settings, such as during summer evening gatherings around the campfire in the annual camp '*Partizan*', people got into heated discussions about the 'real' meaning of democracy and the role of the state in a free society. However, in more 'official'

situations, other activists, often the coordinators, silenced these discussions by steering the discussion back to ‘safer’ topics of practical planning for a certain demonstration or seminar.

Conflicting political views and their exclusion from the group created confusion and even quarrels, and new activists often found it difficult to be accepted into the movement’s inner circle. Oborona’s older activists were a tight group of friends and the new activists often ended up being left out of conversations. Furthermore, new activists often had no clear sense of the behavioral norms of the group and sometimes raised questions that were not proper to discuss, and thus ended up excluded from the discussion. Some of the new members learned the proper behavior and speech and were then included in the group. Often this inclusion was based on how well they got along with others on the informal or friendly level. Oborona’s intellectual jargon could also be confusing for many new activists. Many of the activists read a lot of academic literature on democratic theories and some of them are graduate students in political science or other relevant fields. For example Maria, who attended only one meeting, felt after that meeting that others were so smart and talked so intelligently that she felt that she could say nothing. Therefore, she sat silently and ‘answered if something were asked of her’. I sensed the same kind of admiration in other interviews that I did with new potential participants. Most of them did not continue in the group and the one who did, learned the ‘language’ fast and was considered a ‘cool’ and interesting personality by the older activists. He quickly achieved a coordinating position in the movement.

Oborona’s flexibility with regards to political ideologies created wider opportunities for forming political coalitions than a strictly framed political doctrine would have allowed. However, Oborona activists’ weak political connectedness and the strong inclination towards consensus inside the group contributed to the depoliticization of certain questions, such as LGBTI rights and social justice. Even if the movement positioned itself strongly against the government and identified with western liberal democrat practices, it remained silent on questions of social inequalities and economic liberalism, which might have created inner disagreements in the group. Therefore, the group activities revolved strongly around practical questions of organizing seminars and protest events and of questions of civil and political rights. Furthermore, Oborona’s group practices as well as its activists’ self-understanding drew on a heteronormative understanding of gender relations, which excluded the politicization of gender and LGBTI questions, which are often at the heart of many global social movements that consider themselves to be democratic. The restricted process of politicization also affects the movement’s ability to mobilize people when it cannot address questions that are pertinent to people’s everyday lives. For example, Lipman and Petrov (2010) have shown that Russians show more interest and protest attitudes when they feel that the mobilization concerns questions that touch their everyday lives, such as social rights and questions of redistributive justice. Oborona’s fluid political identity was concretized in the movement’s focus on abstract grievances that are formed around political rights and liberties, which formed the basis of their interpretation of democracy and civil society, as I will show in the next chapter.

# 5 'I LOVE MY COUNTRY BUT HATE THE STATE' – OBORONA ACTIVISTS INTERPRETING CIVIL SOCIETY, STATE AND DEMOCRACY

## 5.1 'Eastern' and 'Western' Traditions of Liberalism

I think that Russia has no other way than to eventually become a democratic country, so that one day we will achieve our goals. (Mikhail)

Oborona, as well as many other Russian liberal groups, draw on western liberal thought in constructing its discourse on democracy. However, Funk (2004, 697) reminds us that the Anglo-American liberal traditions 'are only some among many liberalisms' in the world. Funk (2004, 696) identifies liberalism and proponents of liberal thought as 'all those who, however else they may differ, advocate strong respect for the individual and individual rights, including rights to freedom of speech, conscience, and academic freedom; regard freedom as a fundamental value; and advocate a constitutional state, the rule of law, a division of powers, and a parliamentary system as well as some private property'. Funk (2004, 696) argues that even though liberal thought in Eastern and Central European socialist countries developed differently from western thought, liberal thinkers existed during socialism and post-socialism in the region. Nevertheless, liberal thought exists in different historical, political, and theoretical contexts, and thus, it differs from the classical and dominant forms of liberal thought in Western Europe and the United States. The 'eastern' forms of liberal thought include some of the aspects of 'western' liberal thought, but reject others, and it has formed claims different from Anglo-American liberalism. According to Funk (2004), many eastern liberal thinkers rejected, for example, the social contract theory, that has been dominant in western liberal thought, but have included statist and nationalist thinking, collective rights, and socialist values to their liberalisms (Funk 2004: 699–700). Also Russian liberalist tradition that developed during the late imperialist period and was re-established after the collapse of communism has been described as state-centrist; it includes a general conviction that a strong government is a necessary precondition of liberty (Hamburg 1998).

The aim of this chapter is to show that these western and eastern traditions of liberalism are represented both in the Russian state's as well as in the liberal-democratically oriented opposition's discourses on democracy and civil society. I suggest that both sides involved in this struggle over the definitions of civil society, state, and democracy are constructing their competing discourses as an entanglement (Fournier 2010) of continuing Soviet ideas and liberal or neoliberal thinking. In this chapter, I analyze the definitions of civil society and democracy that Oborona and the state engage with. I am interested in how Oborona activists' ideas of democracy and civil society are related to western liberal thinking and how they are translated into the Russian reality, and how they challenge the dominant Russian political order. I argue that Oborona not only appropriates the western liberal understanding of civil society and democracy, but also

articulates it with the strong political symbols of nation, state and leadership (see also Verdery 1996). As Laura Henry (2010) observes in her study of environmental activism in Russia, Russian activists operate in the middle of enduring and heterogeneous Soviet political traditions, combined with new post-Soviet practices. She claims that '[n]orms, identities, networks and institutional affiliations developed in the Soviet period condition the way activists view current opportunities for, and obstacles to, mobilization'. According to her, the activists have 'recycled' the Soviet era norms, institutions and networks in order to work and achieve their goals. (Henry 2010, 6.) In this chapter, I show that even though Russian political culture is influenced by western political symbols of individualism and neoliberalism, these principles are combined with social and cultural components partly resembling socialist symbolic frameworks.

In this chapter, first I will locate my understanding of liberalism and neoliberalism in the vast academic literature on the topic. Then I will introduce the concept of 'sovereign democracy' as an interpretation of a specific Russian version of democracy put forward by the Russian political elite. In 2007, a collection of articles named 'Sovereign Democracy' (*Suverennaia Demokratiia*) was published in which well-known political scientists, such as Vladimir Surkov, Dmitry Orlov and Vladimir Putin, 'who were directly involved in the creation of this doctrine' (*Suverennaia demokratiia : ot idei k doktrine* 2007, back cover), discuss the concept of Sovereign democracy. I use this booklet as well as previous research to trace the key ideas of the concept of sovereign democracy and how it bears on state and civil society. Then, based on my interviews with the Oborona activists, I contrast this official interpretation to Oborona's understanding of democracy, and show how both these interpretations of democracy and civil society embody ideas of liberalism and Soviet continuities.

## 5.2 Liberalism and Neoliberalism

Liberalism and neoliberalism are concepts that often end up slippery, undefined, and having different meanings when used by different actors. Therefore, in this section I present the general lines of liberal thinking as I have come to understand them. In particular, I concentrate on liberalism in relation to democracy and civil society, which are important in shaping the thinking and ideals of the Oborona activists.

I understand economic liberalism or fiscal liberalism, which draws on Adam Smith's writings, related to the organization of the economy around a strong support of the free market economy, deregulation, and private property. Economic liberalism is often contrasted with state interference in business, and supports free individual choice and equality of opportunity. In economic liberalism, the state's role is to support free flowing business by providing basic public goods, such as infrastructure or schools. The basic idea of economic liberalism is that free competition and free forces of demand and supply create conditions that eventually benefit all citizens. According to Smith's theory of economic liberalism, 'the wealth becomes the largest possible if everyone concentrates in gaining one's own profit, and if the state as little as possible interferes with the mechanism which the market creates' (Pulkkinen 1996, 17; Gaus & Courtland 2010). According to

Smith's ideas of liberalism, a certain 'invisible hand' steers the market mechanism so that the private interests turn into common good (Pulkkinen 1996, 18). Political liberalism, on the other hand, is tied to the ideas of liberty and equality in the form of representative government and freedom of choice. Political liberalism is often associated with free electoral process, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of media, toleration in religion, morals and lifestyle, respect for the rights of the individual as well as with opposition to racial and sexual discrimination (Waldron 1998).

Pulkkinen (1996, 28) differentiates the liberal view of democracy from the Hegelian-Marxian view by claiming that the liberal view is concerned with individual and group interests, and guaranteeing everyone's liberty, while the Hegelian-Marxist, more statist view of democracy, emphasizes the concepts of people and nation and the self-rule or sovereignty of people<sup>22</sup>. The liberal view is based on the idea of free individuals whose freedom to move is threatened by institutions of power. In this train of thought, democracy is a device used to organize the government and to curb its harmful influence on individuals, and to ensure maximal individual liberties. (Pulkkinen 1996, 28.) Furthermore, concerning political participation, in the Hegelian-Marxist view of democracy, the participation of everyone becomes important. However, it is the communal whole that acts, and individuals come to represent the 'will of the people'. On the other hand, in the liberal-individualistic model of democracy, importance is placed on the Constitution, which should provide the settlement and negotiation between various interests, guarantee individuals the possibility of intervening in political process, and to place leaders under surveillance, a task that is often allocated to the free press. In this view, general participation is not a value in itself, but can be viewed as a violation of privacy and their right to remain detached from politics if they wished. In this model of democracy, the division between political experts and the majority of people is possible: political experts take care of public affairs, while the majority of people go on with their private affairs, and only the choice and possibility to intervene and change the specialists needs to remain. However, Pulkkinen argues that, even if contradictory to liberal principles, the notions of people and self-rule are often deployed in liberal thinking as well. (Pulkkinen 1996, 30–31.)

Liberal views are especially dominant in western civil society and democratization debates. Pulkkinen (1996, 23) argues that 'the classical liberal civil society refers to action by free individuals, separate from and in opposition to governmental power'. According to Mercer (2002, 7), the liberal view in civil society and democratization debates 'reproduces the liberal maxim that democracy within capitalist society requires a vibrant and autonomous civil society and an effective state capable of balancing the demands of different interest groups'. Liberal theory sees state and civil society as complementing each other and as separate entities. Thus, Mercer (2002, 7) argues, civil society is seen only in its relationship to the state. State is seen as an important entity in providing an accountable government with free and fair elections, and civil society should act as the state's 'watchdog' and be granted civil and political rights and associational autonomy.

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<sup>22</sup> According to Hamburg (1998), Russian liberal tradition owes its intellectual inspiration to Hegelianism, from which also the state-centered form of post-socialist liberalism is derived.

Especially in the transition to democracy, as the Russian transformation to a market society is often interpreted, civil society is seen as playing a major role in pressuring for political change. After the consolidation of democracy, civil society's role is seen as encouraging citizen participation and acting as the watchdog of the state. However, this understanding of liberal democracy is strongly tied to the history of western thought. (Mercer 2002.)

In addition to a political or economic doctrine, liberalism can be also seen as a form of governance. For instance, Foucault argues that Adam Smith's thinking not only changed the thinking of economic and political realms, but also transformed the relationship between government and knowledge (Gordon 1991, 14). According to Gordon (1991, 15), Foucault saw liberalism as a critique of the state and as an attempt to define how government is possible, what it can do, and what lies within its powers. Thus, liberalism can be seen as aiming to place limits to the exercise of power by the state.

Besides liberalism, neoliberalism is also widely used in political and economic debates and too often it is not a clearly defined concept. I find the anthropological definition of neoliberalism helpful. According to Hilgers (2010, 352), despite a variety of theoretical frameworks, anthropologists agree on the definition of neoliberalism as 'a radicalized form of capitalism, based on deregulation and the restriction of state intervention, and characterized by an opposition to collectivism, a new role for the state, an extreme emphasis on individual responsibility, flexibility, a belief that growth leads to development, and a promotion of freedom as a means to self-realization that disregards any questioning of the economic and social conditions that make such freedom possible'.

In recent theoretical debates, the Foucauldian interpretation of neoliberalism and its governing rationality is often taken as the starting point. Neoliberalism is usually used to refer to a maximized form of market liberalism and as a critique of the Keynesian welfare state. According to Rose and Miller (1992, 198), neoliberalism 'reactivates liberal principles' and positions itself against the 'interventionist state'. Foucault's theorization distinguishes neoliberalism from classical liberalism by emphasizing the role of the state in creating the conditions for market mechanisms and fabricating subjectivities, collective representations, and social relations to support the diffusion of markets (Collier 2012, 190). According to Rose (2007, 141) advanced liberalism changed the relationship between the economic and the social, and according to the neoliberal principle, 'all aspects of social behavior are reconceptualized along economic lines'. Rose argues that this was not a return to 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism or the *laissez faire* type of government after the period of the dominant discourse of the welfare state, but a form of reorganizing all national policies according to economic logic in order to enable a market to exist and function. Furthermore, according to neoliberal ideas, the population is governed according to market principles and the possibilities for state intervention are minimized. This can result in, for example, the monetization of social benefits and the privatization of health care and insurance policies, as for instance in Russia (Hemment 2009).

Neoliberal thinkers are skeptical of the political authorities' ability to govern and see the welfare state as producing a dependency of the citizens on the state. Today's western neo-liberal discourse further transfers the responsibility from the state to the individual. In neoliberal rationality, individuals should 'strive to optimize their own quality of life and



that of their families' instead of putting the responsibility of citizen's welfare on the state or the public institutions (Rose and Miller 1992, 198.) According to Hilgers (2012, 358), '[t]he drive towards individual responsabilisation and the self as enterprise is a major principle of the neoliberal art of governing'. In the Russian understanding of democracy and civil society, the liberal and neoliberal ideas are interestingly combined with frameworks of statist state-society relations, as I will show in the next section.

### 5.3 The Official View on Democracy: Sovereign Democracy

Sovereignty and democracy: In this understanding two different phenomena are evaluated. Sovereignty is positioning the country externally, in the world; it is a possibility to exercise one's internal and external politics independently, without interference. Democracy is a way of organizing society and the state. This is entirely directed inside the country. (Putin 2006; *Suverennaiia demokratiia* 2007, 45)

In the Putin-Medvedev era Russia, the government has actively sought to install a particular notion of civil society and democracy as the hegemonic interpretation of state-society relations. Russia's system of governance has been described by western scholars as 'virtual democracy' (Wilson 2005), 'managed democracy', or 'stealth authoritarianism' (Hahn 2004). Putin's vision of civil society, in which social organizations are under the firm authority of the state as the highest executive leadership, has been called quasi-civil society or even pseudo-civil society (Evans 2006a, 149). Furthermore, Richter (2009a) suggests that 'Putin and his entourage adopted the rhetoric of civil society and bent it to their own purposes' (2009a, 41). These evaluations are often made from the perspective of comparing Russian civil society to the normative western liberal ideal of what civil society and civic participation should be, and seeing these as universally applicable. This understanding tends to see civil society as an independent and separate counter-force to the state and emphasizes individual liberties and civil society's surveillance of the state (Pulkkinen 1996).

However, according to Hemment (2012), the Russian state's official discourse on civil society is based on a view that the idea of civil society introduced to the country by the western-identified agencies in the 1990s is in fact flawed and oriented more towards western interests than those of the Russian state and its citizens. With sovereign democracy, the Russian government has proposed a vision of civil society, which is linked to state sovereignty (*gosudarstvennost'*) and in which self and nation are indivisibly connected (Hemment 2012; Richter 2009b). Western civil society development projects in the 1990s emphasized the importance of free civil society in the democratization process, and the concept of civil society has continued to circulate in Russia even after the international foundations withdrew their activities (Hemment 2012, 244). Civil society remained an important ideological signifier, but the concept morphed into new meanings in the country's modernization projects and in the context of the government's rhetoric of sovereign democracy (Hemment 2012, 244).

As a part of the struggle to define civil society in Russia's 'own terms', the government has strongly condemned the foreign support to Russian nongovernmental organizations. According to Putin's former advisor Gleb Pavlovskii, striving for western grants has forced organizations to accept foreign concepts of rights, which are not efficient in protecting the interests of Russian citizens. (Evans 2006, 150.) Statements about the 'Color Revolutions' also show the government's suspicion towards the West. Russian state officials have represented these popular uprisings in Central Europe and the CIS states, known as the Color Revolutions, as part of a western conspiracy and portrayed as a revolutionary threat to the country. Additionally, they perceived the protest participants of these revolutions as being trained by western political technologists and that western diplomats and intelligence agencies coordinated the rebellion (Horvath 2011, 22). Accordingly, the state officials' reaction to the 'orange sentiments' among Russian youth has been restrictive and precautionary. By portraying the western ideals of democracy and civil society as harmful or even dangerous for Russian society, the government has produced a discourse that frames the West and its western-funded Russian civic groups as a threat to Russia's stability and sovereignty. Another example of this suspicion towards western supported civil society organization is the law on NGOs from 2012, according to which NGOs engaged in political activities and receiving financial funding from abroad are required to register as a 'foreign agent' (*inostrannyi agent*) with the Ministry of Justice, and are put under heavier report obligations than other NGOs (ICNL 2013, see section 3.3 in this book).

The term 'sovereign democracy' has become a dominant concept in the official discourse in Russia. It was coined by Vladislav Surkov, a former aide of Putin's government, in his speech for the United Russia Party in 2006. This speech has been characterized as the strategic direction of the government and as an underlying ideology of the United Russia Party (Cohen 2006; Mäkinen 2011). The booklet *Suverennaia Demokratiia* (2007), which I use to trace the key ideas of the official discourse, starts with the text of Dmitry Orlov, the Head of the Russian Agency of Political and Economic Communications and a pro-Kremlin political analyst, who argues that sovereign democracy is not just an 'effective political concept' but an 'existing doctrine' (*deistvuiushchaia doktrina*) (Orlov 2007, 3). Orlov (2007, 5) argues that sovereign democracy can be traced back to the Russian Federation's Constitution, which defines Russia as a sovereign democratic state. He also refers to the statement by the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, Valerii Zor'kin, according to whom, 'our sovereignty is democratic, and democracy (is) sovereign'. Thus, Orlov claims, sovereignty and democracy are 'inseparable'. Orlov traces the right to state sovereignty back to the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and its agreements concerning the interference in another nation's domestic business. He emphasizes that Russia should be sovereign, meaning that it should 'independently make political and economic decisions' as well as be democratic, developing its own democratic institutions. (Orlov 2007, 7–10.) In the same publication, *Suverennaia Demokratiia*, Viacheslav Nikonov, chairman of the Foundation *Politika*, and a member of the Public Chamber writes that 'Russia does not intend to settle in a role of negligent pupil, whom wise and fair teacher lectures unlearned lectures', referring to the USA and its affairs in Guantanamo and Iraq questioning its role as the 'wise teacher'

(Nikonov 2007, 23). For the writers of the booklet, the main idea of the sovereign democracy doctrine is the right for a state to decide on its own democratic institutions without any interference or ‘lecturing’ by foreign powers, especially the United States. This sovereignty is combined with the idea of being an active participant in the global world. Many authors of the booklet refer to Russia as one of the great sovereign powers among other competing economic, political and military powers, such as the USA, China, India or the European Union (e.g. Nikonov 2007, 24). The importance of a strong country and its status as a great power is found in several of the president Putin’s speeches as well, which often see the strong state, especially in the form of a strong Constitution, efficient governance and rule of law, as preconditions for Russian democracy and its future (Brown 2004; Kortenemi 2009).

The adoption of the term civil society in the government’s rhetoric can be traced back to the *perestroika* era and the 1990s. During socialism, the Central European intellectuals introduced the concept as a nominator of political resistance to socialist states. Later it was mobilized by the international donor agencies working in the area after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Hemment 2004, 221; Domrin 2003). In Russia, Boris Yeltsin’s period of ‘revolutionary reforms’ in the 1990s ended in the defeat of the reformers when Vladimir Putin won the elections in 2000. Domrin (2003, 194) proposes that the use of the concept of civil society in Russia follows the pattern of another concept *pravovoe gosudarstvo* (law-governed state) that dominated the discourse during the *perestroika* and in 1990s. Domrin (2003, 194) argues that the concept of civil society is used in ‘Russian doublespeak’ indiscriminately and the use of the concept lacks any concrete meaning, and thus, it has become less meaningful. Furthermore, he describes the Russian state’s interpretation of civil society as statist, traditionalist and conservative (Domrin 2003, 210). According to Kortenemi (2009) Putin’s rhetoric on democracy accepts the universalism of democratic values, such as free and fair elections, multiparty system, free speech and human rights, but only with the emphasis on country-specific implementing of these principles.

While on the rhetorical level, the Russian state has rejected the western interpretations of civil society as an independent actor and a counterweight to the state as false, or at least unsuitable for the country itself, relying on Soviet nostalgia and Russia’s ‘own way’ of democracy. Nevertheless, the nostalgic relation to the Soviet times and to the statist state-society relations is interestingly entwined with certain liberal and neoliberal ideas. According to Zigon (2010, 12), ‘post-Soviet Russia became a space of experiment for the implementation of neoliberal forms of political, financial, institutional, and personal governance’ and neoliberalism has shaped new forms of business relations, consumer practices, as well as medical and welfare services in the 2000s. However, neoliberalism did not bring an entirely new set of personal and institutional values with it, but rather reworked existing values and practices into more efficient, rational, and reflexive forms (Zigon 2010; see also Collier 2011). According to Teplova (2007, 285), Russia, among some other former socialist states, instead of completely adopting a new neoliberal rationality, has ‘retained many elements of the Soviet welfare state, moving towards a mix of neoliberal ideas and Soviet legacies and institutions’. In regard to political and economic doctrines, the Russian government’s strategy is twofold: it has adopted a

strategy of ‘neoliberalism without liberals’ (Matza 2009, 493–4), in which the state discredits political liberalism, but simultaneously partly pursues neoliberal economic policies. Collier (2011, 161) claims that even though Putin’s political philosophy is not liberal, his government’s economic reforms can be considered neoliberal, especially in the sphere of fiscal administration and social welfare. Kryshtanovskaya (2008), too, has defined Putin’s modernization model as concentrated on modernizing the economy without reforming or liberalizing the political system. One recent example of these measures is the monetization of the Soviet period’s benefits (*Igoty*) in 2005, which Julie Hemment (2009, 40) claims to be ‘a clear step in the direction of a liberal welfare state’, and which started an unusual active protest movement against the reform by people who were not usually involved in political activism.

Some neoliberal values are also included in the government’s ideas of civil society and democracy. State authorities have adopted a neoliberal vision of seeing civil society as the third sector or a state helper in producing services as well as endorsing a neoliberal idea that citizens should discipline themselves to take the responsibility for themselves and the state; to self-govern (Hilgers 2010; Rose and Miller 1992). Civil society organizations’ increased role in service provision has been interpreted as a form of this self-governing principle in which state responsibilities are transferred to the third sector (see e.g. Cruikshank 1999). However, while the state promotes individual responsibility and the third sector as service provider, it does not see civil society as a watchdog or counter-force to the state as political liberals do, but aims to keep it under state control.

Mäkinen (2011, 149) has argued that the official interpretation of sovereign democracy does not see Russian citizens as ‘educated enough’ to self-organize, and this is used to legitimize the strong status of the state. In contemporary Russia, the strong leader-centeredness, also characteristic of the Soviet era, is legitimized by the Constitution introduced in 1993, which president Putin often refers to in his political speeches as legitimizing the authority of the president in control of the state and its citizens (Korteniemi 2009, 63). According to Salmenniemi (2010, 324), ‘although the practices and infrastructure of government have been transformed since the Soviet era, the underlying logic of the government has remained distinctively similar’. Moreover, Zigon (2010, 14) does not see neoliberalism as a pure import from the West, but claims that ‘the most important values and practices that are central to neoliberalism —responsibility and ethical practices of work on the self— were also central not only to Soviet biopolitics, but to contemporary Russian Orthodox moral theology and practice as well’. The Russian state has appropriated neoliberal ideas selectively; civil society guarantees certain liberties and self-governance, as long as it supports the state’s policies and does not question state power. Furthermore, neoliberal elements find resonance with certain state ideals continuing from the Soviet period.

Western critics claim that sovereign democracy gives the authorities power to ‘manage’ the democratic process in order to secure the state sovereignty (Horvath 2011, 20). Others have argued that democracy is not a goal of the Russian state, but more a means to achieve a political system that is in fact very different from western democratic ideals (Lukin 2009, 85). The state’s partial engagement with the western model of liberal democracy can thus be seen as instrumental or as a ‘pragmatic choice’ that is needed for

co-operation with the West, and, for instance, to gain modern technology needed for the modernization project (Mäkinen 2011, 150). Sovereign democracy is interpreted as a statist model that ‘fetishizes’ the state with its over-emphasis on sovereignty (Prozorov 2009, 68, cited in Mäkinen 2011, 145). This over-emphasis is also found in the state’s ideas of civil society. According to Salmenniemi (2010), the Russian authorities use ‘selective corporatism’ to support and cooperate with organizations which do not question the state authority and are willing to help the government to implement its policies and services. This, together with the principle of selective punishment, has made it difficult for organizations criticizing the government to operate in Russia. Furthermore, nationalist rhetoric plays an important role in the official discourse on civil society. One of the central elements of sovereign democracy is to create an image of Russia as a unified nation struggling with real and potential enemies. Those who criticize the state are labeled as ‘dangerous extremists serving foreign masters’. (Richter 2009, 47.)

‘Russia Votes’ (2012) survey results show that many Russian citizens have accepted this idea. According to the survey, support for Russia’s ‘own type’ of democracy has been around 40–50 percent in the 2000s, while the support for western-type democracy has been around 20 percent. However, the recent protest wave in 2011–12 against falsified elections has lowered support for ‘Russia’s own way’. Interestingly, not only has people’s support for the European way of democracy grown, but also the support for the ‘Soviet type of democracy’ has become more popular (Russia Votes 2012). This indicates that people still tend to express nostalgia towards the Soviet times and continue being suspicious of ‘foreign’ ideas.

In contemporary Russia, neoliberal ideals and policies have not entirely supplanted Soviet practices, but rather these rationalities have merged to construct something new: an entanglement of liberal and Soviet ideas. This entanglement is a combination of various rationalities that define the regime and is reflected in the ‘dualism’ (Sakwa 2011a) or ‘hybridity’ (Robertson 2009) of the political regime. I suggest that the sovereign democracy discourse is an example of this combination of Soviet and liberal ideas: it enforces the strong state and restricted political field but incorporates the liberal values of self-organizing civic actors in the third sector. Civil society is harnessed as the state’s helper in terms of providing services and supporting political programs that economically benefit the state, but do not question its authority. The government representative, Gleb Pavlovskii, has characterized human rights groups as ‘dissident organizations’ that are archaic and do not solve any social problems and which therefore do not form ‘genuine’ civil society (Evans 2006a, 150). Thus, Russian authorities’ interpretation of democracy and civil society builds on classical liberalism on the rhetorical level, talking about a flourishing civil society and the strong Constitution guaranteeing equal rights, but inserting authoritarian ideas of a strong state and president in control of all sectors of the society into this doctrine. On the other hand, the state has introduced new social reforms, such as the monetization of state guaranteed benefits, which can be seen as restructuring the welfare state along neoliberal lines. Nevertheless, even in this sense, the state does not allow free markets to guide society, but the state uses its power to selectively guide economic actors and thus tries to combine free market ideas and state control (see also Shev’tsova 2006).

## 5.4 Oborona Defining Democracy: Liberalism against Sovereign Democracy

Because the state strongly regulates civil society and aims to monopolize the very definitions and meanings of civil society, the opposition actors struggling to challenge these definitions have difficulties having their voice heard. While the state partly rejects the western liberal-democratic ideas, the liberal political opposition promotes the western conceptualization of civil society to challenge the state's sovereign democracy model. The struggle concerns normative definitions of the nature of democracy: According to the state, liberal democracy is false and harmful, while for the liberals such as Oborona activists, it is the only way. Oborona participants consider the idea of sovereign democracy to be false; not a variant of democracy, but more of a trick to show the other nations that everything in the country is going according to democratic principles, rather than it being genuine democracy:

Pavel: We have very smart power holders in this respect. ... They do not cross the line. On the one hand, everything is kept under control, but on the other hand, to the outside observer, it may seem that everything is good here.

For many activists, the model of sovereign democracy appears as a way of dominating and repressing 'real' civil society and its actors. Katia refers to sovereign democracy as a 'mutant term' that makes no sense in real life:

LL: Well, what do you think, what does sovereign democracy mean?

Katia: Well, in general, it is a kind of invented term. Of course, it shouldn't exist. It is a kind of mutant term (*termin-mutant*). The head is of one animal and the body is of another animal. Of course, something like sovereign democracy never exists. It exists only in the presentations by Kremlin employees. So it is only a cover-up of the reality (*prikrytie real'nosti*), a kind of high rhetoric of obscure words.

Katia makes a distinction between the rhetoric of the state and the actual reality that she has experienced as an activist. She resisted the sovereign democracy discourse and saw it as just 'obscure words'. In addition, Viktor takes a strong stand against the sovereign democracy discourse and sees the adoption of the western form of civil society as Russia's only option:

Monarchy, Communism – these we invented ourselves, but now we are looking to the West. We don't understand what is going on there, but we want to have that too. [---] And because Russia doesn't have that on its own, there is only one way to civil society and people need to gradually realize this. And they will realize it because there is no other alternative. It will be either some kind of mess in the head or a democratic society (*libo kakaia-to kasha v golove, libo demokraticeskoe obshchestvo*). (Viktor)

Viktor's quote about the future of Russian civil society is an example of how Oborona participants draw on western ideas of civil society. The quote also speaks of the



normalization of the civil society concept as something naturally good and desirable even when one does not understand ‘what is going on’. The ‘West’ is used as a symbol of development and civilization without defining it more concretely. This resonates with the findings of Omel’chenko and Flynn (2002, 79) who in their research on youth’s images of the West found that it was perceived by the youth as a historically and culturally constructed ‘virtual’ space beyond physical geographical borders. The youth in their research often symbolically associated the West with the developed world and as ‘having the ‘very best’ of everything’ (Omel’chenko and Flynn 2002, 82).

Oborona activists challenge the state’s concept of state-controlled civil society and they contradict this model with their own view of civil society, associated with individual freedoms and civil society as a counterweight to the state. For example, Boris explains civil society as a society of free citizens. He claims that individuals should defend their freedoms from state tyranny:

And when we talk about civil society, for me, it is a society of people who A) have freedom, B) are able to defend this freedom from the state. Because it is clear that the state always wants to take away these freedoms. And respectively, to be a citizen, it is to be a person who A) is free, and B) is able to defend his freedom. (Boris)

The quote illustrates the prevailing suspicion of the state by the liberal Oborona activists. Boris represents the state as inherently repressive and sees citizens in a constant struggle against the state. Boris’s idea of civil society is an example of what Chris Hann defines as using civil society as a ‘slogan’ in opposition to the ‘demonic state’ (Hann 1996, 7). Boris also strongly engages with liberalism when he conceptualizes citizens with freedom and civil society (see Funk 2004, 696). For him, citizens should be free from the state and actively defend their rights in the sphere of civil society.

Daria, too, saw civic activism synonymous to being in opposition to the state because according to her, ‘there is no such thing as a pro-Kremlin civic activist’. Vitaly, on the other hand, explained that Oborona’s main goal is to ‘strengthen civil society’ so that civil society would become stronger than the state and could put today’s too strong state power ‘in its place’. These statements reflect the liberal ideas of citizens’ surveillance of the state and the possibility of citizen intervention in state affairs (e.g. Pulkkinen 1996). Furthermore, Oborona activists associate Putin’s rule as similar to the Communist Party’s totalitarian rule and argue that there is no democracy in Russia:

[They] have already formed a totalitarian regime. I mean, yes, the power of one. In general, all in the government are dancing to the tune of one comrade. People are afraid to express their opinions openly. (Inna)

Even if Oborona activists oppose the current government, they emphasize that democratic institutions exist in Russia, mainly the Constitution. However, while the state’s official rhetoric draws on the Constitution to legitimize the model of sovereign democracy, Oborona positions itself ‘against the state that violates the Constitution’ as one of the activists put it. Ruslan compared the Russian Constitution to the US Constitution, setting

the latter as a norm against which to measure Russian democracy. He saw the Russian Constitution itself as democratic but not respected by the state:

That is, there is the Russian Constitution, yes, the Soviet Union also had the Constitution that would compete with the United States' Constitution in its democracy. That is, there are some sorts of human rights in the Constitution, but these rights are not respected.

On the other hand, according to Pavel, the laws lose their meaning and no one respects them if they are implemented by the 'illegitimate authority' that got its power through falsified elections and implements laws against the principles of the Constitution. Therefore, Oborona activists' criticism against the state is not so much of criticism of the existing democratic structures, but of the authorities' implementation of laws and regulations. Activists see the Russian Constitution as a possible base for democratic society, but criticize the double standards or the dual nature of the state, reflecting what Sakwa (2011a; 2010) has referred to as incoherence of the formal and informal structures. He defines the Russian state as a 'dual state', which is split into two realities: the first is a normative state defined by constitutional law and order, the second is an administrative regime that is defined by informal relations (Sakwa 2011a).

Furthermore, Oborona activists mobilize the transition discourse by representing the European or western model of civil society as an inevitable destination of the Russian future (see also Omel'chenko and Flynn 2002, 82). This teleological understanding of the former socialist countries following the development path of western democracy and capitalism was a widely shared idea in the West after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, but subsequently gained increasing criticism (Alapuro, Liikanen, and Lonkila 2004). According to Martyanov (2005, 177), 'in Russia, transitology is historically linked to the dogmatic Westernism of those from Peter the Great and Peter Chaadaev to Soviet dissidents, romantic liberals, "democrats", and right-wing radicals from marginal political parties'. The year 1998, after the economic crisis, was a turning point in Russia, when the political discourse of democracy as anti-communism represented by transitology, was defeated and transformed from a dominant to a marginal discourse in politics. As a result of this, 'such words as democrat, liberal, and reformer turned into pejorative epithets' (Martyanov 2005, 187–8). Oborona and the Russian state are engaged in a symbolic struggle over the definitions of these terms and their evaluation as inherently 'bad' or 'good'.

Even if scholars have suggested that we live in 'post-post-socialist' condition (Sampson 2002; see also Alapuro, Liikanen, and Lonkila 2004), transition discourse is still typical for many scholarly analyses and democratization projects (Coles 2007; Sampson 1996; Greenberg 2010). This discourse assumes that transition is always *to* something and, in this case, it is to transform Russia into something that we have in the 'West'. According to Sampson (1996, 125), the problem of these transition development projects has been that civil society is not seen as a model or ideal but as a reflection of reality. This resonates with Katia's view above of sovereign democracy being 'just rhetoric' and the western idea of civil society being 'real'. Sampson (1996) argues that often many 'exported systems' fail because they are introduced to a new context. However, the 'exporting' agencies, as well as Oborona activists, rather tend to explain this 'failure' in

terms of legacies from the past, resistance, or socialist mentality. Sampson (1996) maintains that the transfer of western models is not only imposed by the West but also facilitated by the Eastern European actors who sought to ‘domesticate’ the introduced forms and try to shape them to their own interests (on domestication, see Alasuutari 2013). Oborona activists see themselves as intermediates translating a western understanding of democracy to Russia, which also resonates with their identification with the intelligentsia traditions of ‘educating the masses’.

Oborona activists suggested that because of the ‘Russian mentality’ and history of socialism, building civil society in Russia would take dozens of years if not a hundred. Aleksandr associated the ‘Putinian present’ with Soviet repression and did not believe that Russia would have free civil society during his lifetime, but put his hope on the next generation, ‘which will no longer be burdened by our past and the Putinian present, and may build something good’. Other activists, too, associate the current government and the United Russia Party as similar to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:

According to the official data, United Russia has more than a million members in the country. It’s clear that all these people are not there because of their beliefs (*ne po udezhdeniïam*), but just as in Soviet times, membership in the Communist Party promoted one’s career. (Anton)

Anna’s view on the future of Russia describes her disappointment towards the government, but also engages with a certain fatalism or the impossibility of change:

I don’t even think that there is a future in Russia, to be honest, not much. Because we have had a few thousand years, 2000 years of tsarism, we had a Tsar, and then the revolution, a few years of freedom. Then 70 years of totalitarianism. Then a few years of freedom. Then we have again totalitarianism, and this is not by accident. We can hardly overcome this circle. It is so seated in people’s minds. People are passive, people do not care. I doubt that anything can be changed. Fundamentally (*kardinal’no*). Most likely we are seeing before us another long period of totalitarianism, then again a short period of freedom, and then the same thing again. (Anna)

Anna sees the reason for the lack of freedom in people’s mindset as being formed by totalitarianism. According to Bergman (1998, 257–258), the Soviet dissidents already saw totalitarianism as a psychological phenomenon and as a way of creating a distinctive mentality in people, thus yet again in this matter Oborona activists engage with the framework that continues from the Soviet period.

## 5.5 Overcoming Citizens’ ‘Sovietness’ with Liberalism?

Oborona activists see their and other ‘real’ civil society actors’ role in democracy building as conveying liberal-democratic values to Russians, who they view as still dependent on the totalitarian state and living in a paternalistic relationship with it. According to Vera, most of the people do not care what goes on around them, and therefore their

consciousness needs to be ‘changed’ (*nado soznanie liudei meniat*). Vitaly, on the other hand, claimed ‘people already live in a new state but still continue living under the old rules (*po starym pravilam*)’. According to Viktor, the concept of civic activism is not Russian and therefore Russians had not yet adopted it. Many activists mentioned educating ‘ordinary’ Russians to understand and approve the western model of civil society as one of Oborona’s goals. Activists also expressed frustration that people did not understand what was good for the country (and consequently, for themselves). Katia saw that the ‘common people’ did not understand civic activism and are not used to take up their civic position:

It is a very big problem that ordinary people (*obichnye liudi*) do not understand what we do and think that it is in general some kind of agitation (*kramola*). Something awful. That is, societal activism has no contact with common people. Here, people are not used to exercise their citizen’s position; they don’t understand what it is. In fact, that is one of the opposition’s main problems. (Katia)

Activists talked about the ‘mentality’ of the ‘ordinary people’ as a hindrance to the development of civil society in Russia. According to Inna, ‘unfortunately, a Russian person is lazy and apolitical by nature’ and there are not enough civic activists yet to do something to change the situation in the country. Vova, on the other hand, described Russians as prone to fatalism and hopeless that anything will ever change. Oborona participants explained that Russians are apolitical and apathetic because of the history of state-socialism, which killed all civic initiative and left people with a deep distrust of the state and its leaders.

When I talked with Pavel about the electoral system in Russia, he explained that even though people are dissatisfied with the political situation in the country, they ‘continue sitting in the kitchens’ because they think that they are ‘powerless vis-à-vis the state machinery’. According to Pavel, ‘the fight is really desperate and hopeless in many ways, but if everyone does everything that depends on him, together we can achieve some kind of a result’. Bergman (1998) argues that this kind of thinking was also popular among the reformers of the Gorbachev era, who perceived that ‘Soviet totalitarianism was a logical culmination of Russian culture and history, its emergence and eventual ascendancy in Russia a reflection of certain deficiencies in the Russian national character.’ According to one of the 1990s’ reformers, L. A. Sedov, Russian people’s personality traits, such as ‘a veneration of force, an extreme sensitivity to criticism, an inability to empathize, a tendency to conform, and an unwillingness to confront adversity’ made them especially susceptible to totalitarianism. (Bergman 1998, 263–264). This essentializing and deterministic discourse blames the people for not filling their citizen’s position, but does not problematize why the opposition is incapable of transmitting their ideas to the ‘common people’.

Furthermore, one of the long-time activists, Vova, took up the issue of personified power and interpreted the creation of civil society to be possible only by removing the current government and especially Vladimir Putin, whom he represented as ‘destructive’ to civil society because of his authoritarian style. Endorsing the aforementioned suspicion of the state and emphasizing the importance of individual freedoms, Vova claimed that

only after liberating the citizens from the strong grip of the state, they could start to build civil society and take their future ‘in their own hands’. He saw this liberation of people as the task of Oborona:

Well, let’s say, (we) have to convey to people that the future of the country and their personal future depend on them, that they are responsible for their actions, and their future depends on their personal actions. That no one, not any state, no national leader does anything for them, that all this depends on themselves. If (we) succeed in explaining all this, to overcome their dependency that is imposed (*naviazynvaetsia*) on them and which is characteristic of a totalitarian regime, I think there is a future for Russian civil society. (Vova)

The idea of responsabilization of the individual is a central feature of neoliberal rationality. In Vova’s quote, as well as in Katia’s quote above, the idea of people’s own responsibility as well as their country’s future and well-being is articulated in the context of democracy and civil society. Also, Igor sees political apathy stemming from a person and as an individual problem, and does not bring up any structural reasons for youth’s apathy in Russia:

LL: Do young people have possibilities to influence (Russian) society?

Igor: Perhaps they have. I think they have. (One) just has to act more actively and somehow to unite and defend his/her interests.

Interestingly, Oborona activists engage with the idea that Russians are not ready for political activism or revolution yet, which resembles the state’s idea of people not being educated enough to take responsibility, as discussed above (see section 5.3). The long-time leading figure of the Moscow Oborona saw the movement’s function as helping people mobilize when they are ready to. He is familiar with the Color revolutions, and sees these events as an example of what should happen in Russia as well:

In fact, we need to prepare a group of core activists who will be able to help people organize popular protests when people are ready for that. I’m sure, and it also comes from what I’ve learned when I studied the non-violent revolutions in other countries, that such revolutions are never appointed. They happen when there are factors in place for them and when people are unhappy with the government, and when the government is weak and so on. It’s not something you can really influence. So, we have to prepare for that time and it will come eventually. And when it comes, we just need to make sure that when people are ready to protest that their protest is not in vain.

Another activist, Aleksandr, conceived of Oborona’s function as ‘carriers of the light’ of democracy and the small group of activists preserving the democratic ideals so that they would not be completely forgotten. Since activists did not see any other way than the liberal civil society, but at the same time realized that this model is foreign or even unwanted by a majority of Russians, they abandoned the discourse of the Orange revolution in Russia that was prominent during the foundation of the movement, and

started to identify themselves as the democratic minority keeping up the spirit and practice of ‘real’ democracy; the vanguard who are ready ‘when the time comes’.

Oborona activists employed a discourse in which civil society development in Russia is seen as almost impossible, not only because of the repressive state, but also because of the passive ‘common people’. This also resonates with the activists’ self-understanding as the moral educator of the masses (Fitzpatrick 1992; Hemment 2004, 229; Kochetkova 2010; see also chapter 4). On the other hand, this kind of blame on the ‘wrong’ kind of mentality and a need to change it has been documented in other post-socialist countries as well (e.g. Coles 2007, 80; Sampson 1996). It can be interpreted as partly stemming from Oborona’s engagement with western democratization and transitology discourses. These discourses also help Oborona activists to dis-identify from the ‘Soviet-minded Russians’ and identify with the imaginary West, to which they wish to connect by leading Russia to the ‘western way’ of democracy.

By referring to people’s apathy, the activists take a stance, which conforms to the western ideas of civil society based on people’s associational participation and the so called NGO-orthodoxy, according to which civil society is equal to the amount of existing NGOs which can be used as a quantitative measure of ‘democracy’ (Hemment 2004, 221; Salmenniemi 2008; Sampson 1996). In scholarly discourse, the ‘neo-Tocquevillian’ framework (Putnam 2001) and the association-based forms of participation have become the defining part of democracy promotion and the civic ‘community’, and the accumulation of social capital as the main goal of participation (Greenberg 2010). Mercer (2002) argues that Anglophone academic literature on NGOs often approaches the NGO sectors and their contribution to democracy with normative and liberal-democratic assumptions, which do not take into account the diversity and complexity of the NGO sectors in different contexts. According to her (2002, 5), discourses of civil society development are often tied to ideas of democracy, civil society, good governance and social capital, which are derived from western historical experience, but are presented and employed as if they were universal. Jessica Greenberg (2010) has taken a novel approach to activism in Serbia by showing how non-participation and apathy can in fact be seen as a form of agency of people resisting imposed norms and making sense of their own lives. However, Oborona follows the idea of civil society consisting of individual participation in formal NGOs or civic movements, which also glorifies the few activists as exceptionally active in comparison to the masses of ‘apathetic’ people. They do not see non-participation as a result of alienating foreign policies or discourses, but as a result of the ‘natural’ characteristics of laziness and apathy of Russians created by the Soviet Union, and thus as the ‘failure’ of democracy.

Oborona activists view democratization as a way to overcome communism and the ‘Soviet mentality’. Their strongest criticism towards sovereign democracy is aimed at ‘Soviet’ paternalistic rationality, which they see continuing in the model of sovereign democracy. Boris associates this rationality with the Soviet state and *sovkovost* or sovietness, a pejorative term used for a person who lives in the past or has a soviet mentality:



And how I see Oborona's idea in St. Petersburg, is a struggle with *sovkovost'*, with the Soviet Union, and with those things that appeared in people's heads during the Soviet years. That is, in the first place, a view that a person is needed by the state, not the state by a person (*chelovek dolzhen dlia gosudarstvo, a ne gosudarstvo dolzhno dlia cheloveka*). [--] We can say that it is a struggle for some kind of liberal goals, liberal ideas, and for that there won't be a state but, respectively, people. (Boris)

This interpretation of civil society concerning the Soviet period and the Soviet regime is a clear difference from the official discourse of sovereign democracy endorsed by the political elite. Salmenniemi (2010) describes the Russian authorities' view of civil society as a mix of new neoliberal rationality and the statist, paternalist rationality continuing from the Soviet era. Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004) suggest that the Russian government's political project is drawing on people's nostalgia, and that this project is based on the 'return' to the familiar social contract of Soviet times in exchange for citizens' political disengagement. Material memory and nostalgia are used as stakes in this 'game', which Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004, 513–514) see as the 'essence of Putin's politics'. Nostalgia for Soviet times is still prevalent and many people miss their lost entitlements and social communities, which they associate with the communist regime. According to Levada Center, 46% of their survey respondents preferred pre-*perestroika* affairs. However, only 5% saw the return to these affairs as possible (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004).

In contrast to the state-promoted official discourse on civil society, many Oborona activists see that reducing state power would lead to greater freedom and eventually to a 'natural' democratization of society. This is also a dominant theme in neoliberal thought, which sees domination rooted in state power (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 992). Oborona activists support a type of governance that relies on citizens' freedom in opposition to the state's 'Soviet style paternalism'. Aihwa Ong (2007, 4; see Rose 1999) claims that neoliberalism entails 'governing through freedom' that relies on people's freedom, but at the same time requires self-managing and self-responsibility by individual subjects in different spheres of everyday life. According to Rose and Miller (1992), neoliberalism aims to reduce the power of the state and emphasizes the role of the individual's own responsibility to optimize his own quality of life. An individual is bound into the social order through highlighting one's responsibility for oneself and one's family, instead of placing the responsibility of citizen's welfare on the state or public sphere. (Rose and Miller 1992, 198; Foucault 1980.) Also Oborona activists argued that the responsibility of the democratic development of society lies with the individual citizen. However, they viewed that before this responsibility could be 'given' to the 'common people', they needed to be educated in order to govern themselves. Even if the activists use these ideas to challenge government's statist, or Soviet from their point of view, model of state-society relations on the rhetorical level, they in fact engage with the same idea of educating the people to be able to self-organize (cf. Mäkinen 2011). Even if Oborona distances itself from the Soviet totalitarian state, the discourse that they employ on educating 'the people' resonates with the Leninist idea of cultivating the 'new Soviet man' before he could be 'liberated' (Mäkinen 2011, 149; see also Yurchak 2006).

## 5.6 Unified Civil Society and the Strong Leader

Even if Oborona activists emphasized individual rights and freedoms in their discourse of civil society and democracy, they often refrained from speaking about socio-economic rights or social inequalities. As I showed in the previous chapter, activists did not share a common political ideology but individual political affiliations were hidden and open discussion on ideological issues was seen as a threat for the unity of the opposition. Aleksandr explained that there is no use in talking about, for example, the taxation system on the ideological level:

But the question is meaningless, since over the coming years it will have to be resolved in Parliament, and so on. Where are we going to decide it now? Inside a police van (*vnutri militseiskogo avtobusa*)? Therefore, there is a Russian expression that says ‘do not sell the bear's skin before one has caught the bear.’ That's it. Better not divide (*delit'sia*) on these principles now, as it is not the time for it now.

According to Sasha, these questions should be postponed to the official platforms where the leaders chosen in free elections decide them. The Russian opposition is a wide coalition of political projects from far left to liberals, to nationalists, and various combinations of these ideologies, and this makes it vulnerable to fragmentation and inner disputes. Withholding one's ideas on topics that not everyone can agree to is seen as essential in keeping the opposition united.

In addition, Aleksandr took up the question of unanimity and a lack of unity and common interests or sense of community (*obshchnost'*), which he saw as the main problem for building civil society in Russia. Aleksandr saw people's diverse opinions as a problem, not as a possibility for discussion and community building. For him, civil society should be unified and solid in opinions:

There is no sense of community (*net obshchnosti*). Not, supposedly, like in the USA, there is no concept of nation here. Here, on any question, two persons have five opinions, which will still change. Like, here it is a total disintegration, atomization of society.

Aleksandr continued by referring to the Soviet Union as having communality when people worked together towards common goals, but then he hurried to emphasize that he did not see socialism as an answer, but hoped for some kind of balance between these two types of organization of society. This discourse of a sense of community resonates with Domrin's research, which suggests that the Russian understanding of the term civil society is closer to ‘community’ than ‘society’, partly because the words are synonyms in Russian language (*obshchestvo*) (Domrin 2003, 204). On the other hand, Funk (2004, 701), who has studied liberal thought in socialism and post-socialism, argues that many ‘eastern’ thinkers, both liberal and non-liberal, regularly criticized western individualism and saw individuals as essentially intersubjective. According to her, the Eastern and Central European thinkers ‘had adopted Hegelian, Aristotelian, and German romantic conceptions of the individual as a part of a community and always related to others, the nation, collective, commune, society or the religious community’ (Funk 2004, 701). Aleksandr's

quote of unanimity resembles what Katherine Verdery (1996) writes about post-socialist Romania and its opposition's struggle to form a 'European type' of civil society. Verdery maintains that because of the hegemony of the political symbols of unity, homogenization and nation, civil society also came to be defined through these terms. Civil society was defined as a 'unified moral realm, separate from politics and the state' (Verdery 1996, 287) also in Oborona. This idea resonates with the Habermasian idea that a single public space is a desirable state of affairs and good for democracy, whereas multiple public spaces would be a departure from democracy (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 19). The ideal of a unified civil society is also found in the state's vision of civil society. According to Richter (2009b), the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, which was created by the government in 2005 to support the dialogue between civil society actors and the state organs (however, excluding the dissenting voices), is structured around the idea of 'civil society as a unified public sphere serving the interests of the whole'. In his view, the Public Chamber wants to present a unified voice and avoids questions that are likely to provoke divisions and dissent within the Chamber (Richter 2009b, 12).

Even if Oborona activists would agree on the claim that the contemporary state-society relations are unsustainable, there are some differing opinions among the activists about the role of the state in Russia. For example, Viktor took distance from his fellow activists' suspicion of the state by saying that Russia would benefit from the United States' model where there is both 'democracy' and 'a strong state':

Our way should be like in the USA. Simply because the USA is also a big country, and as I already mentioned, on the one hand, they have democracy, and on the other – a very strong state (*gosudarstvo*). (Viktor)

Even though looking to the West, Viktor engages with the idea of Russia as a big country, which needs a strong state and leadership; an idea that resonates with the state's rhetoric on *gosudarstvennost* discussed earlier. Also, when talking about democracy, Viktor and other more social liberal oriented activists were not in favor of total freedom or anarchy that many more libertarian activists demanded. Viktor suggested that freedom is not just about 'opening the door of the cage' and setting everyone free, but that democratic reforms should be carried out gradually and under 'strong hands' of a leader (however, yet unknown). The libertarian Oborona activists, in contrast, associate the strong state and leadership as legacies of the Soviet state. Allina-Pisano, who has studied the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, however, notes that the state-society linkages there were not only a result of Soviet-era organizational forms, but also of Ukrainian organizations' interactions with western governments and associations. According to Allina-Pisano, inspiration for the state-driven models of development was not Soviet, but can in fact be found in North American models of state-society relationships, in which state institutions directly fund and direct societal groups. In this model, civil society is a resource for the needs of the state. (Allina-Pisano 2010, 247.) Therefore, what Oborona activists straightforwardly interpreted as Soviet ideas, can also be traced back to western state-society models.

Thus, many of the Oborona activists share the idea that the official discourse also endorses, namely that Russia needs a strong leader who can unify the country. Some

activists see the missing strong leader figure for the opposition as one of the reasons for its weakness:

I think that the Russian man's mentality is peculiar (*svoeobrazen*). And the trouble is that Russian people need a leader (*rukovoditel'*). Yet we don't have that person, in general in the opposition, and therefore we still have to struggle for a long time to try to get somewhere. (Inna)

In the movement WE (*MY*), they have concentrated around one center [person]. This is not only bad; it's good and bad. [Depends on] how you look at it. Because if there is no center, then consequently everything breaks up. And to create a purely democratic structure, that is ... Well, firstly, democracy in general is always difficult, so, secondly, at this level it is not clear how to do this. (Katia)

In Katia's quote, the ambivalence between democratic structures and the idea of a strong leader are articulated. Oborona's founding idea was to be a leaderless horizontal network. However, both Moscow and St Petersburg's branches had four to five coordinators who were responsible for their own fields of activities, such as public relations, human relations, or street activism, as well as one strong figure, who was seen by many activists and outsiders as the leader of the group despite the leaderless principle.

Even if on the level of principle Oborona aimed at being leaderless and criticized the personified power structures of the state as a cult of personality and as a sign of the undemocratic nature of the government, the movement itself was also characterized by a strong symbolic hierarchy. The symbolic power structure gave more authority to the older activist who also acted as the coordinators of the group. This type of hierarchy is in contrast to the network model of leadership, which is often seen as more creative and innovative in giving different actors more space to negotiate and form new ideas. One of the Moscow activists, Pavel, complained that many opposition organizations have a problem that they have one person acting as 'the little Putin' but he also emphasized that even though Oborona has its leader, he is not dictating what the movement should do. However, he also predicted that Oborona would last as long as its leader stays in it, because finally everything depends on him. About a year after this interview, in the Fall of 2010, Moscow Oborona's leader decided to leave the movement because he felt that he was, firstly, a too dominant person in the movement and, secondly, had gotten everything out of it and wanted to move on. After losing its unofficial leader, Oborona struggled to find a new path and suffered from internal disputes that led yet another fraction of activists to leave the movement. As mentioned, Oborona started to dissolve in late 2011.

The leader-centeredness of Russian civil society organizations is documented elsewhere as well. According to Laura Henry (2010, 88), individual personalities are very important not only in the Russian political field but also in civic organizations, where 'no factor is more decisive than the preferences of a single dominant leader'. Henry associates strong leadership and small group size of organizations as the rejection of the Soviet mass organizations and as a response to the resource scarcity of the post-Soviet conditions. However, such leader-centered organizational practices were further reinforced by the foreign donor agencies. Also Salmenniemi (2008, 125) found out in her study of Tver's

civic organizations that even if the organization had the principles of non-hierarchical organization, openness and teamwork, their practices produced leader-centeredness that the members of the group saw the foreign donor agencies and local authorities reinforcing. When I asked Ruslan what had changed after the long-time leader figure of Oborona had left, he answered that the main difference was that the leader took the money and connections for acquiring grants with him. Salmenniemi (2008, 124) associates this personification of organizational work with the practices of donor agencies and with the Soviet/Russian traditions of patronage and *sviazi* (connections), which are used to get things done. As in Salmenniemi's study, in Oborona financial matters were also seen as being especially the leader's business.

## 5.7 Struggles over Patriotism and Nationalism

As discussed earlier, Russian state officials interpret civil society and democracy through state sovereignty and in this discourse emphasize citizens' loyalty for their country as well as the need to protect the country from outside threats. Putin's administration also prefers to support civic organizations that 'share his enthusiasms for a strong state, nationalistic themes, and traditional Russian values' (Evans 2006a, 149; see also Sperling 2003). Nationalists have managed to garner large support in Russia and the 'Russian March' (*Russkii Marsh*), a nationalist gathering organized annually on November 4<sup>th</sup>, on the National Unity Day<sup>23</sup>, is a strong example of their support. According to Panfilov (2006), the Russian state enforces nationalistic sentiments through state-controlled television and Putin himself often engages in nationalistic rhetoric in his statements. In addition, many of the pro-Kremlin groups participate in the Russian March, which is permitted by the authorities regardless of its nationalist and xenophobic slogans, such as 'Russia for Russians'. Marlene Laruelle (2009, 10) proposes that the Russian political space is saturated with nationalism as a denominator of political correctness. She argues that 'public figures are unable to acquire legitimacy, whatever their duties, unless they justify their choices in terms of the overriding national interest' (Laruelle 2009, 10). Nationalism and definitions of patriotism are important struggles both between the pro- and anti-Kremlin groups as well as within the political opposition.

The pro-Kremlin youth movements have incorporated patriotism and patriotic education in their manifesto and activities (Lassila 2011a), and often refer to the political opposition as unpatriotic and as being paid by western governments to disturb the Russian inner cohesion. Because of this, Oborona needs to emphasize that for them, independent civic activism constitutes the space for 'true' patriotism. In their Declaration (*Deklaratsiia*, see Appendix 1), Oborona claims that the movement participants 'show their love for their motherland by their actions and are not stupidly shouting about their patriotism'. With this statement, Oborona points to the pro-government movements, such

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<sup>23</sup>The new holiday, marking the end of the foreign intervention in Russia in 1612, was created in 2005 to replace the traditional November 7th celebration of the 1917 Bolshevik rise to power.

as *Nashi*, that frame their activities as patriotic and chant patriotic slogans in their meetings.

After I asked Inna whether she sees her activism as patriotism, she partly agreed, but differentiated her patriotism from the state propaganda:

Well, it might be [patriotism]. However, it is clearly not that patriotism, which they propagandize to us on television. Maybe it is patriotism. Naturally, I love my country. Of course I love her. But, understand, there is that kind of good line 'I love my country but hate the state'. It is a youth rock group from Ufa, [called] Lumen. They have that line in their song. I think it reflects my position very well.

Patriotism is often understood as feelings of loyalty and affirming and identifying with one's nation and its government (Brubaker 2004, 121). However, Inna explains that one can love one's country, can be patriotic, even if she does not approve of the state. In this discourse, patriotism is associated with a wish for a different, better – from the activist point of view – future for the country. In Inna's interpretation of patriotism, it does not necessarily mean identifying with the nation's government, but rather she articulates her patriotism more as an engagement with a certain responsibility towards the country's future. As Brubaker (2004, 121) suggests, patriotism can sustain civic engagement also through feelings of shame and responsibility for the country. Inna still holds patriotic feelings towards her nation even if she disapproves of the current government and the way forward that it proposes.



**Image 7** *Demonstrators carrying the Russian flag at the 1<sup>st</sup> of May march in 2010.*



In the interviews, Oborona activists express frustration that they are portrayed as amoral or unpatriotic:

Pavel: They say that we have been paid by them (the USA) and so on. It is an absolute lie. It is simply created for the public reaction. So that the public will think: 'Oh, they are such amoral people', and so forth. First of all, it is a lie, and they exploit it in the first place to claim that we are anti-Russian forces, and that the United States provides for us. They display all as if they are the patriots, and we are trying to destroy Russia.

In this struggle for the definition of patriotism, Oborona activists aim to associate their own activism as 'doing good for your country' and to clear their reputation as anti-Russian. To prove their own sincerity and patriotism, they aim to designate the pro-Kremlin forces as liars or amoral. Oborona took up this question also in its website's FAQ section (see Appendix 1):

Q: On TV they say that you are working for the USA. Is that true?

A: No, this is another propaganda cliché. The easiest way to discredit an opposition movement is to accuse them of working for the 'external enemy'. This was done in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and in all the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. [---] But there are no facts, there is only a lie repeated many times.

Here again, Oborona associates the Russian government with totalitarian repressive regimes and enforces the activists' self-identification as dissidents fighting the repressive state. By accusing the regime of lying, Oborona activists construct their identity around morality by declaring that 'we are supported only by truth and strength (*pravda i sila*), but not by any politicians, parties or moneybags'. In the FAQ section of their webpage, Oborona also refers to the unpaid nature of their activism and claims that for earning money for political activism one should turn to the pro-Kremlin parties *Nashi* and *Molodaia Gvardiia*, thus turning the blame of being paid by someone to show political support back onto the pro-Kremlin youth.

The other side of the coin in this struggle of definitions of morality and patriotism is portraying the other as being fascist. Oborona activists use wordplays referring to *Nashi* and other pro-Kremlin activists as '*nashisti*' or 'Putin-Jugend'. On the other hand, the *Nashi* manifesto warns Russians of the western-supported 'liberal-fascists coalition' that will incite bloody revolution leading to weakening the Russian nation (Atwal 2009, 746). As analyzed earlier, the concept of civil society is used as a slogan by both sides of the struggle. In addition, fascism is used as a slogan to discredit the other side of the struggle. Being an anti-fascist and working for the good of your country gain different meanings in the discourses of the pro-Kremlin activists and the political opposition. This resonates with Umland's (2005) argument that the term fascism suffers from fragmentation and 'hyper-inflation' in post-Soviet Russia. In western thought, fascism is understood as radically right-wing and 'envisaging a society that is structured and cleansed according to ascribed differences between human beings' and wanting to 'build a radically new society, create an alternative modernity, and form a 'new man'' (Umland 2005, 35). In Russia,

instead, the conceptualization of fascism has gained multiple meanings. The use of the concept ranges from following the western understanding of the concept to using the term to refer to fascism ‘as a fundamentally western form of extremism which is, by definition, non-Russian’ and, thus, excluding the possibility of fascist trends inside Russia altogether (Umland 2005, 35). Another Russian way to use the term is to associate fascism with a wide range of authoritarian and nationalist tendencies. In this usage, the liberal groups can also be referred to as fascists. This has enabled some right-wing politicians, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, to accuse the democrats of fascism in the state courts and the establishment of ‘anti-fascist’ centers by groups affiliated with Nazi ideology (Umland 2005, 36).

Because of this wide variety of interpretation of fascism, the term itself suffers from inflation and has become an empty signifier referring to something essentially ‘bad’ in both the pro-Kremlin groups and in Oborona. This ambiguity further distances the debate from the wider Russian audience. The pro-Kremlin groups engage with the idea of fascism as a western threat and as non-Russian, while Oborona activists tend to use the term to refer to general authoritarianism and violence used by the allegedly pro-Kremlin groups attacking the opposition. This is reflected in Mikhail’s description of the opposition picket that was attacked by unknown people, who he identified as skinheads, and who are often associated with violent ultranationalism:

More recently, it was a week ago when a picket was attacked by 3 to 5 mobsters. They looked like skinheads or hooligans. They were armed with chains and we could think that it was just an accident, but the strange thing was that there were no police around. Usually we have more police than we have participants. They always bring the riot police even to our smallest actions. Just two minutes before the attack, all the FSB operators left the area, probably not to be beaten themselves. Fortunately, there were no big casualties; just few people got some scratches. But it is really worrying.

Mikhail suggested that the skinhead-looking people were paid by the pro-Kremlin forces to attack the opposition and that the police also knew about this. Also Ruslan associates the fascist programs with being supported by the Federal security services:

In fact, it's no secret that many nationalist organizations, fascists, are also organized by the Kremlin. Well not from the Kremlin, but as a project of the Federal security services. And also recently they [nationalist programs] have begun to get out of control. They [the authorities] have somewhat started to tighten the screws.

Oborona activists’ suspicion of the state is also reflected in these claims, which portray the attackers or challengers of the opposition as always being organized or paid by the Kremlin forces.

Even if on this rhetorical level Oborona activists referred to *Nashi* as fascists and some individual activists distinguished their group from nationalism, Oborona did not include anti-fascism in their group’s demands in their Declaration, for example, and the group cooperated with groups that were known to have a nationalistic agenda, such as the National

Bolshevik party<sup>24</sup> and its spin-off group the Freedom of Nation. The discussion on whether to co-operate with the nationalist or Antifascists (AntiFa) groups was continuous throughout the group's existence and divided the group. Also in this question, as in co-operation with the LGBTI community, Inna explained that Oborona has a principle of not taking part in particular problems such as the fight between Fascists and the AntiFa:

Recently in Russia, all sorts of highly nationalistic ideas started to soar. We can say we are anti-fascist in a way... Well, I do not position myself so, because we cannot be involved in the problem. Yes, there are skinheads and fascists, but one of our principles is that we do not participate in any of these conflicts.

Other activists did not mention antifascism altogether in their descriptions of Oborona's goals and principles. On another occasion, when I was talking with Inna in one of our walks in the city, she explained that these problems, such as women's or gay rights or fascism are particularistic in a sense that they demand special rights for particular social groups. According to Inna, the struggle in contemporary Russia should be to gain basic rights for everyone; only then could they start to demand various social rights. However, Inna did not take into account that the sexual and minority rights activists are not demanding any special rights, but to be included in the sphere of political and social rights to begin with. I suggest that this explanation through the universalism of political rights is used as a way to avoid engagement with social justice questions that are seen as dangerous to the unity of the group.

Patriotism and nationalism are difficult questions for the opposition in general. They create inner clashes and divide opposition groups and this is seen as threatening the ideal of a unified civil society. Some activists of the democratic *Solidarnost'* movement refuse to cooperate with the nationalists and especially the National-Bolsheviks. However, the NBP leader Eduard Limonov manages to mobilize many supporters in anti-Putin rallies, and therefore he is part of coordination councils for many rallies and a guest speaker at many protest events. Co-operation with the National Bolsheviks is problematic for many groups that emphasize legal forms of action since it is banned as illegal and extremist by state authorities. Furthermore, another activist, Aleksey Navalnyi, who has been associated with the nationalists and the Russian March (Balmforth 2011), has also become one of the leading figures of the opposition during the December 2011 election rallies.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Robertson (2011, 185) describes NBP as being 'founded on a curious mixture of Marxism, militant conservative Eurasianism and xenophobic Russian nationalism.' However, according to his interview with an NBP leader in St Petersburg, 'in 2005 it sought to move toward more general social democratic principles: free elections, free choice and social responsibility'.

<sup>25</sup> However, in spring 2013, the non-systemic opposition and Limonov, among other nationalist forces, started to disagree on several issues. One of the disagreements dealt with the rallies against the law that banned US adoptions in Russia, in which many opposition's liberals participated, but nationalists did not support. As a result of the rally, some nationalists demanded that the participants, such as Boris Nemtsov and Ilya Yashin, be expelled from the opposition's coordinating council (Kravtsova 2013). This conflict reflects the difficulties in keeping the fragmented political opposition united.

The question of co-operation with the NBP is also brought up in Oborona's FAQ section on their website:

Q: Do you collaborate with the National Bolsheviks?

A: Yes, we work with any organization, when our goals and objectives are the same. When NBP stands for fair elections and against the police state, we are fighting for the same thing. This does not mean that we have to share all of their views (and they [do not have to share] ours).

Even if individual activists resigned from nationalism and fascism, the movement was divided concerning the question of National Bolsheviks. In St Petersburg, activists told me that one of Oborona's earlier inner conflicts was about nationalism and co-operation with nationalist groups, such as the NBP. As a result of this conflict, the more nationalist-oriented Oborona participants left the movement, but the question concerning co-operation still remained; some of the participants refused to participate in rallies and demonstrations if there were nationalists involved. The answer to this disagreement in regard to the Strategy-31 demonstrations was that Oborona activists in St Petersburg were divided into two different demonstrations: The bigger one in Gostinyi Dvor, with the nationalists, and the smaller one on Dvortsovaia Square, where there were no nationalist groups. Similarly in Moscow, the demonstrations occasionally took place in two places, the bigger one on Triumfalnaia Square and occasionally a smaller and sometimes sanctioned one on the Pushkin Square.

Often the co-operation with the nationalist groups was explained through 'common tactical goals', as Alla put it:

For example, with whom from the political spectrum to participate and with whom not to participate in the actions? I always say to this: 'If the organization, whose ideology does not coincide with ours, is helping a grandma across the road, we shouldn't – in opposition to them – throw the grandma under the wheels' [laughs]. If we have common tactical goals, we should achieve them together. (Alla)

Alla continues that after the fair elections, these disagreements can be solved. She sees Oborona and other opposition groups as struggling for more tactical or technical goals, such as gaining free and fair elections, which can supersede the ideological disagreements between the groups. In addition, Aleksandr described Oborona as being close to the National Bolsheviks through its basic idea of strong resistance to the state:

NBP is not strictly speaking a democratic, liberal movement, they are not liberals. [---] Oborona is a classic political organization, not playful [*shutlivaia*, as the Movement *MY*], but rather expressing centrist, democratic interests in the field, I'd say. So, it is democratic, but its idea (*po obrazu mysli*) is closer to the National Bolsheviks. Well, you could even say symbolically that we are the only ones with the NBP to have a black flag. Black flag, well, it's a symbol of... how to put it into words? It is an organization that is not joking, but carries on serious activism, seminars and so on.

Aleksandr's quotations reflects Sokolov's (2008, 68) findings in his research on nationalist groups, in which people's participation or nonparticipation was determined not by ideological declarations but by the political style or practices of the group. For the participants, the content of the political program was not as important as how the program was performed. Also, Oborona activists draw parallels between different groups based on the visible practices or 'stylistic analogues' (Sokolov 2008, 68), such as flags or forms of protest, instead of shared ideological declarations.

The question of co-operating with nationalist and leftists groups was also raised from time to time on the email-list of Oborona in Moscow. In 2010, one of the activists started the discussion by asking how Oborona as a group supporting liberal goals could participate in demonstrations organized by Limonov and the NBP. One of the older members of the group explained that this discussion has been already gone through earlier in the group and that Oborona participants had agreed that they share their tactical goals with the NBP and, thus, there are no obstacles for participation. Another activist explained her position in the same email exchange:

From time to time, I've been concerned about how we will relate to the National Bolsheviks and others after the victory of the revolution. But at the moment, it seems to me, this is still far away (because historical events happen in spite of us, and, thus, our goal is to provide the ground for the change of power, to maintain a certain 'eternal fire', so to speak). In any case, all democratically minded forces should co-operate in a civilized manner before and after achieving their political goals. I think so.

This resonates with the idea already discussed of achieving the tactical goal of the change of power and settling disagreements only after that. Furthermore, in this message the idea of democracy as an instrument for creating a platform for resolving political goals is enacted. Yet the activist who wrote the message does not see democracy as a functioning instrument in Russia and, thus, politico-ideological goals are still left unsolved. The email-message also resonates with the idea of a harmonious and unified civil society, where all the groups 'co-operate in a civilized manner'. The discussion on the email-list was heated, and the activist, who started the discussion, ended up being accused of provocation and dividing the group. The final agreement was that individual members should decide by themselves if they will participate in the only-liberals demonstration in the Pushkin Square or in the more inclusive group on Triumphalnaia Square. The moral substance of the discussion was repressed by the idea of not creating inner disagreements, but keeping one's position for oneself, out of the general discussion, because it was threatening the group's unity.

The activists' wish for unity and a single-opinioned civil society especially comes up in regard to questions of nationalism, which threaten to divide the oppositional groups, and in which Oborona avoids taking a strong position. Nation and nationalism act as hegemonic political symbols in Russia (Laruelle 2009). Funk (2004, 703) argues that nationalism and the emphasis on a strong state have been dominant ideas in soviet and post-Soviet liberal as well as non-liberal thought. According to Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004), during the 2000s not only the Putin administration but also the Russian intelligentsia drifted into a populist and traditionalist direction. This process is based on

the loss of the fantasy of the West as the ideal ‘other’ during the Soviet Union and, on the other hand, related to the loss of Russia’s imperial presence in world politics. These two losses are very different, but according to Nadkarni and Shevchenko, they can trigger a similar effect: the loss of the utopia of the ideal ‘West’ can be interpreted as the loss of Russia’s imperial presence in the world. Therefore, the loss of the ideal (western) future has steered the intelligentsia to mourn for Russia’s imperial presence. This is reframed as the need for Russia to be seen as a ‘strong state’ respected on the international arena. Therefore, the formally opposite groups of democratically-minded intelligentsia and the nationalists often find themselves ‘on the same side of the barricade’. (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004, 515).

I suggest that using nationalist discourse or refraining from criticizing nationalist rhetoric is a significant framework in Russian politics and civil society. Actors wishing to perform in this discursive framework need to confine to the norms of the ‘speakable’ and the ‘unspeakable’ (see Yurchak 2003, 76; Butler 1988). Nationalist discourse or refraining to speak of nationalism has become the norm among political and civic actors. Nationalism is accepted because it is seen as a strong tendency among people and thus an opportunity for mobilization and at the same time, it is not politicized because of the ideal of the unified civil society in opposition to the current government. On the other hand, many nationalist-oriented people, such as Eduard Limonov, Alexey Navalnyi and Sergei Udal’tsov, have become leaders of the opposition and their ideology is not questioned as such, but they are seen as the unifiers of the fragmented opposition. This is another example of the personification of power in the opposition. The leaders are often not chosen because of their ideological positioning, but more because of their personal characteristics and charisma, which are seen as important in unifying the opposition.

By not problematizing nationalism, the political opposition is not following the western path on this question as in their rhetoric on civil society and democracy in general. Nationalism is often regarded as undemocratic by western democratic aid programs (Greenberg 2010). For example, Greenberg (2010) found that in the Serbian integration process to the European Union, nationalism was often mentioned as one of the failures of democracy and something that should be abolished if the country wishes to become a ‘European democracy’. New European policy-making and democracy assistance emphasize the common European ‘desires and beliefs’ in community-building rather than territory or national institutions. However, Greenberg (2010) claims that EU discourses concerning democratization are alienating for many Serbians she researched, and that ‘the rhetoric of democratic participation silences, rather than resolves, questions about national belonging and its relationship to civic life’.

Similar to LGBTI and minority rights (see chapter 4), nationalism is also a potential source of inner disputes and divisions, and politicizing them does not fit the ideal of civil society as unified and unanimous. This kind of understanding of civil society and citizenship through an individualistic yet universalist approach, in which differences among citizens are seen as irrelevant, becomes easily exclusionary and discriminatory. Citizenship, citizens’ rights and responsibilities, are mediated through their membership in other collectivities, and therefore, according to Nira Yuval-Davis (1999, 131), people’s position ‘in terms of their class, gender, sexuality, stage in the life cycle, ability, etc., have



to be acknowledged in any citizenship project that in principle, at least, would be inclusionary and democratic'. Oborona's stated goal is the western model of democracy, but it is often not defined through inclusion and equality, but through the discourse of undifferentiated rights and freedoms. This discourse does not acknowledge any differences between social groups, but conceives political subjects as a unified mass with identical interests and needs. However, the needs of the 'dissident intelligentsia' are not necessarily resonant with the needs of the 'common people', who are also constituted of various social groups. Therefore, instead of accusing the people of being apathetic and of their lack of interest, the liberal activists could also translate the ideals they endorse to the 'common people', and thus try to involve them in the struggle. Furthermore, recent studies show that Russians are more interested in participating in demonstrations grounded in concrete problems and affecting people's everyday lives (Evans 2012; Lipman and Petrov 2010; Henry 2009). Oborona, as the non-systematic democratic opposition in general, avoids politicizing such issues. This is because they cannot form a unified opinion on issues related to social justice and social rights, and they seem to associate them with a potential for fragmentation that threatens the ideal of a unified civil society. Furthermore, social justice issues are not seen as central to their struggle as political justice questions are.

## **5.8 In Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed how Oborona negotiates between the western liberal discourses and the Russian dominant symbolic order of state-centered state-society relations. I claim that Oborona frames its liberal-individualistic interpretation of civil society and democracy in opposition to the official discourse of sovereign democracy and state-controlled civil society. However, even though Oborona strongly opposes the socialist state and 'sovietness', its participants' ideals of civil society and citizenship are tied to the political symbols of nationalism and the strong state and a unifying leader, which can be seen as a continuation from the centralized power relationships and the personification of power in Soviet political culture. Additionally, Oborona's own organizational structure revolved around the personality of its leader, even though on the rhetoric level it claimed to be leaderless. Oborona's and the wider democratic opposition's struggle is concentrated around one personified enemy, Vladimir Putin, and I suggest that this personified hatred is the other side of the coin when talking about the 'cult of leaders' or the 'Emperor syndrome' that Oborona criticizes that the 'common people' suffer from. Even if Oborona interprets civil society and democracy through the western liberal democracy, certain questions, such as LGBTI rights and growing nationalistic sentiments in the country, are not politicized in the group, but silenced in order to avoid inner disputes that threaten the ideal of unity. Oborona avoids talking about nationalism and justifies co-operation with the nationalist groups by referring to common tactical goals. Therefore, it aims to postpone social justice questions to the 'after revolution' future by portraying the co-operation as not being based on ideological issues, but on 'non-

ideological' technicalities of gaining a large crowd to denounce Putin and to establish free and fair elections.

The liberal opposition's activists struggle to define their goals and grievances in the shadow of the dominant symbolic order. Even though their goal is to show the official discourse as 'false', they do not have efficient rhetorical tools nor a powerful enough position to challenge it and suggest an alternative that would resonate with the Russian public. Even if Oborona positions itself in opposition to the Kremlin, the underlying rhetoric of both Oborona and the state is based on the idea of a unified civil society and adopting a rather paternalistic stance towards the 'common people'. Both the sovereign democracy model and Oborona's concept of civil society engage with the discourse of responsabilization, resonating with the neoliberal rationality, but conceiving the 'ordinary' people not as 'cultivated' enough to be independent and active citizens and blaming the slow democratization on the mentality of the citizens. Oborona circulates the same political symbols, such as the strong state and sense of community (*obshchnost'*) and a need for a strong leader to unify the country, which are stipulated by the state too, and this further complicates their aim to distance and dis-identify from the governmental discourse. Furthermore, Oborona's interpretation of civil society relies on the political principles of western liberalism, which do not resonate with the general public that tends to display nostalgia towards the Soviet Union and suspicion of the West. Even if the concept of civil society is widely used by the government and the political opposition, its meaning often remains unclear to the wider public. Civil society and democracy are used as normalized and standardized 'slogans', which stay abstract for any real mobilization and thus remain distant from the lived reality of many Russians. The discourse does not resonate and does not create a significant interpretation of reality for the general public.

Oborona engages with the transitologist explanations for the question of why the Russian opposition has not succeeded in transforming Russian society into a 'western' form of democracy. For Oborona activists, the problem is not the wrong 'model' of democracy or their inability to communicate western democratic values to Russians, but rather that the people and their 'sovietness' and Russianness cannot be changed. For Oborona participants themselves, these western models are not 'alienating', but empowering and legitimizing their position as the repressed oppositionists struggling for democracy. For these Russian intellectuals, the West signifies an ideal, even if this interpretation does not find larger support among Russians in general. The liberals have not succeeded in translating this ideal to the lives of everyone else (see also Verdery 1996, 127). Furthermore, this western-mindedness gives Russian liberally-oriented groups a discursive space to critique and resist the government's vision of state-society relations without actually distancing them from the dominant symbolic order. Associating themselves with the West also gives Oborona members a space to legitimize and reaffirm their identities as intellectuals and identify as 'western', which are qualities they value. Engaging in the democratization projects of the West has also opened up benefits such as small grants and invitations to travel to Western Europe and the US for trainings and conferences. Western social movement activism has also shaped Oborona's repertoires of action, which I proceed to discuss next.

# 6 PERFORMING OPPOSITION: OBORONA'S POLITICAL PROTESTS AS SOCIAL PERFORMANCES

## 6.1 Political Protests as Social Performances

Every action – it's a step, I hope, towards what we are going to. Sometimes a big step, sometimes a small one, but that's how I see it. (Irina)

In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated how activist identity in Oborona is constructed through intellectualism, dissidence, cosmopolitanism and 'action'. At the same time, Oborona activists draw parallels between the dissidents' struggle against the totalitarian state and their own struggle for the western model of democracy in contemporary Russia. Oborona activists' understanding of democracy combines elements of western and eastern liberal theories and Soviet ideas by emphasizing the individual rights of citizens and seeing civil society as a counter-force to the state, but at the same time leaning on ideas of the need for a strong leader and unity of the country. All these elements are reflected in the movement's repertoire of action. Intelligentsia's traditional role as the 'educator' is performed in various seminars and trainings that Oborona organizes. Their international connections and Oborona as part of a wider democratic struggle, are reflected in various support meetings that Oborona participates in, such as the demonstrations in support of the 'Green' revolution in Iran as well as the support rallies for the Belarusian opposition and visits to Belorussia when there are opposition's protests. Activist identities are performed in the mass protests and street performances, which are most often targeted against the personified enemy: Vladimir Putin.

Because of their small size, oppositional youth movements cannot usually organize any large-scale actions alone, but they actively participate in the demonstrations and marches organized by the umbrella movements such as the Other Russia and lately the Solidarity movement. Some of the Oborona participants are also members of the organizing committees of these bigger demonstrations. During the Putin era, the biggest demonstration waves have been the 'Dissenters' marches' (*Marsh nesoglashnykh*) and the 'Strategy-31' rallies. During the Russian presidential election campaign in 2007, Dissenters' Marches gathered up to 5000 people on the streets of Moscow and hundreds in other cities. When campaigning against Putin's re-election, the 'Dissenters' succeeded in a larger scale mobilization than in a long time. After the elections in March 2008, the oppositional mass actions calmed down. The Dissenters' Marches were dying out, partly because of the harsh police control and arrests, but also due to the unsuccessful large-scale mobilization and the lack of media attention. Militia started to arrest people pre-emptively as they tried to gather, and thus organizing marches became too difficult.

However, the next peak of mass protests started again already in the summer of 2009 when Eduard Limonov and the National Bolsheviks started the Strategy-31 protests in Moscow's Triumfalnaia Square. They started to gather every 31st day of a month that had

31 days in rallies demonstrating how the Russian constitutional right, according to which ‘citizens of the Russian Federation shall have the right to assemble peacefully, without weapons, hold rallies, meetings and demonstrations, marches and pickets’ (RF Constitution, Article 31), was not guaranteed. In 2011, the Strategy-31 demonstrations started to calm down and give room for the electoral protests and the ‘March of Millions’ after the Parliamentary elections in December 2011.

Participating in demonstrations is a very important part of activism for many Oborona participants, and it became an essential part of my fieldwork as well. When I first started taking part in demonstrations, I was quite nervous and unsure how to behave so as not to be arrested or get too much attention from the authorities. Arrest would have possibly compromised my further access to the field since I always needed to apply for a visa and an arrest record could in consequence result in the rejection of my visa application in the future. However, soon I learned how to act in the demonstration and created certain routines, such as constantly moving and yielding away from the authorities and distancing myself from tight crowds. When talking about my field experiences back home, I was often asked how I could avoid being arrested. This frequent question led me to further analyze my own behavior and the activists’ behavior in the protest event. I started to look for certain patterns in the protest events and realized that it was a kind of ‘game’, and the participants all knew the informal rules and played the game accordingly. By learning these rules, I also could ‘play the game’ but often my own strategy and goals seemed to be different than those of the other participants; my aim was not to draw attention and not to get arrested and, thus, I often found myself acting in a way opposite to many active demonstrators who wanted to draw attention to themselves and their goals. With this in mind, I started to reconstruct the game for research analytical purposes. Here, the social performance theory helped to include in the analysis the symbolic background, symbolic means, and representations instead of talking about ‘game-playing’ of pure tactics with no ‘deeper’ meaning besides winning or losing.

In this chapter, I analyze Oborona’s forms of action from the point of view of performance theory. I analyze the protest event as a social performance following Eyerman (2006, 195) who suggests that ‘performance theory, with its focus on drama, staging, and scripts, as well as actual performing, is a valuable analytical frame’ for studying protest and social movements (see also Johnston 2009). According to him (2006, 193), ‘[s]ocial movement is a form of acting in public, a political performance, which involves representation in dramatic form, as movements engage emotions inside and outside their bounds attempting to communicate their message.’ Furthermore, Johnston (2009, 11; 26) argues that both collective aspects of identity as well as self-identities contribute to the movement performances by bringing in the participants’ ideas about how the world is or should be. In this chapter, I show how the identities and discourses analyzed in previous chapters are performed in Oborona’s political protests. The social performance theory gave me concrete tools to analytically break down the often complex and confusing protest event and to analyze its various elements and their interrelations. It helped me to create a more coherent picture of the complex situation, which was full of symbolism as well as various actors and actions, which were hard to distinguish without this analytical ‘toolbox’. The social performance theory also helped me to realize the

background symbols behind the protest ‘performance’ and thus helped to deepen the analysis to the complex meaning making and identity processes behind the event.

According to Alexander (2006), social performance has the same elements as a theatrical performance. He traces six elements of social performance: 1) background symbols, 2) foreground scripts, 3) actors, 4) audience, 5) means of symbolic production, and 6) staging (*mise-en-scène*) of the performance. Alexander suggests that, ‘[f]ailed performances are those in which the actor, whether individual or collective, has been unable to sew back together the elements of performance to make them seem connected seamlessly’. I analyze protest events as social performances and trace the different elements of performance in this context to show how the activists perform their identities in the protest event. I also analyze the effect of the performance from the audiences’ point of view. I suggest that the performance is partly de-fused and this makes it less convincing for the wider public, which also explains some of the challenges that the political opposition faces in its attempts to mobilize people against Putin and his government.

First in this chapter, I will describe the Strategy-31 demonstration based on my participant observation and my field notes, and then move on to analyze the different elements of the performance (Alexander 2006) found in these mass-demonstrations as well as in the smaller street performances that Oborona organizes.

## 6.2 Strategy-31

The date was the 31st once again and we were walking with the Oborona movement activists Inna and Vova towards the Triumphalnia Square for the Strategy 31 demonstration. ‘Are you nervous?’ Inna asked me and continued, ‘I’m always very nervous, I even feel it in my stomach. And especially today, when I know that [mentions one Oborona activist] has a special surprise for us,’ she continued mysteriously, refusing to tell me anything more. Then she turned to her husband Vova and said: ‘Today we are not going to get arrested, my clothes are too nice to ruin.’

Already from afar we could hear the noise from the square and saw that the militia had blocked access to its center. On the other side of the square, we saw a small group of protesters gathering in front of the entrance to the Maiakovskaia metro station. Inna and Vova turned to our right towards the underpass that they hoped could lead them to the other side of the busy road and then to the metro entrance. Inna turned to me and said: ‘I think it’s better for you to stay here since it can get rough in there.’ I stood there for a moment thinking of what to do. Right next to me, a legal picket started to gather. A human rights activist Liudmila Alekseeva had obtained permission for 800 people to take part in a demonstration inside a fenced area guarded by the militia. People from the Solidarity movement started to gather with their orange flags and someone started to give a speech on a small podium in front of a couple hundred people. I knew that the demonstration had divided the unofficial opposition into those who preferred legal actions and those who did not want to compromise with the authorities. The latter group demonstrated in front of the metro entrance with no permission from the authorities. That was where I decided I should be as well.

I started to make my way to the underpass with a small group of people walking in the same direction. As I crossed the road, I saw the ‘surprise’ Inna mentioned before. It was a wedding couple in their wedding clothes on the other side of the road obviously heading in the same direction as I was. The groom saw me and lifted his finger in front of his mouth as a sign for me not to say anything or react to seeing them. I continued to walk behind them with an increasingly large group of people. We all walked in silence all the way to the underpass and then to the metro station.

At the metro station, the crowd of about 200 people was all packed into the small area in front of the station and Tchaikovsky concert hall. I saw a glimpse of Inna and other Oborona activists in the center of crowd. Inna saw me and shook her head but at the same time, she smiled at me. The wedding couple unfurled a banner saying ‘Bitter to see the arbitrariness’ and joined the crowd chanting slogans such as ‘Russia without Putin’ and ‘Down with the Chekists’. Flashlights flashed when people took pictures of the wedding couple. The atmosphere grew tighter and louder and I could feel the anticipation in the air: what are the police going to do?

Many people on their way to the metro station stopped to see what was going on, but most of the passers-by looked scared or annoyed and hurried to get out of the square. Opposition activists gave interviews and the square was full of people with their cameras, some of them journalists, others ‘citizen-journalists’, i.e. bloggers and activists. Soon the police started to arrest people. They first targeted the familiar faces and the loudest activists and people with placards. Opposition activists resisted the arrests and loudly demanded to see the police representatives’ identification cards. They were forcefully dragged into the police vans (‘*avtozak*’ or ‘*Putin-wagon*’). Some protesters fought fiercely against arrest, while others just lay on the ground forcing 4–5 police officers to carry them to the waiting vans. They continued shouting in the vans, rocking them from side to side. When people saw arrests happening they chanted ‘*pozor*’ (shame) and cameras flashed. When one van was full of detainees, it drove away and an empty one arrived. People cheered and applauded the activists when the vans drove away.

Chanting, grabbing, dragging, and resisting continued for half an hour, until the entrance to the metro station was clear. One police officer with a megaphone called on people to clear the way and stop ‘disturbing the peace’. Every now and then, a chain of police officers swept through the area, pushing the protestors to the sides or driving them from the square. The demonstration went on for about an hour, after which most of the group leaders and the most aggressive protesters were arrested, among them Vova and some other Oborona participants. Slowly, the metro entrance was cleared and the illegal demonstration was over. On the other side of the square, the legal demonstration started to break up as well.

The aftermath of the protest continued on the Internet. Those who had been arrested were taken to the police stations for questioning. Some of them were held overnight because they were charged with resisting arrest, and that provided the authorities with the right to detain them for two days. Some were released later in the evening without being charged. Others who were not arrested waited for the detainees outside the police stations or followed the proceedings online. People who were released from jail were greeted by their friends with applause and cheers. Those arrested had their mobile phones with them



so they used Twitter to report what was going on. Some people outside the police station bought pre-paid phone cards that they used to re-fill the detainees call balance so they could continue calling and using data. 140-character length Twitter messages reported that the activists were hungry and tired but were still singing and shouting in the jail. Internet reporting with videos and pictures went on for a couple of days after the demonstration.

## 6.3 Elements of Social Performance

### Background symbols

According to Alexander (2006, 33), *background symbols* and *foreground scripts* are ‘constructed by the performative imagination’ and they are ‘structured by codes that provide analogies and antipathies and by narratives that provide chronologies.’ Every play is written relying on the background symbols of that moment and place. Furthermore, scripts are performers’ conscious and unconscious choices from a broader ‘universe of meanings’ about the specific sets of meanings they wish to project and how they plan to do that. (Alexander 2006, 58.) For Oborona activists, the background understanding to protesting follows their presentation of themselves as the continuers of the Soviet dissidents fighting against the repressive state. Another strong symbol uniting the otherwise fragmented opposition is the personified hatred of one enemy, Vladimir Putin, who is represented as the main evil that ‘a true oppositionist’ should never compromise with. These background symbols of dissidence and a repressive totalitarian state are used to legitimize the foreground script of protesting Putin and his ‘illegal police state’ as the opposition protesters portray contemporary Russia.

When the National Bolsheviks first initiated the Strategy-31 demonstrations in 2009, the liberal opposition was reluctant to take part in these unsanctioned demonstrations. When I talked with one of the Oborona youth leaders in October 2009, he did not see the *Triumfalnaia* actions as successful because they did not have any strategic goals and the demonstrators were always arrested, even before they got a chance to say anything. However, the Strategy-31 movement received more attention and participants during the winter, and in the spring of 2010 the liberals were also participating in the demonstrations. When I asked about this changing tactic in May 2010, Mikhail explained:

I somewhat changed my mind. I saw that it’s beginning to look like the campaign for human rights in the United States, for example, when they started to invade lunch counters. They also started with actions like this when they just organized sit-ins at the lunch counters. In first several months, they had no progress. But they remained persistent and after some time, things began to change. If this strategy is followed, we have a chance of winning. It’s not certain for us because the Russian government cares less about the public opinion than the United States government. Still, we have a chance of winning.

This comparison to the sit-ins of the Civil Rights Movement that started in the United States in the 1950 and 60s is quite interesting since the Strategy-31 demonstrations were initiated by the National Bolsheviks, who have been described as statist and imperialists (Van Ree 2001), while the US civil rights movement's goal was to achieve equal rights for everyone and it was mainly concerned with racial discrimination. However, Mikhail justifies the liberals' participation in Strategy-31 demonstrations through the background symbols of constitutionalism and non-violent resistance, which are also the discursive frames that Oborona activists use to define the movement. The involvement of nationalist groups in the Strategy-31 demonstrations forced the liberals to decide whether they wanted to co-operate with the nationalists or stay out of the widening Strategy-31 movement. In Strategy-31, all the participating groups are willing to unite to protect Russian citizens' constitutional rights, and thus discard other political disagreements between the groups in other questions, such as nationalism, and therefore, the liberals also joined the demonstrations.

Strategy-31 protesters claim to use non-violent tactics, ideals that Oborona activists draw from the writings of Gandhi and the United States' Civil Rights Movement. However, they are prepared to face violence from the police's side during the arrests and often resist arrest strongly or even violently. In this case, non-violent methods are used as a script to convey the basic assumption of the violent police state that abuses peaceful protestors. During the Civil Rights Movement, pictures of violence against peaceful protesters proved to be an efficient way to show the activists as the abused ones and to show how the police did not intervene to stop the violence (Raiford 2007). In addition to being non-violent, Oborona often emphasizes legality and the implementation of law. However, in the case of illegal demonstrations, the movement justifies its illegal activities as the only way to act in Russia:

But when you can't organize anything legally, there is only one option to implement your constitutional right [---] And we believe that these constitutional rights are higher than some arbitrary decisions and resolutions of the city officials. (Mikhail)

## **Actors and the Foreground Scripts**

The scripts are an 'action-oriented subset of background understandings' (Alexander 2006). The script of a performance is created by choosing selected background meanings to be conveyed to the audience. According to Benford and Hunt (1992, 38), scripting is 'interactionally emergent guides for collective consciousness and action, guides that are circumspect enough to provide behavioral cues when unanticipated events arise yet sufficiently flexible to allow for improvisation'. Scripts identify the actors, outline expected behavior and define the scene (Benford and Hunt 1992, 38). In the case of Russian protests, the scripts of different performances vary according to the nature of the protest event. The so-called legal pickets (*pikety*), which have the authorities' permission, often go as planned from both sides, the authorities and the protesters, even though sometimes the script is disturbed by the protesters themselves or by 'counter-movements', such as the pro-Kremlin movements *Nashi* or *Molodaia Gvardiia*, and their provocation.

When protesting with the permission of the authorities, the demonstration area is often in a relatively remote place and the demonstrators have to stay in a fenced area and go in through metal detectors. These pickets often include speeches and chanting slogans, and are organized by the officially registered political organizations such as the Communist Party or the Fair Russia party. Some individual organizers such as Liudmila Alekseeva, who is a long-term human rights activists and the leader of the Moscow Helsinki group, are granted permission to hold rallies that then come to be associated with the Solidarity Movement or another group that the organizer is associated with.<sup>26</sup>In the legal pickets, the speeches and chanting has to remain acceptable by the authorities and not to violate the laws on defamation. Sometimes the police end the demonstration if they see it diverging from the permitted plan and then a legal picket turns into an unsanctioned demonstration.

Rallies that are organized without the authorities' permission follow a certain script as well, even if it is more hidden than at the legal events. First, the organizers ask for a permission to gather in a central place, which is usually denied by the authorities, who sometimes propose a more remote place for the event. After this negative response to their application, the organizers decide to organize the event even if it is unsanctioned and justify gathering as their constitutional right. When the day of the protest arrives, the place of the meeting is often occupied by the pro-Kremlin youth movements and cordoned off from the public by the police.

Even though at first glance, the illegal demonstration rally seems to be a total chaos, upon a closer look, one can see that it is more of a 'screen-written performance' whose rules all the 'actors' know. The actors in this play are the pro-Kremlin movements, oppositional movements, police and other authorities as well as the media. All these groups have their own roles in the performance and they can be specified even further. Among the protestors there are different roles; there are the ones that push through to the heart of the demonstration, shout and fight the police. They are often beaten and arrested. Their faces are familiar to the militia, which targets them and other public figures, such as the opposition leaders, as the first ones to be arrested. Besides this 'front line', there are the 'by-standers', protesters that just stand and follow the play and the ones who shout slogans but try to stay out of contact with the militia.

From my description of the Strategy-31 above we can see that Inna also recognized these different roles and decided to stay as a 'by-stander' or audience to avoid arrest (and ruining her clothing). In another 31-demonstration, Inna had a different strategy; she wanted to challenge the police and she aimed at getting through the police line in the middle of the square. She repeatedly pushed through and once she was already taken by the police, but then for some reason the arrest did not happen and the police went after another activist. Inna returned to the side of the demonstration, a bit disappointed, but proudly displaying her 'battle wounds': torn and dusty t-shirt and bruises. This excitement and adrenaline from challenging the authorities and fighting oneself out of the hands of

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<sup>26</sup> *Getting permission for protesting became more difficult after the Duma passed a law in 2012 on organizing demonstrations that prohibits people who have been arrested in illegal demonstrations to act as the organizer of a demonstration. Also, fines for organizing or participating in unsanctioned demonstration have been raised to thousands of dollars.*

the police often shows in people's faces when they rush back to the sides of the demonstration to catch their breath and then again push through to the frontline. However, many of the films, which are published afterwards online, show how the 'familiar faces', such as the opposition leaders, get arrested while giving interviews even though they are not disturbing the order or challenging the authorities.

A part of the protesters have taken their role as witnesses or reporters who film or photograph the event and publish these reports afterwards online. They are often correspondents of some independent web-media sites or individual bloggers. Some of these protesters use their status as 'press' to avoid arrests even though they are obviously also participating as protesters. The state media made the informed decision to stay out of the oppositional demonstrations or at least not to report on these events. Sometimes foreign media agencies, such as the BBC, cover these events on their channels but they often remain out of reach of the wider Russian public. However, this changed somewhat during the wider electoral movement after the elections in 2011 when the authorities gave permissions for larger rallies and also the state-controlled TV channels noted the demonstrations in their news podcasts. However, the authorities and the state-controlled TV channels tend to downplay or even ridicule the protest events and the amount of people participating in them.



**Image 8** *Army troops guarding the park where the opposition's demonstration was held.*



**Image 9** *The Young Guard has occupied the Triumphalnia Square before the planned Strategy-31 protest.*

In addition, the police have different roles in the ‘play’. There are the feared OMON<sup>27</sup> troops, Special Forces dressed in camouflage outfits, which are big and scary men and execute arrests efficiently. Then there are the police that stand out in numbers. The police representatives are either older higher officials on command or young new recruits that are used more as a human shield or chain to keep the protesters from spreading from the area. Often they are supported by army recruits who circle the square to keep the outsiders out and the insiders in. Besides these, there are some non-uniformed authorities that command the troops but do not take part in the arrests themselves. Protesters have also learned to recognize these plain-clothed authorities and stay out of their monitoring gaze. Sometimes these authorities are also filming the events and its participants.

The script of the performance is also adapted to the changing circumstances. Both sides of the struggle form their tactics according to the opponents’ tactics. For example, when the police arrested 82-year-old activist Liudmila Alekseeva, the event got international attention and condemnation. At the next demonstrations, elderly women were allowed to walk freely in the areas where other people were arrested immediately. Another change of policing tactics that occurred in May 2010 was the inclusion of the female police to guard the demonstrations, and especially to arrest the female activists. Some of the female activists told me that the women ‘*menty*’ were even crueler than the men in their arrests.

Every good theatrical ‘plot’ needs to have twists and turns (Alexander 2006, 62). In Strategy-31 demonstrations, the first twist comes when the uniformed crowd turns into a unified demonstration. This usually happens when the organizers light a torch or start chanting slogans. The next turn happens when the demonstrators start to challenge the police by running to the closed areas or taking up placards. This leads to arrests that make a great and dramatic end to the play that intended to show how there is no freedom of gathering and how brutally the authorities treat people trying to voice their grievances. Arrests re-fuse (Alexander 2006) the background story of a police state into the script of showing police brutality that often includes the ‘audience’ if they happen to stand in the wrong place, consciously or by accident.

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<sup>27</sup> Otriad Militsii Osobogo Naznacheniiia, *Special Purpose Police Unit*.





**Image 10** *Demonstrators light up a torch in the Strategy-31 demonstration on Triumphal Square in July 2010.*



**Image 11** *Detained activists in the police minibus (avtozak).*

## Audience and Means of Symbolic Production

According to Eyerman (2006, 199), in social performance, actors and roles are important. He argues that '[m]ovement actors perform and convey; they also dramatize, adding powerful emotions to their actions which re-present known narratives through the use of symbols'. The foreground script, the screenplay of the performance, is performed by *actors*; in this case, the protestors in the demonstration chanting their slogans. Slogans used in the demonstrations, such as 'Down with the Chekists' and 'Down with the police state', associate contemporary authorities with the repressive Soviet state. The one common enemy that brings all the oppositional forces across ideological boundaries together occurs in slogans such as 'Putin Resign!' or 'Russia without Putin'. The main idea of the script of the protest is to show how opposition and citizens' constitutional rights are repressed by the state. This is shown practically by gathering at a designated square and being arrested by the police. The arrests legitimize opposition activist self-identification as repressed dissidents. However, the different audiences of the performance might have different interpretations of the events.

According to Alexander (2006, 34), the relation between the actors and *audience* depends on the actors' ability to project the background and foreground presentations as moral evaluations and to display meanings to the audience, who are 'the observers for cultural performance'. The audience should be able to identify with the characters 'on stage' for the message to be transmitted. In order to persuade the audience, the actors need *means of symbolic production*, objects that help them to dramatize and make vivid the motives and morals that they are trying to represent. In Strategy-31 demonstrations, these 'iconic representations' have to be subtle in order to make the point of citizens' right to peaceful assembly but at the same time making sure that the script is followed so that the performance ends in arrests. According to Russian law, people's gathering is interpreted as a demonstration that needs permission from the authorities when the participants chant slogans or carry placards (OVD-info 2012). However, many protesters have decided to wear clothing or have their body painted with symbolic number 31 or are carrying placards with these slogans attached to their clothing to get around this rule. With these 'hidden' signifiers of a demonstration, they try to make a point why they are in the square as well as to test out how far they can go in the name of the 'peaceful gathering of citizens'.

An example of symbolic production and dramatizing the performance is the wedding couple I mentioned in my description of the Strategy-31 protest. The couple that had married on the previous day came to the Triumfalnaia square in their wedding clothes holding a banner saying 'Bitter to see the arbitrariness' ('*Gor'ko videt' proizvol'*). The slogan refers to the wedding tradition when the wedding guests chant '*gor'ko*' and the new couple should kiss away the 'bitterness' of the drink. In the protest event, the couple drew correlations to Russian traditions and at the same time produced an image of the 'revolutionary bride and groom' setting the protest event as important as their wedding. Another example of this symbolic production on the other side of the struggle is the action of the pro-Kremlin activists who climbed up to the scaffolding of a construction site near Triumfalnaia Square and hung a banner mocking the demonstration occurring down in the

square with the text: ‘Hurray! Strategy 32, Psychos go forward’ (*Psikhi vpered*). Labeling the opposition as a sick and unstable minority is also familiar from Soviet times (Yurchak 2006).

Also the physical place, Triumfalnaia square, where the demonstrations are held acts as an iconic representation: the actors need a central place and prefer a place where they know they are not going to receive permission to gather and thus can ‘stage’ (turn their text into a scene, the *mise-en-scène*) their dramatic play of ‘Brutal police arresting innocent citizens executing their right to peaceful assembly’. Protest events are often dramatized in the aftermath that goes on online. Vivid pictures and videos of arrested young men and women and injured protesters are spread throughout Internet blogs, where the participants report about the events and the police brutality.

However, in all the elements of cultural performance, *social power* plays an important role. ‘Social power affects performance by mediating access to the means of symbolic production’ (Alexander 2006, 66). The Russian state controls the ‘symbolic distribution of social drama’ and frames these performances by dismissing or downplaying the protests and oppositional protesters. Opposition demonstrations have no legitimacy in the eyes of the powerholders, who also control the publicity of these events through the state-controlled media, and thus affect the public recognition and interpretation of the performance. The state has its cultural hegemonic status to represent the actors and the whole performance as a minor disturbance by an unstable minority.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the status of the group as the state’s ‘ally’ or ‘adversary’ defines the different opportunities for action. When the opposition demonstrations are kept small and under strict control of the authorities, the pro-Kremlin groups have more freedom and the state support to organize large-scale events in the main squares of Moscow and other big cities.

On the other hand, social power defines who is able to participate in a demonstration. Opposition demonstrations are usually organized on the Internet and the participants are more likely to come from the middle class. Oborona activists come from middle class families and they have steady incomes or support from their parents, which enables them to participate in and organize demonstrations, which requires free time from employment that many people from lower classes do not have. Through their education and activist experiences, Oborona activists have gained a certain legal literacy and, thus, know their rights very well and are able to protect them. Additionally, Oborona participants have created a wide network of friends and acquaintances, which makes it easier for them to gain information. Knowing that your friends are participating in demonstrations tends to lower the threshold of participating in a protest event. Furthermore, progress and civic-mindedness tend to be symbolically associated with the middle class in Russian public discourse (Melin and Salmenniemi, 2012), which may encourage participation by the more privileged middle class.

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<sup>28</sup> According to Levada Center’s survey (Levada Tsentr 2010a), only a quarter of Russians had even heard of the Strategy-31 rallies. Of these, 37 percent supported the actions at least partly while 15 percent of the respondents were against it. 49 percent of the respondents answered ‘it is difficult to answer’.

## Effect of the Protest

According to Alexander (2006), different elements of a social performance have to be 're-fused' to make an impact, to persuade the audience (see also Benford and Hunt 1992, 38). Alexander (2006, 55) maintains that '[t]he aim is to create via skillful and affecting performance, the emotional connection of audience with actor and text and thereby to create the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from performance to audience.' Failed, or not successfully re-fused, action seems inauthentic and not sincere, but is more likely to be interpreted as, for example, manipulative by the audience. Successful performance creates ritual-like conditions by stitching together the disconnected elements of cultural performance and the separate elements become indivisible and invisible. Successful performance makes the social powers acting (directing) behind it invisible.

Rauer (2006, 260) defines the different orders of audiences of a social performance: the first-order audience is the people experiencing the actual performance, in this case the people standing on the square watching or participating in the performance. This order of audience can become actors of the performance through their reactions to the performance. The second-order audience is the media that further encode the event and provide 'latent structures of time and space by means of textual or visual representation'. (Rauer 2006, 260.) The media encodes the event as failed or successful. The readers or viewers of these media products are the third-order audience and they are mainly absorbing the decoded meanings created by the media. In Russia, the state-controlled media acts in between the first and third order audiences, decoding the performance and knowingly de-fusing the message by portraying the demonstrators as a minority and disconnecting them from the background symbols that the protesters wished the script to reproduce. On the other hand, the third-order audience is divided; the Internet audience finds more fused message than the audience of the more traditional media outlets do.

In addition to the uneven social power relationship between the authorities and the opposition, the background scripts and collective dimensions of the activist identity, which are based on exceptionalism and distance from the 'ordinary people' (see chapter 4), can 'de-fuse' the audience from the script and its actors. Furthermore, the performance may seem artificial to the audience, since it brings somewhat foreign (western) ideals to the dominant, official understanding of state-society relationship (see chapter 5). Oborona identifies with the western ideals of liberal democracy, which are based on individual freedoms and rights, and thus the movement positions itself against the state's sovereign democracy model which sets the state's interests above the individual citizen's interests (Cook 2007; Salmenniemi 2010). Furthermore, liberal protesters are associated with the 1990s shock therapy and economic reforms, whose conductors are the 'heroes' of the liberals of the democratic movement but not so much of the wider public. Oborona and other opposition activists struggle to redefine these denominators, such as 'western' or 'democrat', as legitimate, but the state has a hegemonic position to symbolically associate protests as extremism or as a western plot against Russia. Some protest organizers, such as the National Bolsheviks, are portrayed as aggressive and violent hooligans by the state-controlled media, which strongly influences the wider perception of the National Bolsheviks and the people associated with them.

However, the script of this social performance is ‘re-fused’ with the first-order audience who has come to the square knowing about the demonstration and being thus partly involved in it: they are acting as demonstrators and the audience at the same time. For them, the script and resulting arrests legitimize their struggle for constitutional rights as well as their identities as repressed modern-day dissidents. However, the script does not re-fuse as successfully with the audience who happened to be on the scene, for example on their way home from work. These people often seem scared or annoyed because their way home is disturbed and blocked. I was surprised to see that even if the square was surrounded by dozens of police vans and hundreds of police officers, many passers-by did not seem to react to the situation in any way but ‘closed their eyes’ to what was happening and hurried away. It seemed that they did not want to be part of anything or even know what was going on. Furthermore, the first-order audience who was on the square or who knowingly looked for information online can find convincing witness stories and videos in various blogs, but these remain hidden from the wider audience, the Russians people in general.

Usually during the Strategy-31 protests, there is another performance at play and often at the same square where the opposition’s demonstration takes place. The pro-Kremlin youth movements have used a tactic to seize the square right before the opposition’s protest and stage their own play. In this play the script is different; it is based on the admiration of Vladimir Putin, and on portraying the opposition as ‘weirdoes’ or sometimes even as terrorists. This is performed through a script that includes a mass of young people showing their support for Putin (and Medvedev), singing and dancing or volunteering, for example donating blood. Their performance often includes colorful and matching clothing, a big stage with big portraits of the leaders of the country. Even though this performance might be more convincing to the third-order audience who follow it on their TV screens at home, it also lacks authenticity since many times it is widely known that these young people are brought to the square from the nearby regions with a promise of a big party and a free trip to the capital city (Hemment 2009). Therefore, often the actors in this performance are not really ‘re-fused’ with the script, but just having fun or waiting the obligatory time to pass so that they can stop ‘performing’.

According to Eyerman (2006, 207), ‘on a collective level, strategic performance is a part of a social movement’s representation of itself.’ He continues that ‘collective self-presentation is part of the process of collective identity forming’: it bonds people together emotionally and creates boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Even if these rallies hardly ever get any visibility or public acknowledgement, participation makes sense to the activists participating in it. Also Pavel has noted this:

And besides, we go to the Square on the 31st. Stupidly stand there a couple of hours if everyone is not arrested. Well, it is understandable that, on the one side, it is a feeling that I fulfilled my duty, all that is depending on me. However, I understand that for not politicized people this does not find resonance (*u nepolitizirovannykh liudei eto ne nakhodit otklika*). (Pavel)

Jeffery S. Juris (2008), who has studied the anti-corporate globalization protests, claims that besides attracting the media’s attention, the mass-protests also have another function:



generating powerful emotions and political subjectivities. Through his ethnographic research, Juris found that by transforming emotions such as anger and rage into a sense of collective solidarity, the anti-corporate globalization demonstrations also created 'affective solidarity' among different protest networks.

In the case of the Russian protests, creating affective solidarity is also an important function of the mass protests. Of course, the stated goal of these protests is to voice the participants' contention with the government, but because of the lack of public media attention, grievances of the protesters often remain unheard. However, demonstrations are a way for the opposition activists to 'let steam out', meet friends and make new acquaintances. Therefore, the outcomes of these mass protest events often seem to be more intra-movement, i.e. strengthening the collective identity and the activists' self-realization as political subjects, rather than extra-movement, i.e. enhancing wider mobilization or creating sympathy for the protesters' cause (see also Earl 2001). As in Juris' (2008) study on counter-summits, Russian opposition's protests also seem to be important for networking and emotionally satisfying for the protesters themselves, but their media effects are often contradictory. The same trend has been documented by Ashwin and Clarke (2003, 200) in their study of Russian trade unions that did little in the sphere of organization and recruiting, but concentrated on serving its existing members, even if their memberships were declining and the organization needed a reform to sustain itself in the new market economy.

## **6.4 Flash Mobs and Street Performances**

In addition to participating in mass-demonstrations, Russian youth movements, including Oborona, organize smaller scale performances that they call direct action or 'flash mobs', which are often organized on the Internet and in social media. The main idea of a flash mob is that after finding out the place and time of action online, people gather somewhere in the city, do their act, and disperse quickly. However, in Oborona's and other small youth movements' case, the people performing the action know each other and are often from the same youth group or from other like-minded groups. In that sense, their action is not strictly following the original idea of a flash mob as strangers coming together to perform (see Rheingold 2003).

According to McCarthy, McPhail and Smith (1996, cited in della Porta & Diani 2006, 180–183), in order to obtain public coverage, an action should be big in numbers of participants, deploy radical tactics, or be particularly innovative. In addition, activists need to create new tactics constantly to meet the criteria of newsworthiness. Also Oborona activists claim that a protest should be creative, and thus, not 'boring'. Especially younger and new activists see traditional party pickets and marches as boring and inefficient in creating wider media and public attention for the activists' cause. However, the numbers of participants in a protest event are not seen as very important, if the action is interesting and creative. Activists describe flash mobs and other creative protests as strategies especially attractive to youth. The 'traditional' political marches and pickets are seen as



adult ways of protesting because they are physically easier and because they do not involve ‘jumping and running’ as unsanctioned protests often do:

Roughly speaking, there are two directions in the tactical plan; there are meetings and pickets, and some creative cheerful actions. Youth movements, they manage to combine both. Those who are older, they already... Probably due to physical limits, they choose an easier way. (That is) to stand in the pickets at (the statue of) Griboedev. (Inna)

A ‘flash mob’ can be, for example, a short play that is performed on the street, and it is often related to contemporary political events. One example of a flash mob-type of direct action was Oborona’s performance against Putin in which one of the activists wore a Putin mask and was put in a cage, representing jail. Other participants held a banner requiring Putin to be put in jail instead of Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Their banner said ‘Freedom to Khodorkovsky—Bread and Water for Putin!’ (*Khodorkovskomu—svobodu! Putinu—na khleb i vodu*). This performance also relied on the symbolic background of the personification of dissent against one ‘main enemy’ and the illegality of the ‘police state’. Mihail Khodorkovsky’s case has become an iconic symbol of the opposition in its struggle against Putin. Interestingly, even though there is evidence that Khodorkovsky has committed economic crimes, his deeds are not in the center of the opposition’s attention. The opposition sees the conviction as political because only people showing support for the opposition tend to be convicted of these ‘common’ crimes committed during the chaos of the 1990s. Khodorkovsky is not supported because of his deeds, but more as a personified symbol of general injustice and the illegal measures of the state.

Oborona’s performance took a humorous turn when the police came to stop the action. One of the Oborona activists tells about the end of the performance as follows:

They’re yelling, ‘Stop!’ (*Stoiat!*) And it was really funny for me to see Putin running at full speed, away from the White House [laughs], while they’re yelling, ‘Stop! Freeze! Or we’ll shoot!’<sup>29</sup> It was so funny, seeing Putin running away from the White House, with the security services after him! That was one of my favorite actions. (Cited in Sperling 2012, 240.)

This ‘turn’ made the performance successful and gave it the dramatic end the protesters wished for. If the police would have given the protesters freedom to stage their performance, it would not have followed the script, which usually includes being detained or running from the police. As usual, the audience for this performance was small. The pictures of Putin in jail were distributed online for a couple of days after the event.

Another performative action of Oborona was oriented against the reform of the Russian school system (see also section 4.4). In this performance, one activist, dressed in camouflage, gas mask and angel wings, cascaded with mountain gear down the building of the Ministry of Education. The symbolic background of this action was a bit unusual for Oborona since it critiqued education reform and tuition fees and religious education in

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<sup>29</sup> During my field work, I have not witnessed the police making any threats with guns. This might be the informant’s ‘coloring’ of the story.

schools. Thus, it engaged with questions of social equality, while Oborona's performances usually used the background symbolism of political rights and legality. In addition, this performance got its dramatic ending when the police waited for 'the Angel' on the street level and arrested him and he ended up in jail with a black eye. In the online aftermath, activists were quite sure that the angel would get 15 days of arrest, but in reality he was released already on the same day. The extension of the background symbols in this case also led to divisions within the movement, and part of the group disavowed from this action. In October 2012, I talked with one of the activists who had been in Oborona for several years, and she explained the new set of background symbols by saying that 'with the new participants of Oborona, its goals moved more to the left'. This action was one of the last ones that the Moscow Oborona organized and mirrored the breakdown of feelings of solidarity and groupness within Oborona.

The youth activists see flash mobs, graffiti, and fastening banners as interesting and motivating ways of protest. They create a feeling of an adrenaline rush and thus articulate the discourse of 'action' that Oborona activists engage with to differentiate themselves from the 'apolitical masses' and also from their parents' generation (see chapter 4). However, youth activists often emphasize that they do not do these actions just for adrenaline but also for the good of the country and for other people:

I am interested in taking part in interesting, artistic, provocative actions even though I understand that alone [without other forms of action] they are not enough. Well, that is, rationally and as a person, I like the extreme, the danger, [and] a surprise. Like to climb to the roof [refers to the Angel performance]. (Katia)

Mikhail: You can feel that you are doing a good thing and at the same time, it is very interesting. Especially in our circumstances, you are living a very interesting life. Sometimes it's almost like in cinema. [---] It's a lot of adrenaline, but not just adrenaline like jumping with a parachute; you are doing a good thing helping your country and people.

Katia and Mikhail associate demonstrations and street performances with emotions such as anger, surprise, extreme and fear. These emotions that are shared with other participants create high levels of affective solidarity, feelings of collective power and solidarity (Juris 2008).

## **6.5 Discussion Clubs, Seminars and the 'Partizan' Camp**

In addition to contentious protests, youth movements believe in discussions and intellectual training of their current and future activists. According to Johnston (2009, 9), these kinds of 'specific workings of movements also have performative aspects', which are directed towards internal audiences. Oborona organizes training seminars to which they invite guest speakers to talk about the legal rights of Russian citizens. These seminars are small-scale and usually attract only a few new people in addition to the usual participants. Seminars and discussion clubs are advertised on the Internet and sometimes

in the hallways of the universities, and they reach only a small fraction of possible audiences. Through these performances, the activists reproduce their intelligentsia identity both inside the movement and for the audience. The background symbolism of these actions is drawing on the western ideals of liberal democracy and political rights as well as non-violent resistance tactics, and the seminars usually deal with the legal rights of citizens or practical advice such as how to communicate with the police or how to effectively organize a protest event. One big seminar, iWeekend, which Oborona was organizing together with other liberal youth groups, dealt with online activism, social media, Internet security and online campaigns, which have become more important for the organization of protests in Russia (Lonkila 2012). Also, the English name of the seminar and its references to information technology re-established Oborona's strong connection to the West and to contemporary Internet activism.

Besides seminars and debates, Oborona also organizes practical 'training' for the activists of youth movements and their like-minded friends. One popular training event is the City-quest (*Kvest*) that is organized in cooperation with other youth movements, such as *Smena* (Change) and the Nation of Freedom. Quest is a game where the participants have to solve different tasks together. Tasks often involve orienteering in the city, problem solving, and practical protest methods, such as fastening banners with slogans against the authorities on bridges. City-quests are exciting and educational for its participants. They involve a lot of running and excitement, but also demand different activist skills such as leadership and collaboration, since usually one of the activists is designated as the leader of the group, who other group members need to follow. The concrete results of these games, besides 'training', are the banners that are fastened in public places and sometimes graffiti. Usually the banners and graffiti repeat the familiar slogans of the demonstrations ('Down with the *Chekists*', 'Down with the police state', 'Russia without Putin'). These activities follow the logic of public protests and the script of opposition activists struggling for freedom and against totalitarianism.

Another form of action that combines the previous ones is the 'Partizan' camp that Oborona organizes annually. These camps can be seen as shadow camps for the big youth camps that the pro-Kremlin youth movements organize by Lake Seliger. Partizan camps are much smaller with a couple of dozen participants, but they offer a space for intensive discussions, lectures and 'training' for its participants. The camp's highlight is the quest-game that takes place on the last day of the camp. Camps are usually three days long and the participants sleep in tents and cook their food on a fire. These camps are advertised as a place for activists to relax and learn about activism. Often the participants themselves give lectures in their own areas of expertise. These camps as performances combine the background symbols of the need for 'action' and the intellectual tradition of educating the masses. They also strengthen the activist identity as radical and active and not only as intellectual 'nerds', since the physical exercises of the camp, such as the Quest game in the woods, are often demanding.

Camps are also interesting since in such a closed camping situation, activists cannot avoid talking about their political ideologies. The activists spend many evenings by the campfire in heated debates or arguments about politics. When I participated in the 'Partizan' camp in 2010, there were many debates between the libertarian activists and the

more left-oriented activists. For example, these included arguments about state-society relations such as total freedom of markets and people or the benefits of anarchy or order. These arguments often spread to the activists' presentations as well, but in that situation, other activists or presenters had more authority to 'steer' the discussion back to 'neutral' topics of non-violent methods or talking about the repressive Russian state and the 'common enemy'. These political discussions show how inside the activist group, people draw on different background symbols and how this creates tensions that reflect the rather weak collective political identity of the movement. Some activists show frustration in not agreeing with others on socio-economic issues, but also seem to enjoy debates. These debating skills are appreciated in the movement as a form of cultural capital.

## 6.6 In Conclusion

Oborona's repertoire of action brings together the ideals and norms of the activist identity and the discursive frameworks of the movement. These are performed in the protests, whose scripts follow the self-understanding of the activists as supporting constitutional legality, individual freedoms, and its resistance against the authoritarian state. Background symbols also articulate with the activist identity, which is constructed upon an entanglement of identification with the intelligentsia, Soviet dissidence, western-mindedness, and action in contrast to general passivity of the Russians.

However, the re-fusion or success of the performance can be contested. Performances are built on unfamiliar symbols drawn from western thinking and the scripts often remain distant from the wider Russian audiences. This de-fusion of the audience from the actors and the text is partly because of the political opportunities and restrictions (social power), but also because of the construction of intelligentsia identity based on distance from 'ordinary people'. Performance makes sense (is re-fused) for its actors themselves but not for the wider public. Therefore, the results of the protests seem to be more intra-movement than extra-movement.

At the high point of the Strategy-31 demonstrations and also Oborona's active period in 2010, only one to three per cent of Russians recognized oppositional youth movements, while around 20 per cent recognized the pro-Kremlin movements. According to a survey (Levada Tsentr 2010b) among the university students, only 7 percent of students had heard of the Oborona movement and only 1 percent knew its political goals. 58 percent of the students recognized the pro-Kremlin movement Nashi by the name but only 8 percent knew its goals. 47 percent of the respondents did not know the goals of any of the movements listed. This is of course partly due to the lack of interest of the wider public in political movements per se, and the lack of media coverage. However, the action repertoires of the youth movements emphasize the intra-movement outcomes, bonding and training of the already established members of the oppositional movements, while the extra-movement actions remain few. This shows in the small numbers of memberships, but also in the overall recognition of these movements. These performances do not reach to the wider masses of youth, but concentrate on the youth that are already like-minded or even active in other protest movements. The big mass of the Russian 'apolitical' youth

still remains out of the reach of the repertoire choices, and tend to see the grievances of the oppositional movements as somewhat foreign and distant.





**Image 12** Partizan 2010 campers planning their upcoming group presentation.



**Image 13** Banner criticizing Moscow mayor Luzhkov on a Moscow Bridge after the City Quest game: General Plan of Luzhkov is Killing Moscow.





**Image 14** Activist learning to draw graffiti in the abandoned building site.



**Image 15** iWeekend: New Technologies for Civil Society

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1 'The Day X'

In October 2012, when the political protests against Putin and the falsified election results had already cooled off, the Russian 'non-systemic' opposition held their first Internet elections for the opposition's Coordinating Council that was supposed to take a fresh lead in mobilizing people against President Putin. On the weekend of the elections, I met with Viktor on *Tsvetnoi* Boulevard to stroll around the park where the weekend event around the elections was organized. Since many people who wanted to vote in these elections did not have access to the Internet or did not know how to use computers, the organizers had set up several tents in the park where they had installed computers and helped people cast their vote. There were long lines outside all the tents. We were standing in one of the lines with Viktor when he explained to me how the voting would proceed; people chose 45 candidates to the council from a list of over 200 people. Furthermore, all the voters had to choose candidates from all the lists, nationalists, liberals and non-affiliated, to prevent any one coalition taking over the whole council. Of course choosing this many candidates took a long time and the lines to vote were long. I saw people getting anxious and frustrated; they had stood in line for a long time, even an hour. Their frustration was eased from time to time when the 'stars' of the opposition, Boris Nemtsov, Aleksey Navalnyi, and Sergey Udaltsov, came to greet people standing in lines and thanked them for being there. All three had their usual 'entourage' with them, their personal bodyguards, assistants and a crowd of reporters following them.

When meeting Viktor by the metro station, I was surprised to learn that he had not voted online and was not planning to vote in the park either. He explained that he was not used to voting since voting usually does not solve anything in Russia, since the elections have been rigged for so long. However, when he saw people lining up to vote, and probably after my questioning his reasons not to vote, he decided to cast his vote anyways. While standing in line, I asked Viktor for whom he was going to vote. He said that he did not know yet, but was just going to look through the list and mark the familiar names in it. I was again taken by surprise that he was not very interested in the political programs of the candidates. However, on the previous day, I had met with another activist who complained that this was the usual case among the voters; no one was willing or even able to read through the 200 individual programs of the candidates. She gave this as the reason that she herself did not vote in these elections that she did not even support wholeheartedly. She told me that some of the candidates had 'stupid' claims in their program, such as 'it's my birthday, you should vote for me'. These elections seemed to divide the ex-*Oborontsy* even further; some of them took part in organizing the elections, some of them boycotted the elections entirely and some were trying to decide whether to vote or not.

After standing in line for about 20 minutes, it had not moved anywhere and Viktor decided to leave without voting. We walked through the park, but there was not that much

going on. We greeted a couple of ex-Oborona activists who were now taking part in organizing the elections as Solidarity members. The stage was empty and the speakers were playing background music. Most of the people walking around or talking in groups were elderly and the only flags visible were the traditional red sickle and hammer prints. Viktor decided to leave to meet his girlfriend and I left the park, too. When walking away from the park, I took some pictures of the large number of police cars and trucks that stood around the park. In some of them, the police officers were sleeping or playing with their smartphones. Before entering the metro, I saw two clowns around the circus handing out leaflets saying, ‘vote for them in the circus’. They must have been some pro-Kremlin activists. I entered the metro thinking that this seemed to be the end of Moscow Oborona and a good time to end my fieldwork.



**Image 16** *Clowns outside the park where the opposition gathered.*

Oborona had dissolved right when the long awaited mass protests against the government, which Mikhail had earlier referred as the Day X (see chapter 3.5), took place. In my first interview with Vova in October 2009, I asked him what the movement wanted to accomplish in the near future. He answered:

Well, we want to achieve the change of regime as a result of free elections. We will certainly orient towards the years 2011–12. We have to work very hard and we want that the vector of direction in the country to change to democracy, to European values: not authoritarian but democratic. (Vova)

However, even if Oborona wanted to orient towards the electoral period of 2011–12, it failed to achieve this goal. On the contrary, Moscow Oborona dissolved right around the time when the larger mobilization against the falsification of elections started. The movement had been drifting, since its symbolic leader left at the end of 2010. It did not manage to gather people again and was not able to reorganize its structure according to the wishes of the older section of activists and the newcomers. The time that was supposed to be the prime time for Oborona ended up creating such a big need for an organizational reform, that the activists decided to freeze the movement altogether. The post-electoral protest movement forced Oborona participants to break the ‘silence’ in regards to political affiliations and ideologies, and the negotiation process of a new strategy for action revealed the weak political connectedness amongst the participants and led to the group’s dissolution. It seems that the wide spectrum of political opinions and goals was too fragmented to create a concrete platform for action. I argue that in this sense, Oborona reflects the problems of the non-systemic opposition in general; persistent vertical power structures (even if symbolic), an nonexistent political program, and the inability to create an alternative vision of the future without Putin that would help to gain people’s trust and support. In this concluding chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to Russian political culture and show how the case of Oborona illustrates the problems of the liberal opposition in contemporary Russia.

## **7.2 Entanglement of Liberal and Soviet Ideas**

In the beginning of this book, I set out the research questions of the study, which aimed to answer the main question: How are oppositional activist identities and movement practices constructed in the restricted Russian political environment and how do these reflect Russian political culture? My research engages with recent research on civil society in post-socialist states that has begun to move away from comparing civil society development in these countries to the western liberal-democratic ideal, towards the study of ‘actually existing’ activism in the area. These studies have shown that comparing local activism, or non-participation, to the western models of participation and political activism is often not fruitful as such, but the analysis needs to see the historical continuities and new developments of post-socialist societies, which create new, localized models of participation and activism. (See e.g. Greenberg 2010; Dunn 2004; Hemment 2009; Fournier 2010; Kulmala 2013; Verdery 1996.) Anna Fournier (2010), in her study on the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, writes about a certain engagement of continuing Soviet values and western ideas, which she sees as becoming entangled and impossible to distinguish and, thus, create an entirely new model of citizenship and civic participation. According to her (2010, 111), continuities of selected elements of Soviet political culture and citizenship become ‘reconstituted in such a way as to be relevant to post-Soviet challenges’ and these ideas engage with ideas of (imagined) western modernity. In this engagement, some aspects of local life become westernized, but simultaneously also the western practices, standards and discourses become localized (Fournier 2010, 115). I

argue that also the Oborona movement illustrates this entanglement in the context of Russian political culture.

### **Depoliticized political movement?**

My first research question concerned how activists construct their identities in Oborona, and in relation to other political actors in Russia. Even though theoretical discussion on identities is fluid, and for some even controversial (see chapter 1), I found Brubaker and Cooper's theorization of identity helpful in analyzing activists' self-understandings. Approaching activist identities as processes of identification and dis-identification in relation to 'others' is helpful in highlighting lived activism in Russia and the motivations, opportunities and constraints for opposition activism in Russia's restrictive political environment. Looking into activist identities helped me to create a more nuanced analysis of the activists' self-understanding and the negotiation processes of who one is in relation to others.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) distinguish between self-identification on the one hand, and identification and categorization by others on the other, and they emphasize the dialectical interplay between these. In Oborona's case, the categorization by outsiders, the state, and pro-governmental groups was integral to Oborona participants' self-understanding as opposition activists. Their identification processes were formed as a response to outside categorizations of them as unpatriotic, western spies or even 'nutters' (*psikhi*). The activists made great efforts in trying to prove these definitions wrong and to portray themselves as interested in the well-being of Russians and in the fate of their country. Oborona activists' subjectivity was constructed in strong interplay with the negative categorization imposed on them by 'others' (see Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 17). Activists produced a counter-narrative to the outside categorization by narrating themselves as young cosmopolitan intellectuals who were guiding their country into a better future.

I argue that Oborona activists construct their self-understanding as activists on three main axes: upon the ideals of intelligentsia, dissidence, and cosmopolitanism. Activists are from intelligentsia families and carry on intelligentsia's traditional ideals of morality and intellectualism. They also drew parallels between their activism and the Soviet dissidents fighting the totalitarian state and, simultaneously, they drew parallels between the Russian state and the Soviet totalitarian system. Furthermore, activists hold western liberalism as their ideal and Oborona's goal was to steer Russia towards the 'western' way of democracy. These ideas were endorsed by the group practices, which further strengthened activist identities through shared ideals of a 'true oppositionist' and through the movement's repertoire of action, which was built on this self-understanding; around aggressive demonstrations against the current government, youthful and playful street activities, Internet activism, and educational seminars.

The activist identity exhibits an entanglement of ideas that draw on historical continuities and dissident traditions in Russia, and on new global forms of activism. Activists wanted to portray themselves as today's 'intellectual dissidents' and to take up



the traditional role of intelligentsia as the ‘educator’ and moral example of the ‘masses’ (Fitzpatrick 1992; Kochetkova 2010). However, on the other hand, they emphasize their international experience and connections, and identify with the western activists demanding democratic freedoms. Furthermore, Oborona activists distance themselves from their parent’s generations’ ‘kitchen activism’ by engaging with the common youth discourse of ‘action’, which sees physical ‘doing’ and street activism as especially youthful ways of being. This discourse is shared by the youth from the pro-Kremlin movements as well as the skinhead groups (see Lassila 2011b; Pilkington 2010) and, thus, I interpret it as a shared discourse among Russian active youth.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 20) also provide a perspective to understand the construction of activist identities on the group level with the concepts of commonality, connectedness, and groupness. These different dimensions of group identity can be used to create a nuanced understanding of an activist group and its internal solidarities and frictions. Identity theories helped to understand how and why the movement dissolved and why it had to stay silent in various political questions. Furthermore, understanding the grounds for groupness and connectedness in Oborona helped me to examine the very complex understanding of democracy and civil society that circulated among the group participants, which would have otherwise left me bewildered (see chapter 5). Identity theories gave me an understanding of the group’s inner dynamics, which helped me to understand the ways they spoke about liberalism, statism, freedom, and patriotism in the group, and the sometimes paradoxical combinations of these discourses. These statements were made under pressure of keeping the group united despite its weak political connectedness, as well as to balance between the western ideals of liberal democracy and the ideas of patriotism and national unity, which continue to circulate in Russian political debates.

In Oborona commonality, i.e. shared common attributes, were quite clear: they described themselves as intellectuals, continuers of dissident intelligentsia, and as cosmopolitan. Additionally, they held a certain middle class position, which gave them opportunities and resources for being politically active. Commonality among the group members was important especially when new participants entered the group: people with similar dispositions were accepted as group members while those diverting from them had difficulties in finding their place in the group. Activists were expected to be ready to voice their opposition to Putin, and to possess forms of cultural capital, such as education, international experiences, and IT knowledge in order to join the group and to contribute to it.

In Brubaker and Cooper’s theorization, the definition of groupness, that is, ‘the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group’ is also a helpful perspective for unpacking social movement practices. This groupness manifested itself in Oborona’s practices of *obshchenie* and *tusovka*, which can be seen as an important historical pattern in Russian and Soviet cultural history (see Yurchak 2006; Pilkington 1994; Zdravomyslova & Voronkov 2002). I observed these continuing practices of being together and communication as the main source of feelings of solidarity in the group. Interestingly, the group seemed to lack political connectedness as ‘the relational tie that link people’ (Brubaker & Cooper 2000), which was partly replaced by this strong sense of



belonging through friendship. Oborona activists emphasized the significance of friendship and obshchenie as uniting the group instead of political affiliations or shared political ideology.

I suggest that the post-Soviet activist identity is a new entanglement of continuing and transformed Soviet frameworks and localized practices and values of global activism. In Oborona, activist identities are constructed upon distancing oneself from the 'Soviet' generations and identifying with the 'western way' of democracy. However, at the same time, the traditional forms of groupness, tusovka and kruzhok culture, as well as traditional gendered understandings of activism continue to shape the group's collective identity. I have argued that the weak political connectedness made engaging in strong and novel politicization processes a challenge for the group, but forced the movement to shush certain types of political discussions, such as the LGBTI rights or questions of social justice, in order to preserve the group's unity. This led to a paradoxical situation in which the political movement was internally depoliticized and individual political affiliations were not discussed. This type of groupness and loose political connectedness allowed for wide and flexible coalition-building amongst a wide spectrum of political actors, but did not create a strong sense of political connectedness inside the group, and kept the group's turnover rate high.

### **Gendered and Classed Activist Identities**

Gender relations shape the practices and ideals of different types of political action (Gal and Kligman 2000, 4–5). Even if the activist identity in Oborona was constructed on seemingly non-gendered ideals of intellectualism, dissidence, and international orientation, the movement practices and the ideal of a true oppositionist were gendered: women took their position as the care-takers of the movement, while men were associated with 'harder and colder' politics. In the group setting, gender was naturalized by interpreting the roles of women and men activists in this essentialist framework. According to Butler (1988, 520), gender performances are confined by social taboos and sanctions. People embody certain ideals of femininity and masculinity and then 'perform' what is normatively seen as 'proper' behavior for women and men. In Oborona, gender was performed by articulating certain 'truths' about gendered attributes and division of labor as well as by gender specific practices of the group, such as serving tea as a women's task, or the greeting by a handshake only amongst men. Women were seen as uninterested in politics and better equipped to act as caretakers and nannies of the male activists. Neither women nor men questioned these gendered conceptions and, consequently, women and men activists legitimized their activism in different ways. Men narrated it through their active participation in street demonstrations and political discussions, while women found their place in the group through their caretaker role. Women legitimized themselves as members of the group by emphasizing their valuable role as taking care of the male activists. However, some young women participated in aggressive street demonstrations, but also there they took up their caretaker role in taking care of the jailed male activists, for example (see p. 63). The essentialist and gendered

understandings and group practices were not questioned by the activists, nor politicized as a question of equality. These gendered understandings of the activist-self and activist roles within the group can be traced back to Soviet gender relations and gendered forms of dissident activism (Ashwin 2000; Temkina and Rotkirch 1997; Rotkirch 2000; Chuikina 1996).

Likewise, youth identity was also constructed as gendered. According to Pilkington (1996, 1), moments of the life cycle, such as entering a relationship or the birth of a child, are important in the process of renegotiating one's identity. In Oborona, especially women articulated that marriage and the birth of a child were moments when women needed to grow up and move to adult ways of activism, such as 'standing in pickets' or writing petitions – mainly to refrain from active street demonstrations, which were seen as youthful, aggressive, and often as a male sphere of activism. Becoming a 'true' woman through motherhood often meant the end to activist practices, such as demonstrations or direct action, which were before becoming a mother accepted as youthful behavior for some young women too.

Furthermore, class difference, in the form of privileged social position and access to economic and cultural resources (capital), became naturalized in Oborona as personal attributes of the Oborona participants, who were seen as 'naturally' interested and more capable of activism as the 'ordinary' youth (see Lawler 2012, 259–260; chapter 1). Activists endorsed the idea of political activists as somewhat exceptional in relation to the 'ordinary' people, which created distinction from other Russians. Oborona activists also attributed special value to their own activism and portrayed non-participation as apathy and not as a conscious political choice or as a form of protest, for example (see e.g. Greenberg 2010). Thus the 'other' Russians came to be seen as apathetic and unable to act while the activists portrayed themselves as a 'naturally' active part of society without taking into account their own privileged position as the middle class, which actually gave them resources to be active. The Russian restrictive political environment is challenging for political activism and being active requires a large input of one's time and energy. One also needs to have a strong sense of one's rights, 'legal literacy' as one of the activists put it, and the competence to convincingly battle for one's rights. Thus, the threshold for activism, and especially for oppositional activism, is very high. However, in Oborona, participation was portrayed as stemming from individual dispositional differences instead of reflecting the unequal opportunities in society. Activists did not problematize class inequalities and the unequal distribution of resources in society, nor how these inequalities also influence political participation.

### **Intertwining Soviet and Liberal Ideas of Democracy**

The aim of my second research question was to examine Oborona's interpretations of democracy and civil society, and how these interpretations relate to the state's official view on state-society relations. I suggest that in both Oborona's and the state's interpretations of democracy, the traditional state and leader-centered understanding of state-society relations is intertwined with selected ideals of western (neo)liberal thinking.

When the state and the groups affiliated with it emphasize the sovereignty of a state and its strong control over society, Oborona activists argued for more individual freedom and enacted a vision of civil society as a counter-force to the state. For the state, civil society takes on the meaning of a third sector, an arena of cooperation with ‘ally’ organizations, which are seen as beneficial to the state, as service-providers. Many of these organizations have benefited from this cooperation and use it tactically to achieve their goals, which are not necessarily the same as the goals of the dominant order (Salmenniemi 2008, 195; see also de Certeau 2002). For Oborona activists, on the other hand, cooperation, even tactical, is not possible, as they see civil society as a space for citizens to struggle for their rights in opposition to the state. However, the struggle between the state and the opposition activists over the definition of civil society, is characterized by using civil society as a ‘slogan’ (see Hann 1996) without further defining its meaning, and, thus, making the debate less meaningful and distancing it from wider audiences. Furthermore, even though both the state officials and Oborona activists followed the neoliberal rationality of emphasizing individual responsibility over one’s future, they viewed Russians as ‘not cultivated enough’ and not yet ready for the ‘freedom’ of being in charge of their future. This further distances the struggle from the general public, and does not create civil society as a space where people can truly engage with politics and civic activism, but rather it remains a domain of a few dedicated ‘experts’.

Regardless of their liberal orientation, Oborona activist recognized the need for a strong leader that should unify the country and lead its people. The main organizational ideals of Oborona were based on horizontal, leaderless power structures and non-violent methods that draw on writings of non-violent resistance inspired by Gandhi, which have traveled around the world from the US Civil Rights movement to the Eastern European Color Revolutions (Tarrow 2005). However, on the practice level, the group has been revolving around a strong leader figure and often the decisions are made among the movement coordinators without consulting with the rank and file activists. I suggest that this leader-centeredness, which is also documented elsewhere in recent studies on Russian civil society (see e.g. Henry 2010; Salmenniemi 2008), illustrates the continuation of Soviet values and frameworks in contemporary Russian political culture. As in Fournier’s (2010, 127) study on the Ukrainian Orange revolution, Russian liberal activists also seem to long for a kind of democracy that is compatible with a strong state and strong leader.

Furthermore, Oborona activists endorse western ideals of liberal democracy but intertwine them with ideas of patriotism and nationalism. Even if Oborona identified with European liberal thinking that often condemns nationalism, the group did not take a strong stand against nationalism, for example, by denouncing the nationalistic sentiments of its participants or by avoiding co-operation with groups affiliated with nationalism. The co-operation between the liberals and the nationalists was justified through the discourse of shared political goals, such as free and fair elections, and co-operation was framed as a more technical or instrumental issue of achieving a large anti-Putin crowd, rather than an ideologically important nominator. Additionally, definitions of nationalism and patriotism were the subject of constant struggle when both sides aimed at portraying the other as essentially ‘bad’, and using the concept of fascism as a slogan without deeper meaning than associating fascism with violence, extremism or being anti-Russian. In this struggle

over the definitions of patriotism and fascism, the concepts suffer from ‘hyperinflation’, gain new meanings, and become fragmented (Umland 2005). They become ‘empty’ signifiers appropriated by both sides of the struggle: the opposition and the state’s officials and their supporters.

As mentioned earlier, the activists do not share any common political ideology, but their political disagreements were silenced within the movement in order to avoid inner disagreements that would have compromised the groupness, the feelings of solidarity, which were based on friendship. This reflects Domrin’s (2003) findings, according to which Russians tend to see civil society as a community instead of a diverse society of social groups and as a space for open debate, which, I argue, also shapes politicization processes in Russia. Oborona activists have not adopted all of the western liberal democratic ideas as such, but abandoned some of the aspects that are often associated with it, such as gender equality, minority and LGBTI rights, which they feel uncomfortable with, and which they see as a hindrance to gaining general support for the movement. Oborona wished to ‘stay out’ of these questions, of which politicization they see as too threatening for the ideal of unity of civil society.

Furthermore, the ideal of civil society as a unified moral realm has made it difficult for the activists to take up questions on social justice. They feel more comfortable refraining from voicing their individual views on ideological questions, and aim at unifying the opposition under the question of ‘democracy or no democracy’ and constitutional and political rights and freedoms. Even if some of the activists supported leftist ideas and others libertarian views, they also confined to not speaking about these questions in public because they felt that these discussions could divide Oborona or the political opposition in general. Various personal political opinions are hidden under a general level of rhetoric about freedoms and rights and personified resistance towards their ‘main evil’, Vladimir Putin. Even if Oborona and other opposition’s liberals follow the western ideals of liberalism, the continuing framework of political symbols of unity and a strong nation shape the liberals’ thinking and keep the questions of social justice, gender and minority rights depoliticized.

I suggest that my findings further speak for the approaching post-Soviet political culture in its own terms and without trying to install western understanding of civil society and political participation in the post-socialist context. By examining Russian political culture through the eyes of the youth of the political opposition, I found that their self-understanding, sense of groupness and belonging, as well as their political protests were performed through a combination of western and eastern thought traditions and located within the continuing and transforming frameworks of Soviet political culture. I argue that my findings contribute to our understanding of Russian political culture as an entanglement of localized ideas from western and eastern thinking and continuing but also transformed frameworks of Soviet values, which are intertwined and interpreted differently by various political subjects.

## Social Performances

My third research question engaged with Oborona's public practices, and asked how the activist identities and discourses of the movement are performed in the protest event and how effective these performances are. I argue that Oborona's repertoire of action reflects the activist identities as part of the intelligentsia and as 'educating the masses' by organizing various educational seminars and trainings for young people. In addition, Oborona activists' western orientation was reflected in certain activities, which drew on forms of action of the global justice movements, however, without adapting the often left-progressive orientation of these movements, and thus again creating a new entanglement of localized ideas and values.

I analyzed how Oborona and other political opposition's groups create their political protests as social performances by using the background symbolism of dissidents fighting the repressive state and drawing parallels between the totalitarian Soviet state and contemporary Russian government. The social performance approach revealed how activists perform their identities, groupness, connectedness and commonality in the protest event, and how the audience received the message. According to Goffman, there are no 'false' or 'true' performances of the self, but the concern of a performance is, whether it will be credited or discredited by the audience. Therefore, 'the self is a social product in the sense that it depends upon validation awarded and withheld in accordance with the norms of a stratified society' (Branaman 1997, xlvi). I argue that Oborona's social performances did not gain validation from the audiences and this was due to the weak ability to politicize social justice issues and everyday problems of the Russians as well as due to the strong emphasis on the group members' commonality, which formed the group as somewhat exclusionary, distant and not easily approachable for outsiders. Even if the performance reinforced the intra-movement groupness by creating affective solidarities and the sense of we-ness, it did not speak to the wider audience and thus did not have strong mobilizing power. Quite the opposite, it might have even further distanced the group from the general audience and, thus, enforced the outside categorizations of the opposition as marginalized and weird, which the Oborona members tried to combat in the first place.

Opposition's performances have not gained wide support or publicity, and the different elements of the performance were not 're-fused' (Alexander 2006) to convince the audience. Oborona's discursive strategies were aimed at protesting the sovereign democracy model stipulated by the state. The liberals form their discourse around freedoms and individual political rights of the citizens. In a way, this discursive tactic highlights the authoritarian nature of the state, an image that the opposition tries to strengthen further in their performances, by associating the Russian state with the Soviet leadership, the cult of personality and the Soviet secret police (*Cheka*). Furthermore, when the state's rhetoric is based on open nostalgia of Soviet leadership and the Soviet Union's status as a global superpower, Oborona bases its criticism on the state's totalitarian rule, citizens' 'sovietness', and the general lack of freedom in the country.

I suggest that not only because of the strong power status of the state, but also because of the liberal political opposition's idealization of western thinking and its strong anti-

Soviet position, the message of the opposition's performances does not find resonance among the wider Russian public. Russians tend to exhibit nostalgic sentiments of Soviet times and to be suspicious of the West, liberalism and the Democrats, which they often associate with the shock therapies of the 1990s and the declining living standards of that era (Martyanov 2005). The opposition's demonstrations, such as the Strategy-31 protests, are built on liberal claims and performed in a way that makes sense to the participants themselves, and perhaps also to the foreign news audiences, but their message often remains unheard by the Russian public. Slogans, such as 'Russia without Putin' or 'Down with the Police state', leave the audience puzzled since they do not offer a convincing and positive alternative vision of the future to Russians, many of whom have in fact enjoyed the Putin era stability and often relate to change with suspicion and fear and find revolutionary rhetoric to be frightful because of the previous bloody revolutions.

### **Social Movements and Politicization**

I argue that politicization and de-politicization processes are important to take into account when studying social movements. My case study, the youth movement Oborona, can be seen as a social movement following della Porta and Diani's (2006, 20–21) definition: it was engaged in conflictual activities and had clearly identified opponents, had created a dense network of like-minded people, and shared a certain collective identity or sense of groupness. It participated in protests and in 'new disruptive forms of action' instead of conventional political participation, which della Porta and Diani see as distinguishing social movements from other types of networks and organizations (della Porta and Diani 2006, 28–29). However, I argue that even if Oborona, or the Russian political opposition in general, fits della Porta and Diani's definition of a social movement, their inner logic, success and continuity as a movement are strongly connected to the processes of politicization and de-politicization.

I suggest that politicization processes should be central in theoretical discussions on social movements. Alvarez et al. (1998) also see politicization as the most important aspect of social movements and the politicization of everyday questions and the inclusion of minority rights in the sphere of political debate as the central practices of a social movement aiming for social change. Oborona did not engage in wider politicization processes, but remained a small and closed group, in which ties were based on friendship and being together. Because of its inability to politicize questions beyond abstract legal and political rights, to consider people's everyday problems, it did not succeed in mobilizing people around its cause. Furthermore, Oborona did not openly question the hegemonic political symbols, such as anti-gay and anti-migrant attitudes, which circulate in the Russian political sphere, and are widely accepted in Russian society (e.g. Pew Research center 2013).

A social movement with strong political goals and a collective identity based on political beliefs can act as a forerunner in politicizing everyday issues and creating new spaces for political action (see Palonen 2003; Luhtakallio 2012). However, Oborona's *raison d'être* seemed to be more intra-movement, to provide its participants a space for



*obshchenie*, instead of reaching for validation by the audiences and aiming at wider mobilization. Oborona survived as a *kruzhok* or a small *tusovka* based on friendship, but it was not able to negotiate convincing political grounds for groupness, or clear political boundaries for the group, which I see as significant requirements for a social movement to be successful in mobilizing people to struggle for social change. A social movement needs to be credited by the audiences as a convincing proponent for an alternative future in order for people to join it, especially in countries such as Russia, where dissent is repressed and where political activism requires a certain readiness to sacrifice one's well-being or freedom.

Thus, I argue for the centrality of politicization for understanding social movement dynamics. Even if the group shares a collective identity, the grounds for groupness define the group's ability to politicize, to bring out new issues and ways of performing in the political sphere, and define how successful it is in mobilizing people and sustaining this mobilization. In the case of Oborona, the weak political connectedness became obvious only after the mass mobilization during the parliamentary elections in 2011–12, when the movement needed to stand up as a coherent group to be able to communicate its message to the wider public, and to decide on whether to take to the streets and with whom to cooperate. I argue that the feelings of solidarity based on friendship and having fun together did not compensate for the need for a shared politico-ethical understanding amongst the participants, which would have been needed for them to take the role of a leader or facilitator of general mobilization, which many activists dreamed of during the earlier years of Oborona. At this point, the lack of political connectedness made it impossible for the group to renegotiate its aims and tactics and led to the dissolution of the group.

Performing political opposition in Russia is a delicate process of politicization and depoliticization in which the activists try to balance between Russian traditions and people's nostalgic expectations, and western ideals of democracy. However, even if the activists themselves believe in their cause, they have not managed to mobilize people's growing dissatisfaction. I suggest that the way the political opposition constructs and performs this entanglement of eastern and western identities and ideals does not resonate with the wider Russian public. The opposition's message seems to be foreign to many Russians, whose relation to Soviet times as a period of 'stability' and to the Soviet status as a superpower is more nostalgic than condemning. Therefore, I argue, Oborona and the opposition in general seem to have 'othered' themselves in the eyes of the Russian audiences.

### **7.3 Performing Political Opposition and the Russian Audiences**

I argue that the case of Oborona illustrates the general politicization processes of the Russian liberal political opposition and its struggle to mobilize people against the current government. Even if the opposition managed to gather thousands of people in its rallies in 2011–12, Putin's opposition and especially the liberal-democratically oriented political activists are still marginal when compared to Russian political attitudes in general. According to the Levada Center's recent report on the electoral protest of 2011–12

(Volkov 2012), the participants of the post-electoral protests differed from the general Russian public in several ways. First of all, the protesters' willing and active participation in a political rally is not typical for the Russians. In December 2012, approximately 75 percent of the Russians said that they were not prepared to take part in a street demonstration (Fond Obshchestvennoe Mnenie 2012). Secondly, the protesters' level of education and well-being is much higher than Russians in general, and also higher than the levels of education of other Muscovites (Volkov 2012, 20–21). Thirdly, the protest movement participants are using the Internet and communication networks other than the TV and newspapers to get information: 70 percent of the respondents in the rallies in December and February had heard of the rally from the Internet. Most Russians hear their news on television and only 13 percent from the Internet (Volkov 2012, 21; see also Lebedev 2008, 207–208.) Lastly, the political opinions of the participants of the protest rallies were different from most of the Russians. Almost all of the protesters agreed on demanding the resignation of the head of the election council as well as demanding new parliamentary elections, which only 30–40 percent of Russians surveyed supported (Volkov 2012, 25). Furthermore, the protesters demanded a change in power, which they saw as repressive and authoritarian. However, most Russians see strong powerholders that can bring order to the country as necessary for the country's survival. (Volkov 2012, 26.) According to Volkov (2012, 49; 53), one of the problems of the political opposition's leadership is the lack of a concrete program on what to do and how to achieve the goals of the electoral protests, which were formed around the concepts of democracy and other 'abstractions', and the lack of a program that would take into account the interests and grievances of the different political and social groups that participated in the protests. Also, 49 percent of the participants of the opposition rally in December 2011 thought that the opposition does not have a sound program to improve the situation in the country (Levada Tsentr 2012).

The same features that Levada Center surveyed among the protest participants are illustrated through my case study of the Oborona movement, and I argue that these characteristics reflect the general problems that divided and eventually broke up the youth movement. Oborona tried to keep its program politically 'neutral' on issues of social justice, such as tax reforms, education or social benefits, by basing it only on general common goals of liberal democracy and political rights. This 'accommodating all' approach required the movement participants to base their connectedness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) on friendship ties instead of common political attributes, and to form the movement goals on the level of generalized political rights, which made recruiting and gaining public attention more difficult. Oborona activists' accounts tend to emphasize the intellectualism and exceptionalism of the group, and this 'othering' keeps them marginalized and distanced from 'ordinary' people. Oborona joined in the discourse on youth apathy and accusations of youth being cynical, but at the same time constructed its identity on exceptionalism. With this strategy, Oborona was not creating opportunities for new political agencies that would have enhanced wider mobilization, but was more likely reproducing existing cultural codes and norms (see Polletta and Jasper 2001) that reconstruct the Russians and especially Russian youth as apathetic.

The post-electoral protest of 2011–2012 tried to convene a convincing performance for the international and domestic audiences. The protest movement managed to create enthusiasm and anger among its participants by concretely showing the fraud of the elections and portraying the Russian citizens as victims of this fraud. However, the movement leaders did not manage to create a sustainable organization to force the authorities to hold new elections, and did not succeed in creating a new symbolic means to keep people interested in continuing the protest. Instead of relying on people's passion for the cause, the opposition movement started to concentrate on the official and systemic organization of the movement by creating leadership organs, such as the Coordinating Council, and concentrating on technical voting issues. Through this technical organization, the movement lost the emotional connection that people had already formed with the protest movement. According to Benford and Hunt (1992, 42) '[w]hether performers and audiences view movement dramas as suspenseful, captivating and persuasive or predictable, boring and uninspiring often depends upon the management of unique/routine and passion/organization tensions'. Creating too routine-like and technically detailed voting systems and organizational structures compromised the emotional satisfaction and connectedness that the protesters felt when marching with thousands of other protesters in the Moscow streets. In Benford and Hunt's (1992, 43) terms: the opposition movement 'had organized itself to death'. The participants' passion towards the movement seems to have weakened when it could not deliver the outcomes it promised, new fair elections, a concrete goal that the participants could relate to.

The Ukrainian Orange Revolution is a strong source of inspiration for the Russian liberal opposition. According to Fournier's research, Ukrainian protestors not only had political motivations but also economic claims, which were partially connected with the economic expectations developed by the Soviet state. The protesters were concerned with perceived economic inequality in post-Soviet Ukraine and they articulated 'a form of democracy that was compatible with social justice' (Fournier 2010, 111). Taking on a new discourse based on social and cultural inequalities and marginalized people's right to rights would have given Oborona, and the oppositional movement in general, new tools to voice discontent, and might force the government to engage in a real debate that would show its 'true colors' instead of repeating the various empty 'slogans' of democracy and civil society. This was a difficult (or even impossible) task for Oborona because of the ideal of a unanimous civil society and the avoidance of inner politico-ethical disputes that social justice questions would arise. On the other hand, Oborona's strong anti-Soviet disposition was unfavorable for questions of social justice and inequalities, which the activists often associate with communism, which they wanted to denounce. However, struggling over abstract concepts and the appropriation of civil society 'slogans' is not appealing for the larger public and has not led to larger mobilization. Recent polls have shown that people are more dissatisfied with social justice and readier to mobilize to protect their social rights, such as rights to education, housing or social benefits (Evans 2012; Henry 2009; Lipman and Petrov 2010). This might be a sign of a need for a more social-democratically oriented movement instead of these 'neoliberal' projects, which do not reach the wider public.

Russian political activists try to find ways to voice out their grievances in the restrictive political environment. The Russian state's hegemony in forming the official understanding of democracy as 'sovereign' and its strong control over civic activism in the country create many obstacles for the opposition and hinder its attempts for larger mobilization. In this situation, the political opposition sees staying united and suppressing internal disagreement as the only way to sustain its activities. The group of dissenters is small, and the political elite in power do not leave much room for voices of dissent in order for the opposition to grow and diverge. To be able to create a somewhat sustainable organization, the opposition needs to balance the hopes of its colorful subgroups, the liberals, conservatives, communists, nationalists, and socialists. This has created a situation in which it cannot take a strong stand on issues of social justice and equality, but rather remains silent. A recent example of this was the silence over the LGBTI and migrant workers' rights during the Sochi Olympic Games in February 2014. Even though the Olympics would have provided an opportunity for a new campaign against Putin, which would have received western support as well, the opposition restricted its political criticism to the cases of corruption and the huge economic costs of the games. Bringing up questions of gay rights or migrant workers' rights would have compromised the internal cohesion of the opposition. Furthermore, by opening this debate, the opposition would have marginalized itself further from the Russian public. Even if in the West issues of gay rights seem an obvious point of criticism, in Russia, the general atmosphere towards sexual and ethnic minorities is hostile. According to the Pew center's research, 74 percent of Russians would not accept sexual minorities in society (Pew Research Center 2013).

## **APPENDIX 1: Oborona's Declaration and 'Frequently Asked Questions'**

### **Декларация**

#### **Кто мы**

Мы – новое, свободное поколение. Мы выросли в свободной стране, мы не привыкли быть быдлом, нас не загнать в стойло. Мы не боимся власти, и на нас не давит опыт советского прошлого.

У нас могут быть разные мнения о политических и экономических реформах 90-х. Но мы не будем тратить силы на бесполезные споры о прошлом, нас интересует будущее.

Российскую молодежь принято считать циничной и пассивной. Но есть и другая молодежь – думающая, смелая, равнодушная к судьбе своей страны, готовая взять на себя ответственность за ее будущее. Нас еще мало, но мы уже есть и с каждым днём нас будет всё больше и больше.

Власть стремится законсервировать существующую элиту и не пустить туда новых людей. В качестве смены предлагается самая зависимая, тупая и агрессивная часть молодежи, идущая вместе с унылой толпой старших товарищей. Это не наш путь!

#### **Что мы делаем в Обороне**

Мы отстаиваем свои права и выражаем свои идеи, а не зарабатываем деньги и не делаем карьеру.

Мы добиваемся, чтобы власть считалась с народом, при этом сами не желаем переходить во власть.

Свою любовь к Родине мы доказываем своими делами, а не бессмысленно кричим о своём патриотизме.

В своей борьбе Оборона использует только ненасильственные методы.

#### **Наши требования**

Мы хотим жить в свободной и процветающей стране.

Мы хотим, чтобы нас защищала боеспособная и профессиональная армия, а студенты могли спокойно учиться.

Мы хотим демократической смены власти путем свободных и всенародных выборов.

Мы хотим получать информацию из свободных и независимых СМИ.

Мы хотим работать в компаниях, не опасаясь, что их закроют из-за наездов бандитов или чиновников любых уровней.

Мы хотим, чтобы закон был справедливым и одинаковым для всех, а не орудием против недовольных.

Мы за честный бюджет, в котором есть деньги на студентов и бюджетников, но не на льготы для чиновников.

Настало время заявить о себе!

За нашей спиной стоит правда и сила, а не политики, партии или денежные мешки.

Наши ровесники в соседних странах уже изменили ход истории.

Может, и нам пора?

## **О ДВИЖЕНИИ**

### **Общие вопросы**

#### **Q: Почему Оборона? Что и от чего вы обороняете?**

**A:** Оборона защищает право россиян выражать свое мнение, выбирать власть и требовать от нее выполнения обязанностей. Мы защищаем достоинство и честь граждан от произвола зарвавшихся чиновников. Подробнее наши взгляды и цели изложены в Декларации.

#### **Q: Почему кулак?**

**A:** Кулак на нашей эмблеме символизирует единство и готовность к борьбе. Он имеет долгую историю: в 1930-х его использовали партизаны в Испании, сражавшиеся против фашистов, потом его подняли на знамена студенческие движения в Европе в 1968 году. В начале 2000-х этот кулак стал символом 'четвертой волны' демократии, когда народы Сербии, Грузии и Украины боролись за честные выборы в своих странах.

#### **Q: Каковы ваши цели?**

**A:** Стратегическая цель Обороны — установление в России цивилизованного демократического режима, при котором власть избирается народом и служит ему,



она подконтрольна гражданам, уважает их и защищает их интересы в стране и за рубежом. Такой Россией можно будет по праву гордиться.

Необходима полноценная, радикальная смена всей политической системы, а не просто изменение одних фамилий на другие. В нынешних условиях, когда выборы превращены в фарс, референдумы фактически невозможны, в парламенте оппозиции нет, а власть не идет на диалог с обществом, только массовые народные выступления представляют реальную силу и угрозу для режима. Речь идет о революции, но о революции мирной и демократической.

**Q: Вы много критикуете. А что вы предлагаете взамен?**

**A:** Оборона не политическая партия и не правительство. Мы не можем решить огромное множество проблем, которые возникают в нашей стране. Но наш долг — обращать на них внимание общества и власти, добиваясь от чиновников выполнения их обязанностей.

**Q: Почему вы не хотите прийти к власти?**

**A:** Оборона объединяет множество разных людей с различными взглядами. Многие из нас — обычные люди, которые никогда не собирались заниматься политикой и не хотят связывать с ней свою жизнь. Только критическая ситуация в стране заставила нас объединиться и встать на защиту наших гражданских прав. Нами движет не стремление сделать политическую карьеру, заработать легких денег или распиариться, а желание жить в свободной России.

**Q: Какими методами вы действуете?**

**A:** Оборона использует в своей работе любые доступные ненасильственные методы. Это и издание литературы, и проведение конференций, и сборы подписей, и юридическая помощь. Но основными являются уличные методы борьбы: от пикетов до маршей, от театрализованных представлений до акций прямого действия.

**Q: Почему вы предпочитаете уличные методы борьбы?**

**A:** В современной России власть последовательно закрывает любые возможности для выражения своего мнения и общественной деятельности. На ТВ и в крупнейших СМИ существуют черные списки запрещенных к показу людей и движений, проводить какие-либо законы через Думу стало невозможно, как и собирать средства на просветительскую деятельность, суды открыто нарушают закон, когда им прикажут. Единственной территорией относительной свободы остается уличная борьба, только она при всей своей кажущейся виртуальности представляет собой реальную силу. Именно громкие уличные выступления не раз заставляли власть идти на попятную и отказываться от своих планов. Поэтому другого пути сейчас нет.

**Q: Чего вы уже реально добились?**

**A:** На нынешнем этапе задача Обороны — мобилизовать граждан России, в первую очередь молодежь для борьбы за свои права. И здесь мы добились значительных

успехов: отделения Обороны действуют в двух десятках городов, под нашими знаменами собрались сотни активистов, о нас знают и к нам прислушиваются сотни тысяч.

Но есть и победы, пусть пока небольшие, которых мы добились вместе с другими гражданскими организациями. Например, в результате кампании, которую организовывала ‘Оборона’, было закрыто уголовное дело против кемеровского блоггера Дмитрия Соловьева, обвинявшегося в ‘возбуждении ненависти и вражды по отношению к ФСБ и МВД’ по ст. 282 УК. До сих пор это единственный успешный случай защиты блоггера от преследований за слова.

## **Об организации**

**Q:** Кто у вас главный?

**A:** Оборона — безлидерная организация, ее никто не возглавляет. Региональные отделения действуют автономно, их координирует Совет Обороны (где представлены все регионы) и Всероссийский Комитет Обороны (который осуществляет текущую координацию). Таким образом мы избегаем опасности превратиться в вождистскую секту или погрязнуть в борьбе за лидерство.

**Q:** Кто вам платит?

**A:** Ключевой принцип Обороны: любое финансирование мы принимаем только при условии сохранения нашей независимости. Предоставление нам какой-либо помощи не дает права влиять на определение наших целей, стратегии и тактики.

На самом деле, бюджет Обороны невелик. У нас нет аппаратных работников, мы не раздаем халявных пейджеров, деньги собираются обычно на конкретные акции и проекты. Зачастую скидываются сами участники, иногда нам помогают честные российские предприниматели — представители малого и среднего бизнеса, сочувствующие нашим идеям. В современной России финансировать любые не приближенные к власти организации рискованно, поэтому мы не называем имен спонсоров.

**Q:** Сколько вас?

**A:** Оборона сейчас существует примерно в 20 регионах, общая ее численность — около 1000 человек.

**Q:** Чем вы там занимаетесь?

**A:** Каждый может выбрать то дело, которое ему больше по душе. Можно участвовать в акциях или в их подготовке, писать тексты и рисовать растяжки, выступать на конференциях и расклеивать стикеры... Сферы деятельности ограничены только твоей фантазией.

**Q: Что за народ там собирается?**

**А:** В Обороне состоят самые разные люди: состоятельные и небогатые, левых и правых взглядов, ‘яппи’ и неформалы. Большинство — студенты и молодые люди, недавно окончившие ВУЗы, умные и самостоятельные молодые люди и девушки.

**Q: У вас можно заработать?**

**А:** Вот чего нет, того нет. Денег за участие в акциях мы не платим никому и никогда, специалистов по распилу смет тоже не держим. Так что если вас интересует исключительно материальное вознаграждение, вы пришли не по адресу. Рекомендуем обратиться к нашим или в ‘Молодую Гвардию’.

**Об идеологии**

**Q: Какую партию или какого кандидата вы поддерживаете?**

**А:** Оборона — внепартийное гражданское движение. Это значит, что мы не выражаем поддержки никому из кандидатов или партий. Симпатии к тем или иным политикам (или их отсутствие) — личное дело каждого. В наших рядах есть сторонники самых разных сил, но использовать Оборону для продвижения этих организаций им нельзя.

**Q: Вы сотрудничаете с нацболами?**

**А:** Да, мы сотрудничаем с любыми организациями, когда наши задачи и цели совпадают. Когда нацболы выступают за честные выборы и против полицейщины, мы боремся за одно и то же. Это не значит, что мы обязаны разделять все их взгляды (а они — все наши).:

**Q: Как вы относитесь к бывшим олигархам?**

**А:** Мы к ним не относимся. Никто из экс-олигархов никакой поддержки Обороне не предлагал, сами мы о ней тоже их не просим. Чтобы убедиться в том, что ‘миллионов Невзлина’™ у нас нет, достаточно просто познакомиться с активистами Обороны в вашем городе, побывать в штабе (если он есть) или поучаствовать в подготовке к акции.

**Q: По телеку говорят, что вы все работаете на США. Это правда?**

**А:** Нет, это очередной пропагандистский штамп. Самый простой способ дискредитировать оппозиционное движение — обвинить его в работе на ‘внешнего

врага'. Этим занимались и в СССР, и в нацистской Германии, и во всех без исключения авторитарных и тоталитарных режимах. При этом никаких внятных доказательств не представляют, ограничиваясь намеками и натяжками. Если бы хоть один оппозиционер оказался реальным шпионом, ФСБ уже давно бы его посадила, а это дело раздули бы до вселенского скандала. Но фактов нет, есть только многократно повторенная ложь.

**Q: Как вы относитесь к оранжевой революции?**

**A:** Оранжевая революция в Украине без сомнения изменила всю политическую жизнь в России. В 2004 году украинцы вышли на майдан Незалежности, чтобы защитить свое право выбирать власть и выражать свое мнение, даже если оно противоречит официальной точке зрения. И они несомненно добились победы: даже в ходе пертурбаций и скандалов следующих лет выборы и личные свободы граждан оставались неприкосновенны. Украинцы заставили свои власти (будь то бело-голубые или оранжевые) считаться с мнением народа.

**Q: Почему вы против Путина?**

**A:** Путин является архитектором и олицетворением системы, существующей сейчас в России. Он отменяет выборы и назначает на все ключевые должности своих питерских приятелей. Он назначает Героем России Рамзана Кадырова и лично контролирует закрытие оппозиционных телеканалов. Он подписывает законы о монетизации льгот и санкционирует передачу Роману Абрамовичу \$16 млрд. из госбюджета. Он не стеснясь врет про 'Курск' и про 'Норд-Ост'. Наконец, он назначает своего старого приятеля президентом страны, а сам пытается править из-за кулис. Конечно, проблема не лично в нем, а в созданной им системе. Поэтому наш протест не столько против Путина, сколько против 'путинщины'.

Ты с нами? Присоединяйся!

У тебя есть еще вопросы? Свяжись с нами

## APPENDIX 2A: Informants

Pseudonym	Movement	City	Interviews
Alina & Vladimir	Nation of Freedom	Moscow	May 2010
Aleksandr	Oborona / Solidarnost'	Moscow	April 2010
			October 2010
			March 2011
			October 2012
Alla	Oborona	St Petersburg	May 2011
Anna	Oborona	Moscow	April 2010
			March 2011
Anton	Oborona	Moscow	October 2009
Artem	Solidarnost'/ Oborona (Ex)	Moscow	March 2011
Boris	Oborona	St Petersburg	May 2011
Daria	Oborona	St Petersburg	February 2013 (Email)
Daria, Valeriia, Yuliia	Oborona	St Petersburg	May 2011
Zhanna	Oborona	Moscow	November 2010
Igor	Oborona/ MY	Moscow	May 2010
Viktor	Oborona	Moscow	October 2010
			October 2012
Inna	Oborona	Moscow	October 2009
			October 2010
Irina	Solidarnost'	Moscow	October 2009
Katia	Oborona/ MY (Ex)	Moscow	November 2010
			March 2011
			February 2013 (Email)
Maksim	MY	Moscow	May 2009
Maria	Oborona	Moscow	May 2010
Mark	Free Radicals	Moscow	May 2010
Matvei	DA!	Moscow	May 2009
Mikhail	Oborona/ Solidarnost'	Moscow	May 2009
			October 2009
			April 2010
			November 2010
Pavel	Oborona	Moscow	May 2010
Petr	Oborona (Ex)	Moscow	May 2010 (email)

Ruslan	Oborona	Moscow	May 2010
			November 2010
			March 2011
Vera	Oborona	Moscow	June 2010
Vitaly	Oborona	St Petersburg	May 2011
Vova	Oborona	Moscow	October 2009
			November 2011



## APPENDIX 2B: Thematic Interview Questions

1. Расскажи немного о себе: возраст, где родился/ась, в какую школу ходил/а, о семье, профессия родителей и их политическая активность.
2. Расскажи о движении «Оборона».
3. Какова идея движения?
4. Какова цель деятельности движения?
5. Как бы ты описал/а членов движения? Какой он типичный член?
6. Что движение пытается изменить своей деятельностью? Почему это является важным для членов движения? Что они значат для тебя?
7. Против чего выступает движение?
8. Существует ли у движения совместная деятельность с другими движениями или организациями? А с какими-нибудь официальными органами?
9. Есть ли у движения противники/враги? Кто? Почему их считают противниками/врагами?
10. Какие организации являются самыми важными партнерами для вашей организации?
11. С какими организациями вы хотели бы сотрудничать больше? Почему?
12. Как Оборона отличается от других движений молодежи?
13. Как организовано принятие решений движения?
14. Как часто вы проводите собрания/встречи?
15. Можешь ли ты, по-твоему, влиять на принятие решения движения? Принимается ли во внимание твое мнение?
16. Почему движение официально не зарегистрировано как НГО?

### **Рекрутирование и политическая активность**

17. Какие каналы вы используете для привлечения новых членов?
18. Являешься ли ты членом какого-то другого движения или организации или состоял когда-то? Есть ли у остальных членов движения связи с другими организациями или движениями? Какими?
19. Откуда ты услышал/а о существовании движения?
20. Почему и когда ты примкнул/а к движению?
21. Знал/а ли ты ранее активистов движения?
22. Что значит для тебя членство в движении?
24. Какую пользу тебе дает деятельность? Есть ли от нее какой-нибудь вред /возникают ли от нее проблемы в личной жизни?
26. Что, по-твоему, даешь ты своей деятельностью движению? Каков твой вклад в деятельность движения?

### **Деятельность**

27. Какие различные формы деятельности есть у движения?
28. В каких мероприятиях ты принимал/а участие? Какова была твоя функция в этих мероприятиях?

29. Какое из них было наиболее интересным? действенным? самым успешным? а самым неудавшимся?
30. Какие мероприятия тебе больше нравятся и почему?
31. Против кого направлены протесты? Каким образом эти стороны отнеслись к ним/ ответили на них?
32. Кто планирует различные события и мероприятия?
33. Участвуешь ли ты в планировании?
34. Откуда ты узнаешь о различных мероприятиях?
35. Знаешь ли ты, какие тактики применяют другие оппозиционные движения?
36. Каким образом противники отвечают на ваши протесты? Какие действия они предпринимают?
37. Каковы важнейшие достижения движения? Чего вы еще хотите достичь?
38. Каковы ресурсы деятельности у движения?
39. Какова роль Интернета и медиа в деятельности движения?
40. Какова роль руководителя в деятельности движения?
41. Каким ты видишь будущее движения?

#### **Пол**

42. Сколько в движении женщин/мужчин? Насколько активны они?
43. Есть ли разница в активности женщин и мужчин?
44. Участвуют ли они в одних и тех же мероприятиях?
45. Принимают ли все в равной степени участие в принятии решения?
46. Каковы сильные стороны у мужчин и женщин в политической жизни?
47. На ваш взгляд, участие в работе вашей организации более подходящее для мужчин или женщин? Почему?

#### **Демократия и общество**

48. Что, на твой взгляд, означает слово 'демократия'?
49. Что обозначает 'хороший гражданин'?
50. Существуют ли разные критерии для женщин и мужчин, чтобы быть хорошим гражданином?
51. Каково состояние демократии в современной России?
61. Как должна измениться ситуация?
62. Каково, по-твоему, положение дел у политической оппозиции в России?
63. Каковы, на твой взгляд, самые большие проблемы в нынешнем обществе?
64. С какими проблемами особенно молодые сталкиваются в своей жизни? 64. Существует ли какая-нибудь разница в проблемах молодых женщин и мужчин?
65. Каким образом, по-твоему, можно поправить положение?
66. Существует ли на твой взгляд у молодых возможность влиять в нынешнем обществе? Каким образом?
67. Как добиться более активного участия молодежи в политической жизни?

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